

SANDY CAY III

A PROJECT TO HELP PRESERVE THE NATURAL AREA TREASURES
OF THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

SANDY CAY FIELD TRIPS: Semi-annual Report, July – December, 2007

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INTRODUCTION

From July to December members of the Jost Van Dykes Preservation Society, Resortscapes, Inc., and Island Resources Foundation visited Sandy Cay on eight occasions. All visits included the participation of David Blyden. Susan Zaluski, JVDPS' new program manager visited the island twice; once with J.P. Bacle on October 12th for an introductory and overview of the on-going monitoring and maintenance program, and on November 29th with Chris Thomas, to participate in the fertilization of palm trees.

POST RAT ERADICATION MONITORING

All monitoring trips during the second half of 2007 indicated no sign of rat activity - in other words no evidence of rat droppings in and around the 15 bait stations as well as signs of gnawing on branches, twigs, or fruits. No rodent trails were observed in the sea purslane ground cover in the central part of the islands.

During the course of the year, we decided to test a new bait station suggested by a local provider (BVI Pest Control). This new design (#902 Top Loader Bait Station) has thus far been quite successful at preventing hermit crabs gaining access to the bait (Photo 1.). If this continues to be the case in the next few months, more stations of this type will be acquired as replacement for the older deteriorating stations becomes necessary.

TRAIL CONDITION

Trail maintenance along the trail bed and pruning along the trail corridor was kept to a high standard. While working on the island, numerous visitors complimented us on the good appearance of the trail. We noted however that the majority of walkers were bare feet and unable to walk the rocky upland section. Most of them were unaware of the trail's existence and where the trail led. Perhaps once the island is under the Park System, a Sandy Cay flyer showing the trail, its condition and other island features should be made available to visitors, through local charter groups, and associations.

BIRD OBSERVATIONS

Records during the latter half of the year reveal modest bird activity except for a large flock of brown pelican who were foraging around the island on October 12th (Table 1.). The resident population of bananaquits and yellow warblers continue to be active and in fair numbers.

Table 1. Bird observations at Sandy Cay.

Species	10/12//07	11/29/07
Magnificent Frigatebird	1	
Brown Pelican	45	3
Brown Booby	6	

Laughing Gull	2	
Scaly-napped Pigeon		4
Common Ground Dove	1	
Zenaida Dove		1
Green-throated Carib	2	2
Gray Kingbird	1	
Yellow Warbler	12	1
Bananaquit	17	24
* <i>nesting activity</i>		

VISITATION

As expected, Sandy Cay remains a popular destination for recreational users as indicated by the figures on Table 2. Peak activity was during the November and December months when the tourist season gradually kicks in. Clive Petrovic, an IRF associate also recorded anchoring data during this period from his vantage point on Tortola (see Table 3).

Table 2. Visitation at Sandy Cay on selected days from July to December 2007.

	7/28/07	8/28/07	9/15/07	10/12/07	10/20/07	11/17/07	11/29/07	12/18/07
Anchored boats	6	1	4	2	8	11	8	7
Persons on the beach	2	2	8	6	5	27	31	22
Persons on the trail	13	0	2	6	5	5	6	25

Table 3. Visitation at Sandy Cay (anchored boats only) reported by C. Petrovic.

	6/3/07	6/10/07	9/2/07	11/17/07	11/18/07	12/30/07
Anchored boats	6	7	2	3	3	16

OTHER OBSERVATIONS

The wet season is about to end and Sandy Cay's vegetation continues to show signs of healthy growth due primarily to regular rains. Although coconuts continue to be harvested, it is reassuring to see an increasing number of seedlings along the ground. We estimate that at least half a dozen seedlings are scattered in the western half of the island.

During this last trip, we noticed a number of sea turtle nest pits throughout the western shoreline, just inside the vegetation line (Photo 2). These pits were measured at around one meter in diameter and are possibly that of the hawksbill turtle which customarily nest during this time of the year.

Shoreline erosion. Evidence of shoreline erosion was apparent along the southern and western beaches. Photo #3 depicts the typical erosion profile with beach vegetation slumping down the bluff. The cycle of erosion is expected to continue for a few more months.



Photo#1: New bait station .



Photo #2: Turtle activity along the western beach, possible nest pit.



Photo #3: Bluff erosion, 3 to 4 feet in height along the south shoreline.