

island resources

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Sandy Cay

One Project + Eight Years = A Microcosm of IRF's Mission

On **May 1, 2008**, in a ceremony at the J.R. O'Neal Botanical Gardens in Road Town, Tortola, the island of Sandy Cay was formally transferred from the estate of philanthropist, conservationist, and entrepreneur, the late **Laurance S. Rockefeller**, to the people of the British Virgin Islands, to be cared for in perpetuity as a protected natural area and recreational site by the BVI's **National Parks Trust (NPT)**. The transformation of Sandy Cay from a privately owned island (albeit one that had always been open to the public) to its emergence as the BVI's newest national park had been planned over an eight-year period, with **Island Resources Foundation** serving as the critical link between the donor's expectations and the BVI's aspirations.

The **Sandy Cay Program**, 2000-2008, is but one of the over 200 individually funded, island-focused projects implemented by Island Resources Foundation since its establishment 36 years ago. As such, it is perhaps not conspicuous. It was not, for example, the longest—our technical assistance program for environmental NGOs in the Eastern Caribbean was active for well over a decade. It was not multi-island in scope—as was the Foundation's better-known Country Environmental Profile series. It did not reflect, as had many of the Foundation's endeavors, insular initiatives on a global scale.

What is unique about the Sandy Cay Program—from the Foundation's perspective—is that this cluster of activities, known collectively as "*Sandy Cay*", eventually encapsulated so many of the components central to IRF's mission, all tied together in a neat program package named after the island which was at the center of everything.

At the commencement of this effort, there were two men—**Laurance S. Rockefeller**, who had purchased Sandy Cay more than 40 years ago and then nurtured and enhanced the island to create a unique managed-wilderness landscape, and the late **Dr. Edward L. Towle**, founder of Island Resources Foundation and a leading protagonist for Caribbean environmental concerns since the 1960s. The two had partnered many times before, in both the American and British Virgin Islands and in the wider Caribbean region. Neither lived to witness the closing phases of their last joint effort.

Yet both were men of extraordinary vision and both would appreciate that, in the end, the British Virgin Islands acquired more than the island itself and, in the end, Island Resources Foundation had overseen a program that mirrored the essential objectives of the organization itself.

The transfer ceremonies in the BVI were attended by the Foundation's president, **Bruce Potter**, IRF trustees **Dr. LaVerne Ragster** and **Nicolas Drayton**, and key members of the IRF Sandy Cay project team—**Judith Towle**, **Jean-Pierre Bacle**, **Barbara Lausche** and **Lloyd Gardner**. This time together in Tortola provided an opportunity for all to reflect on what the Sandy Cay program had meant to the Foundation.

continued on page 2 . . .

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Sandy Cay Photo by Bruce Potter
[May 2, 2008]



♪ *Oh Sandy Cay, oh Sandy Cay* ♪
We're happy you've come back to we. ♪
 (to the tune of "Oh Christmas Tree")

Students from the Jost Van Dyke Primary School serenaded participants en route to Sandy Cay on May 2nd with an original composition dedicated to Sandy Cay. The students first sang the Sandy Cay "anthem" at the formal transfer ceremony held at the Joseph R. O'Neal Botanical Gardens in Road Town on May 1st.

Sandy Cay ... continued from page 1

Sandy Cay was both a program of *forward planning for the future of Sandy Cay* and *institutional strengthening for protected area management in the British Virgin Islands*. The project was initially focused on the island itself—its habitats and ecosystems. Over time, it evolved as a longer-term program of sustained and targeted assistance for BVI institutions, laws and policies that support conservation and protected area management.

BIODIVERSITY RESEARCH — Initially, the Foundation was engaged by Mr. Rockefeller to investigate Sandy Cay's environment and its natural carrying capacity in the face of increasing touristic use. More than a dozen researchers participated in studies to document and evaluate the island's natural resources while, at the same time, projecting what was required to conserve them in the future.

The Sandy Cay Program emphasized what has always been at the center of IRF's approach to island development: THE APPLICATION OF SOUND SCIENCE TO ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM SOLVING.

RESOURCE PROTECTION — Mr. Rockefeller and others engaged in the Sandy Cay Program had, early on, concluded that the BVI's National Parks Trust was the logical entity to ensure the island's long-term protection. To move toward this objective, IRF and NPT cooperated in initiatives designed to strengthen the Trust's capacity to manage and protect not only Sandy Cay but all parks under the Trust's stewardship. Most significant was the development of a new *System Plan for BVI Protected Areas*, covering the years 2007-2017. The Foundation has provided similar counsel and professional planning assistance for Caribbean park development since the 1980s.

IRF's conservation priorities have always encouraged expansion of a Caribbean environmental ethic, protection of land for public use, and the creation of partnerships between public and private sector interests.

CAPACITY BUILDING — Increasing the confidence of Mr. Rockefeller and his associates in the institutional strengths of the National Parks Trust was key to the success of the program. Sandy Cay did not exist in isolation, and therefore the Trust's organizational growth and professional development emerged as critical components of IRF's collaboration with, and assistance to, the National Parks Trust. An unusual aspect of this collaboration resulted in the drafting and approval of formal *Operational Procedures for the NPT Board*, the only statutory body in the BVI to develop an *Operational Manual* to guide its actions.

