



# REEF-in-Brief

*The e-Newsletter of the  
Reef Environmental Education Foundation*

October 2006

## 1. **Welcome** -

**Happy fall!** This month we highlight an expanded REEF mission and vision statement, a fantastic 2007 Field Survey schedule, and the imminent arrival of the mythical, magical, milestone submission of the 100,000th REEF fish survey. You'll also find updates on the successful Biscayne National Park monitoring and a rare and intriguing exotic tropical fish sighting in Rhode Island. And don't forget to come visit us at DEMA in 2 weeks! We are sad to note that Bryan Dias, Director of Outreach and Education, recently left REEF but we wish him well and thank him for his hard work and dedication. Special thanks, also, to REEF intern Ashley Apel for putting together this month's edition of REEF-in-Brief. Please read on...

- *Best Fishes* - Leda Cunningham, REEF Executive Director

## 2. **REEF Poised to Mark 100,000 Survey Milestone** -

Extra! Extra! REEF is set to collect fish survey number 100,000 this month.

As of this writing, REEF volunteers have contributed 98,923 surveys to the REEF dataset, the world's largest living marine life database. With an average of 2,500 surveys coming in to REEF HQ per month, Joe Cavanaugh, Director of Field Operations, estimates that we should hit the 100,000 mark by the close of October. Where will the survey take place? Who will be the surveyor? There's a good chance it will be in one of ten National Marine Sanctuaries around the country at which REEF has active surveying programs, given the recent level of surveying activity at Sanctuaries by the REEF Advanced Assessment Team (AAT) and other volunteer divers.

100,000 surveys means about 100,000 hours of bottom time, which, at 24 hours in a day and 8,760 hours in a year, is equal to almost twelve years of around-the-clock underwater surveying. Put another way: in thirteen years of existence, REEF has done as much work under water as it has 'topside,' sharing survey data, training volunteers, and reaching out to divers, educators, and the general public. Now THAT'S diving that counts!

Stay tuned to the REEF website ([www.reef.org](http://www.reef.org)) to mark the day we hit 100,000. If you're one of the more than 9,000 REEF volunteers who has contributed a fish (or invertebrate) survey - and you've submitted one recently - you just might be the 'milestone' volunteer...

## 3. **Founding Director Lad Akins Recognized for Sixteen Years of Service** -

An enthusiastic group of staff, Board, and long-time members of REEF recently gathered in Key Largo, Florida, to recognize Lad Akins for his contributions to the organization, to marine citizen science, and to the promotion of fish-watching as a lifelong hobby among divers. Lad first met REEF founders Paul Humann and Ned DeLoach in 1990 while working as a fulltime boat captain and scuba instructor for Key Largo dive operator Atlantis Dive Center. For more than five years, Lad voluntarily ran REEF out of his home while the organization refined its mission and infrastructure and officially launched its first citizen

## What's in this issue:

- 1 - [REEF-in-Brief October](#)
- 2 - [REEF To Hit 100K](#)
- 3 - [Lad Akins Recognized For Service](#)
- 4 - [New Mission, Vision Statement](#)
- 5 - [2007 REEF Field Survey Schedule](#)
- 6 - [Fish ID Seminar and Dive Trip](#)
- 7 - [Rhode Island Lionfish Sighting](#)
- 8 - [REEF Parts](#)



*Dry Tortugas National Park,  
AAT Survey Trip*



science program, the Volunteer Fish Survey Project in 1993. Since then, Lad has been the driving force behind REEF, traveling around the world to train volunteers in fish identification, working with world-renowned scientists, underwater photographers, and naturalists to improve the quality of data collected by REEF volunteers, and winning numerous awards for his commitment to marine conservation.

Lad recently stepped down as Executive Director to spend more time with his family. "I have a new boss now," he told friends gathered in Key Largo, indicating his one-year-old son, Griffin, "I am grateful for having had the opportunity to lead such a great organization . . . and look forward to many more years of work in special projects." Lad was honored with a portrait and a plaque to reside in the REEF HQ office in Key Largo and a specially baked cake in the shape (and color, size, and body markings) of a terminal phase stoplight parrotfish, courtesy of Anna DeLoach. "There would not be a REEF if it weren't for Lad," said Paul Humann, "Ned and I and all REEF members are indebted to Lad for taking an idea and making it a reality."

