

island resources

F O U N D A T I O N

Direct your reply to:

6292 Estate Nazareth #100
St. Thomas, VI 00802
340/775-6225; fax 779-2022

■ 1718 P Street NW, Suite T4
Washington, DC 20036
202/265-9712; fax 232-0748

123 Main Street, PO Box 3097
Road Town, Tortola
BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS VG1110
Tel. and fax: 284/494-2723

Or via the Internet at:
irf@irf.org
<http://www.irf.org>

SANDY CAY ANNUAL REPORT

June 2008 — June 2009

Prepared by:

Jean-Pierre Bacle
island resources
F O U N D A T I O N

Prepared for:

BVI National Parks Trust

INTRODUCTION

This is the first annual report prepared by Island Resources Foundation since the transfer of Sandy Cay from the Estate of Laurance S. Rockefeller to the BVI National Parks Trust in May of 2008. The report contains a summary of activities and observations during this time period, including all visits to the island related to caretaking, maintenance, monitoring, training, and general project oversight.

During the period of June 2008 to June 2009, the island was visited on eleven occasions by members of four organizations: Jost Van Dykes Preservations Society (David Blyden); Resortscapes, Inc. (Chris Thomas and Al Romero); National Parks Trust (Keith Grant and Marcus Maturine); and Island Resources Foundation (Jean-Pierre Bacle).

TRAIL MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES AND OBSERVATIONS

The island was visited on a regular basis by David Blyden (island caretaker from Jost Van Dyke). Visits were carried out according to schedule throughout the period except during the first quarter of 2009 due to weather conditions, primarily heavy seas, which reduced the number of visits to two for the quarter instead of the required four caretaking trips.

The general condition of the trail is very good. **However, a short section along the southeast side will require intervention, following discussion with the National Parks Trust.** Ongoing erosion due to heavy seas along with foot traffic to and from the beach has contributed to removal of some beach vegetation. As a consequence, erosion is slowly encroaching on the trail (**Figure 1** and **Photo 1**). Eventually this trail section (estimated between 15 – 30 metres) will have to re-routed further inland.



Figure 1.

Sandy Cay showing 2005 re-routed trail section; trail section currently experiencing erosion; and area fenced off for restoration. Aerial imagery is from Google Earth (2009).



Photo 1.

Erosion along the edge of trail section (June 2009).

A similar situation happened in the past just to the east (see Bacle, 2005). Remedial measures taken at that time required that a 30-metre trail section be re-routed 5 to 10 metres inland on the land side of the beach berm adjacent to the wetland (**Figure 1**). The intervention was successful in that very few trees were removed, and the new realignment provided an opportunity for visitors to have a closer look at the mangrove wetland. Since then, we have noted that vegetation has reclaimed most of the abandoned trail section and stabilized the berm section.

Along the northeast section of the ridge, the vista clearance created by visiting film crews

has been fenced off since April 2008 (**Figure 1** and **Photo 2**). The plastic fencing is holding on but requires some periodic maintenance, such as retightening and adjustments. The closure has partially discouraged trail walkers from accessing the edge of the cliff; however, there is still evidence that some visitors are skirting around the fence to gain access to the view. **More fencing carefully laid out may have to be considered. A temporary sign labeled “Vegetation Restoration Area — Please Do Not Pass” should be placed at this site to further discourage access.**

Earlier this year (January 2009), Keith Grant and Marcus Maturine from the National Parks Trust accompanied Chris Thomas, Al Romero and J. P. Bacle for a day-long training exercise in trail maintenance and environmental monitoring (Photo 3).



Photo 2.

Fence preventing access to the vista viewpoint and allowing site restoration.



Photo 3.

Pictured (left to right): Al Romero and Chris Thomas (from Resortscaapes) and Keith Grant and Marcus Maturine (from NPT).

POST-RAT-ERADICATION MONITORING

We found no sign of rat activity during all monitoring trips since the transfer of the island (May 2008). There was no evidence of rat droppings in and around the bait stations, no rat trails, as well as no signs of gnawing on branches, twigs, or fruits. Furthermore, during our last visit in June of 2009, we noted an increase in land and sea bird nesting on the ground, which is a very positive indicator the rats are absent (see Wildlife Section below).

During the June 2009 trip we continued to replace some of the older, dilapidated rat monitoring stations and also added a new one. The number of rat monitoring stations currently totals 16.

WILDLIFE

Bird observations were made on two occasions during two different seasons and at approximately a six-month interval. The most active period was in the summer of 2009 with at least seven different species nesting: White-tailed Tropicbird, Laughing Gull, Bridled Tern, Scaly-naped Pigeon, Zenaida Dove, Yellow Warbler, and Bananaquit (**Table 1**). Noteworthy is our observation that many Zenaida Doves were nesting on the ground and on lower branches of trees (**Photos 4 and 5**). This is further indication of the absence of predators such as rats.



