



‘One Love’ or Region-Wide Conservation of the Caribbean Marine Environment

(September 30, 2011) *The last two weeks saw an intense training and networking effort among environmental managers, park rangers and marine biologists from eight Caribbean countries in support of the management of marine protected areas.*

An initiative of the Caribbean Environment Programme of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP-CEP) and the Caribbean Marine Protected Areas Management Network and Forum (CaMPAM), the ‘CaMPAM Training of Trainers Course’ has been held annually for nearly 10 years, alternating between English and Spanish each year.

This year, the course was held at Hol Chan Marine Reserve on the Belize Barrier Reef. Participants came from Belize plus the seven English-speaking countries that are participating in the ‘Caribbean Challenge initiative’. This important investment in environmental management capacity in the region was made possible with support from the Directorate General of International Development Cooperation of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Additional support was provided by the NOAA Coral Reef Conservation Program, the Belize Fisheries Department, the Protected Areas Conservation Trust, and Hol Chan Marine Reserve.

UNEP-CEP Programme Officer for Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife, Ms Alessandra Vanzella-Khoury, describes the significance of the training “UNEP-CEP and CaMPAM are helping to build regional capacity for marine conservation and especially for the management of marine protected areas. The course is a great opportunity for those who work to promote marine conservation to come together, learn and share experiences.”

The Caribbean Challenge seeks to conserve 20% of near shore marine areas by 2020. Participants on the course came from countries associated with this initiative, namely from Antigua & Barbuda, The Bahamas, Grenada, Jamaica, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and Nevis and St. Vincent and the Grenadines all participated in the course in Belize. The Dominican Republic is also part of this work and was the venue for last year’s CaMPAM Training of Trainers course.

“Linked to us through international conventions such as the Protocol for Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife, and through networks such as the Global Island Partnership (GLISPA), Belize has valuable experience to share with these other countries about the management of marine resources” commented Ms Vanzella-Khoury. “It also offers the chance for participants to witness first-hand the quality of the Barrier Reef system,” she added.

Guest speakers from Belize were a key feature of this year’s course. CaMPAM Coordinator Dr Georgina Bustamante explains “Non-government organizations play an important role in helping manage protected areas and marine resources in Belize.”

“Presentations by both government and non-government organizations about their work demonstrated how partners can work together for the good of the marine resources and the communities that depend on them.”

According to Dr Bustamante “Those who work in marine protected areas across the region face many similar challenges in their day-to-day work. In the past two weeks, veteran fisheries officers and experienced protected area managers have shared their experiences of overcoming hurdles and described the ways in which they slowly built public support.”

Invited experts taught sessions on topics ranging from marine research and monitoring, to staffing, communications and the planning of national and regional networks of ecologically-connected marine protected areas. Field trips to snorkel in Hol Chan Marine Reserve and to snorkel and visit the facilities of Bacalar Chico National Park and Marine Reserve were a highlight of the course.

“In Hol Chan we snorkeled with huge grouper and snapper the size of which I’ve not seen before at home” remarked one of the participants. “And I’ve not seen schools of parrot fish as large as we saw in Bacalar Chico” added another participant.

Having forged new connections with their colleagues, the spirit of sharing will continue in support of the Caribbean marine environment that we all love and need.

Dr Bustamante describes “The course follows a ‘training of trainers’ model, and each participant now returns home committed to passing on the most relevant of their newfound insights to their colleagues, who they will help to train in the best practices that they learned on the course from around the region and beyond.”

“We look forward to sharing management strategies with each other and to discussing our progress in achieving both conservation and community benefits through effectively managed marine protected areas,” commented one of the participants. “We will definitely keep in touch with our new friends and help each other in future as we strive to protect the marine environment that we all love and need in the Caribbean region.”

For more information on the course please contact Dr Georgina Bustamante at gbustamante@gcfi.org. Information on this and CaMPAM’s other activities can also be found at <http://campam.gcfi.org/campam.php>.



The 2011 CaMPAM Training of Trainers Group. Photo: D. Baker