As Lad moves into a part-time role working on special projects at REEF, please join us in recognizing Lad's extraordinary gift of his time, talent, and service to the organization.

#### 4. **REEF Adopts Expanded Mission Statement** -

Recognizing the growing scope of REEF's marine conservation efforts, the Board of Trustees recently approved an expanded mission statement for the organization:

*To conserve marine ecosystems for their recreational, commercial, and intrinsic value by educating, enlisting and enabling divers and other marine enthusiasts to become active stewards and citizen scientists. REEF links the diving community with scientists, resource managers and conservationists through marine-life data collection and related activities.*

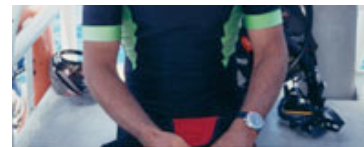
The new language reflects the growth of REEF volunteer programs beyond the Volunteer Fish Survey Project and the potential for including volunteers beyond the dive community. The Grouper Moon Project, for example, brings a small group of volunteer divers and snorkelers together every year to collect in-depth data on the reproductive behavior of Nassau grouper in the Cayman Islands. The Exotic Species program is growing quickly in response to increased sightings of exotic marine species along the Pacific and Atlantic U.S. coasts. In south Florida, there may be opportunities to engage the local fishing community in capturing specimens of exotic lionfish for analysis.

"REEF has done well by its focused approach on divers conducting fish surveys," said Leda Cunningham, newly appointed Executive Director of REEF, "The Fish Survey Project has overwhelmingly demonstrated that with training and the opportunity to get involved, divers make significant contributions to marine conservation. The challenge now is to give our members more to chew on - they've mastered fish counts, now what else can they do? And who else is out there besides divers to pitch in? It will take time to answer these questions, but REEF is looking forward to exploring this new path."

To see the complete new statement of REEF mission, vision, and goals, visit [www.reef.org](http://www.reef.org).

#### 5. **2007 REEF Field Surveys** -

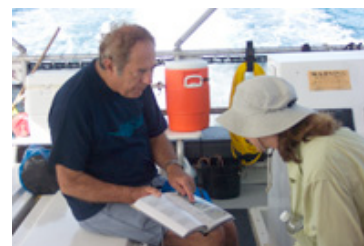
Our 2007 Field Survey Schedule is now complete and the full details for each trip are available at <http://www.reef.org/fieldsurv>. We have put together an exciting season of "Making Dives that Count" to seven Caribbean destinations in addition to New England, Hawaii, Mexico, Monterey, the San Juan Islands, and the Florida Keys. Paul Humann and Ned DeLoach, world-renowned marine life authors, are once again leading Field Surveys in addition to REEF staff and some outstanding REEF volunteer members.



Lad Akins



Biscayne Bay National Park,  
AAT Monitoring Project



Paul Humann during the 2005  
Discovery Tour in Key Largo



Paul Humann, REEF co-founder and winner of this year's "Reaching Out Award," to be awarded at DEMA, has also received this year's U.S. Coral Reef Task Force's Outstanding Public Awareness and Education Award, and is a 2007 Inductee into the International Scuba Diving Hall of Fame. Paul will be leading two trips for REEF in 2007; the Key Largo Discovery Tour (July 7-14) and our Utila, Honduras trip (October 20-27).



*2006 Barkley Sound Field Survey Trip*

REEF Field Surveys provide recreational divers with a wonderful opportunity to learn more about the marine environment through active participation in surveying fish populations and through top-notch instructional classes. Please take a moment to check out our seasonal line-up and book early for your trip to be sure to get the one you want!

First 2 REEF trips: Joe Cavanaugh will be kicking off our new season, leading the first trip to Grand Turk in the Turks and Caicos Islands (February 17-24) for some fabulous wall diving. Our new Executive Director, Leda Cunningham, will be leading our second trip to Tortola, part of the British Virgin Islands. Come meet Leda and spend time with her diving and learning more about the exciting new direction REEF is headed over the next few years. We have a new travel service for REEF Field Surveys, *Travel For You, Inc.* and you can reach them at 888-363-3345 or via their website at <http://www.travelforyouinc.com>. Tami and Raedene will be handling your REEF reservations and are happy to be a part of the REEF team.