Photo 4.

Zenaida Dove nest located on the ground within a coastal, beach grass environment.



Photo 5.

Two chicks (Zenaida Doves) nesting on top of an abandoned termite nest. The nest is about one metre above ground, adjacent to the trail.

In January 2009 we observed a rare visitor to the island — the Mangrove Cuckoo. This species had been observed only on five occasions since January 1970, the last time in May 2005 (Bacle and Towle, 2008)

Sea turtles were not observed during the reporting period; however, nest pits were seen on a few occasions along upper reaches of the beach, for example, by David Blyden (October 2008), reported on in the quarterly Caretaker Report Form submitted by the JVD Preservation Society to NPT.

Termite control measures along the trail's corridor and sides were applied on several occasions during the reporting period. Overall, the number of termite nests throughout the island appeared normal.

Table 1. Recent bird observations at Sandy Cay.

Species	1/30/09	6/12/09
White-tailed Tropicbird	3	2*
Magnificent Frigatebird	2	1
Brown Pelican	6	8
Brown Booby	3	1
Green Heron		1
Laughing Gull		14*
Royal Tern		2
Bridled Tern		7*
Least Tern		3
White-cheeked Pintail		4
Scaly-naped Pigeon	1	30*
Common Ground Dove	4*	1
Zenaida Dove	6	28*
Mangrove cuckoo	1	
Green-throated Carib		3
Gray Kingbird	1	2
Yellow Warbler	3	23*
Bananaquit	8	18*
* <i>nesting activity</i>		

VISITATION

As expected, Sandy Cay remains a popular destination for recreational users (see figures reported in **Table 2**). Generally speaking, the tourist season commences in November and December, and we recorded peak activity in January. Clive Petrovic, an IRF research associate, also recorded anchoring data during this period from his vantage point at his residence on Tortola. His observations are shown in italicized blue font on **Table 2**.

Table 2. Visitation at Sandy Cay.

Date	Anchored Boats	Dinghies on beach	People on beach	People on trail
<i>June 1, 2008</i>	5			
<i>June 15, 2008</i>	6			
July 22, 2008	8	6	30	7
<i>August 3, 2008</i>	6			
<i>August 10, 2008</i>	5			
August 19, 2008	3	3	10	8
<i>August 31, 2008</i>	2			
September 16, 2008	3	2	9	4
October 21, 2008	9	3	43	12
November 6, 2008	4	3	19	2
<i>November 20, 2008</i>	8			
December 22, 2008	7	3	6	9
<i>December 26, 2008</i>	7			
January 29, 2009	11	6	13	20
January 30, 2009	9	4	36	16
<i>February 25, 2009</i>	6			
March 2, 2009	10	3	24	11
<i>March 22, 2009</i>	11			
<i>May 10, 2009</i>	3			
May 25, 2009	5	3	23	20
June 12, 2009	6	3	12	15

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

On his November 2008 report form, David Blyden notes that residents from Tortola have been harvesting coconuts from the island. On his August 2008 report form, he also notes evidence of camp fires on the beach (**Photo 6**). Although these activities (especially coconut harvesting) have occurred many times in the past, Dave suggests that they seem to have increased since the transfer of Sandy Cay from private to public ownership. **This observation by the Caretaker suggests that early installation of the visitors' sign, as designed by the NPT, is important to avoid a pattern of misunderstanding and misuse from developing during the early years of NPT stewardship of the island.** The sign makes clear that Sandy Cay is a protected area and highlights permitted and not-permitted activities on the island.



Photo 6.
Remnants of a campfire on the beach (June 2009).

FUTURE ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 2010

- (1) Trail section re-routing should be considered in early 2010 when Chris Thomas undertakes his annual visit to the island. This task could be undertaken jointly with routine trail maintenance activities. An annual coconut tree count and application of fertilizer should also be carried out during this period. It is estimated that the effort will take two full days. Representatives from NPT, JVDPS, Resortsapes, and IRF should be present during this exercise.
- (2) We recommend ongoing maintenance of the fence closure on the ridge. This should become part of regular trail maintenance, with any observations of change noted on the trail maintenance reporting forms. This activity should be continued until restoration is complete. A small sign affixed to the fence, as discussed above, is suggested.
- (3) A refresher course on trail maintenance, rat monitoring, wildlife observations, visitation, and a review of reporting procedures should be done at least once a year.

REFERENCES

Bacle, J.P., 2005. *Sandy Cay Field Trips: Annual Report for 2005*. Island Resources Foundation. Tortola, BVI and Washington, DC.

Bacle, J.P. and J. Towle, 2008. *Four Decades of Site Maintenance and Environmental Monitoring at Sandy Cay, British Virgin Islands, 1968-2008*. Prepared by Island Resources Foundation for the Estate of Laurance S. Rockefeller. Tortola, BVI and Washington, DC.

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