



B.R.E.E.F.  
Caves Village, West Bay St.  
P.O. Box N-7776, Nassau, Bahamas  
Ph: 242-327-9000 / Fax: 242-327-9002  
breef@breef.org, www.breef.org

# Press Release

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**Contact:**  
Casuarina McKinney or Charlene Carey, 1-242-327-9000  
casuarina@breef.org, charlene@breef.org

## What is Your Child's Teacher Doing Underwater?

This summer, The Bahamas Reef Environment Educational Foundation (BREEF), in collaboration with the Ministry of Education Science and Technology, held its 8<sup>th</sup> Marine Conservation Teacher Training Workshop. The workshop was held from August 13-21, 2006 at the Gerace Research Center on San Salvador. The objective of the workshop was to build on previous collaboration between BREEF and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology and provide Bahamian educators with hands-on experiences in the marine environment that they could subsequently share with their students. Ultimately the goal of the Marine Conservation Teacher Training Workshop is to promote an appreciation for our ocean and the knowledge and desire to protect it.



To date over 180 Bahamian educators have participated in one of BREEF's intensive marine conservation teacher training workshops. Participating teachers are provided with a unique experience to learn about the Bahamian marine environment and how we can best protect it. Teachers were also given the opportunity to conduct scientific investigations and review and develop hands-on interactive activities on marine ecosystems that they can take back to their schools. The workshop was funded by members and sponsors of BREEF, as well as by grants from the Lyford Cay Foundation, The James R. Dougherty Jr. Foundation and the Moore Charitable Foundation.

Twenty-three primary and secondary teachers from public and private schools throughout The Bahamas attended this year's workshop. Workshop participant, Nicola Williams from L.W. Young Junior High School wrote: *"Can you imagine being surrounded by water and not comfortable with it? Living in a country that*

*is considered to be entirely a coastal ecosystem and not knowing it? How about teaching about corals having never seen a live coral in its natural environment? This was my reality until my BREEF summer workshop experience. The BREEF summer workshop was amazing. We went into the water from the first day. I will no longer look at the beach and the rocky shore the same way. Every minute of the day was planned and I left with a wealth of knowledge and materials. The joy I have received I will now pass on to my students."*

Dannielle Brathwaite from S.C. McPherson Junior High School wrote: *"This was by far the best workshop I have ever attended in 16+ years of teaching. It was truly a wonderful experience."*

The intensive nine-day workshop included lessons on mangrove wetlands, coral reefs, sea grass beds, beaches and rocky inter-tidal zones. Field trips to each of these environments focused on ecology, scientific survey methods and activities



*Teachers conduct field activities in the inter-tidal zone.*

that students can do to better understand these habitats. Snorkeling lessons were an integral part of the course, building skills and confidence in the water. Field activities included snorkeling expeditions to a mangrove creek, sea grass beds and coral reefs, field investigations of the sandy beach and rocky shorelines, conch anatomy, survey of adult and juvenile conch shells, beach clean-up and marine debris data analysis. The participants also took a boat trip to Green Cay to see the endangered San Salvador Rock Iguana in its natural habitat and learn about nearby sea bird nesting colonies. Bridgette Barrett from St. Anne's School remarked that: *"The lessons on mangroves, rocky and sandy shores, pollution and coral reefs will be put to good use in new and exciting ways."*

Participants heard lectures by local professionals on topics such as Coastal Ecology, Marine Conservation, Sustainable Development and Environmental Stewardship. Presenters included representatives from BREEF, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, The Bahamas National Trust, The BEST Commission, Dolphin Encounters, The Department of Marine Resources, the Marine Science Magnet Programme at C.V. Bethel Senior High School, The American Museum of Natural History and the San Salvador Living Jewels Foundation. Teachers were also treated to an island tour to visit natural and historic sites, nature walks on bush medicine and bird watching, and a visit to the exciting bat cave.

Particular attention was paid to the status of our marine environments and marine fish populations in The Bahamas and around the world. Workshop participants were made aware of the critical status of many of our marine species and the steps that are being taken to ensure that the fish, conch and crawfish that we depend on do not become extinct. The closure of the Nassau grouper season and the establishment of a network of Bahamian Marine Reserves were discussed. Teachers were made aware of their role as environmental stewards by developing in their students the value of caring for their environment. The workshop equipped teachers with information to take back and share with their students, and the resources needed to discuss the environmental policy decisions that are made in our country.



Teachers try fun activities that they can put to use in their classrooms.



Suzan Cartwright from Morrisville Primary School records the fish living on a coral reef.

Caribbean. Important fisheries resources such the conch, Nassau grouper and crawfish that we take for granted here are commercially extinct in neighboring territories. Reports that these are on the decline have prompted the need to put safeguards such as closed seasons, size limits and marine reserves in place. It is through education and research that we will be able to make sound decisions that will care for our environment and thus our natural heritage. As Viola Johnson from Mabel Walker Primary School explained, *“The BREEF experience made me more aware of the coastal environment and how to help to protect it for future generations. It was an exciting week.”*

Lesla Curtis of Maurice Moore Primary School, traveling back home from the workshop wearing a BREEF T-shirt advocating the closed season for Nassau groupers during the spawning season, had the following experience: *“A few people asked me about it (the T-shirt) at the airport and as a result, class was in session (I had my posters in hand). I had about twenty-five people around me in deep discussion. Many of them were just as naive as I was entering the workshop but they walked away enlightened. It made me realize how important it is to get the word out to alert the public of our responsibility as good environmental stewards. Every teacher should embrace the opportunity to attend the BREEF workshop. It will open your eyes to a whole new world.”*

The Bahamas is still considered to have some of the healthiest marine ecosystems in the wider



Workshop participants visit Columbus Park, San Salvador.



Club Med San Salvador takes teachers on a snorkeling expedition to an offshore coral reef.

Founded in 1993 by Sir Nicholas Nuttall, BREEF is a non-profit Bahamian foundation that promotes a sustainable relationship between Bahamians, visitors and our marine environment. It achieves this through teacher training, public education, fisheries workshops and school programmes. The organization is supported entirely by membership dues and grants and donations from members and sponsors. Please contact BREEF with any questions, or to find out how you can get involved. BREEF is located at Caves Village, West Bay St., New Providence. Tel: 327-9000, Fax: 327-9002, email: [breef@breef.org](mailto:breef@breef.org).