*REEF Field Survey: Paul, Anna, & Ned*

#### 6. **Fish ID Seminar and Dive Trip -**

Alecia Adamson, one of our current REEF interns, held a fish talk at Horizon Divers on Saturday, October 21st. Those who attended were active divers from the Key Largo community and people directly involved in the marine science field from the University of Miami and Nova Southeastern University in Ft. Lauderdale. "It was nice to have such an enthusiastic group. The interactive and knowledgeable audience made the talk easy to lead," Alecia said.

After the talk, lunch was provided for those who planned on diving with Horizon that afternoon. Joe Cavanaugh joined the group to help Alecia with those who wanted to perform their first fish surveys in the Keys. The dive group went to two sites on Molasses Reef where conditions were optimal with good visibility and very little current. Everyone enjoyed the dives and the day was a success. Much thanks to the staff at Horizon!



*Photo by Paul Humann*

#### 7. **Rhode Island Lionfish Sighting -**

This month we are lucky to have a submission by a REEF member! Charles Benoit tells his story about finding a Red Lionfish in Rhode Island.

On Sunday, September 17th, my 15 year old nephew, Christopher Benoit, and I were diving at [Fort Wetherill State Park](#) in Jamestown, Rhode Island. Our club, The New England Aquarium Dive Club, was holding its annual Tropical Fish Hunt, and it had been a very successful day. My nephew and I had already captured a Beaugregory Damselfish, a Spotfin Butterflyfish, and an Orange Triggerfish on our first dive. For our last dive of the day, we decided not to bring our collecting nets because most of volunteers had departed to distribute the captured fish to area aquariums and science centers.

As we followed the cove wall out, we were scanning the nooks for any bright colors signifying the misplaced tropicals that get swept into New England waters each year. My nephew was swimming just ahead of me, when he suddenly turned and opened his cupped hands. To my surprise, he had just released a juvenile lionfish in front of my face! I



immediately cupped the fish in my hands, and signaled to him that we should surface. I told Chris that this was no ordinary tropical fish, and that we had to bring it into shore. With the lionfish cupped in my hands now, we started swimming for the exit point, a boat ramp about 150 yards away. My mind was racing, but I was confident that this fish was scientifically important. I recalled reading a story in the New England Aquarium's newsletter about their capture of a juvenile lionfish in the Bahamas, and figured if that was newsworthy, finding one in Rhode Island had to be big!

Approximately half way in, I watched the lionfish fan out its fins as it rested on my hands. That's when I noticed the small, sharp points on the end of each and every tip of its fins. It was at that moment I recalled that not only is this fish invasive, but also poisonous! Thank goodness for 7mm gloves and the fact that this juvenile was only about two inches long. Fearing no harm would come we continued in to shore, and promptly placed the lionfish in a bucket of water.

We tracked down one of the last, remaining club members, Jean Stefanik, who, as luck would have it, was transporting several of the tropicals to the Seacoast Science Center in Rye, NH. She was as amazed as we were by the find, and accepted the lionfish into her traveling tank.

It took several days, and a lot of phone calls and emails, before my nephew and I received confirmation that we now had the record for the northern-most capture of a Red Lionfish. Our lionfish remains on public display at Seacoast Science Center.

*-Charles Benoit, REEF Member*

8. **REEF Parts - Things To Know** - Here are a few notes and news bits we'd like you to know about:

- **Survey Tip:** When filling out scanforms for fish surveys, don't forget the back page! The date and time of your survey, total bottom time, maximum depth, and habitat are extremely important for our database. Keep counting those fish!
- **Visit Us At DEMA:** If you are headed to the DEMA convention November 8-11, don't forget to stop by our table (#1786) and say hello. We can't wait to see you there!



*Red Lionfish  
Photos by: Peter Winans*



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See You Next Month!

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