The strengthening of indigenous institutions has always been an integral part of IRF's mandate. The Foundation has long maintained that NGOs and quasi-governmental entities have a major role to play in the management of insular environments.

ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY AND LEGISLATION — The Sandy Cay Program significantly strengthened the policy and legal framework for the BVI's protected areas. The most far-reaching product produced was the new *National Parks Act* (2006) and the *Regulations* thereto (2008). The Act is a modern piece of legislation reflecting international policy, standards and practice; it perhaps provides the most up-to-date and effective framework for protected area management in the insular Caribbean.

For more than three decades, IRF has assisted island governments in the establishment of environmental policies, guidelines, legislation and regulatory procedures that strengthen resource management, physical planning, and the development control process.

At the end of the Sandy Cay Program, our attention turned again to the island itself, the gift of Laurance Rockefeller to the people of the British Virgin Islands. Ellen Pomeroy, an executor of the Rockefeller Estate, wrote to IRF after the transfer ceremony, reflecting on a truism that perhaps best sums up the eight-year effort: *"The Sandy Cay project underscores the adage that it is not easy to give things away — if you are trying to do it well!"*

**PHOTO CAPTIONS
(PAGE 3)**

- 1 Dignitaries at the Sandy Cay Transfer Ceremony at the J.R. O'Neal Botanical Gardens, May 1st, 2008 (l-r): **Dr. Michael E. O'Neal**, Chair, BVI National Parks Trust Board and President of H. Lavity Stoutt Community College; **William S. Moody**, Distinguished Fellow of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund; **Ellen R.C. Pomeroy** and **Clayton W. Frye, Jr.**, Executors of the Estate of Laurance S. Rockefeller; and **Joseph C. Smith Abbott**, Director, National Parks Trust.
- 2 **The Honorable Ralph T. O'Neal, OBE**, Premier of the British Virgin Islands, speaking at the Transfer Ceremony.
- 3 **Clayton "Wes" Frye, Jr.**, Executor of the Rockefeller Estate, speaking at the Premier's Dinner on April 30th at Little Dix Bay Resort, Virgin Gorda.
- 4 NPT Director **Joseph Smith Abbott** (l) and **Honorable Omar W. Hodge**, Minister of Natural Resources and Labor, following Minister Hodge's signing of the official declaration making Sandy Cay the BVI's newest national park.
- 5 Rockefeller Estate executor **Ellen R.C. Pomeroy** being recognized at the Sandy Cay Transfer Ceremony. In front row (l-r): **Lloyd S. Gardner**, IRF environmental consultant for the Sandy Cay Program; **Dr. LaVerne E. Ragster**, President of the University of the Virgin Islands and IRF Trustee; **Judith A. Towle**, IRF Vice President and Coordinator of the Sandy Cay Program; **Ellen Pomeroy**; and **Barbara J. Lausche**, environmental lawyer for the Sandy Cay Program and IRF Trustee.
- 6 Photographed at the Premier's Dinner at Little Dix Bay Resort are (l-r) IRF's **Judith Towle** and **Sandra Ward**, Communications Director, Premier's Office and one of the coordinators of the Sandy Cay transfer ceremonies.
- 7 Attendees at the Premier's Dinner in honor of the transfer of Sandy Cay (l-r): IRF Trustee **Dr. LaVerne E. Ragster**, **Honorable Dancia Penn-Sallah**, Deputy Premier of the British Virgin Islands; **Kinsey Potter**; and **Bruce G. Potter**, President of Island Resources Foundation.
- 8 IRF's **Jean-Pierre Bacle**, who, with **Chris Thomas** of Resortsapes (not pictured), provided tours of Sandy Cay on May 2nd as part of the official transfer proceedings.
- 9 **Jost Van Dyke primary school students** who visited Sandy Cay on May 2nd with other participants in the Sandy Cay transfer events.

PHOTOS PROVIDED BY THE BVI GOVERNMENT INFORMATION SERVICE, JOSE GARNHAM, AND BRUCE POTTER.



Events to Mark the Official Transfer of Sandy Cay

Program Updates and Other News about IRF

Bat researchers (pictured below, left to right) **Kevel Lindsay** (IRF) **Dr. Gary Kwiecinski** (University of Scranton) and **Jean-Pierre Bacle** (IRF) are part of a three-year study team that is surveying the Virgin Islands' only remaining native mammals — *bats*. Mysterious and often



IRF researchers pose in front of a cave occupied by a roost of cave bats, located at Boatman Point on the southwest coast of St. John.

linked to the supernatural, bats are nevertheless important to the ecological wellbeing of the Virgin Islands because of their ability to control insects and disperse plant seeds for regeneration. According to IRF ecologist Kevel Lindsay, "Bats help to keep nature in balance, and we need to be able to protect them."

The IRF team is working with biologist **Dr. Renata Platenberg** of the V.I. Division of Fish and Wildlife (DFW), with funding provided under a grant to DFW from the U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Service. The objective is to determine the status of the local bat population on St. Thomas and St. John and to develop conservation strategies that address population decline. Lindsay and Bacle hope to continue their research with scientists in the British Virgin Islands.

Two bat species appear rare in the islands currently under study — the fig-eating bat, a fruit bat endemic to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, and the Brazilian free-tailed bat that is fairly widespread in the Caribbean but seems very rare in the Virgin Islands. "We need to understand more about why it is so rare in Virgin Islands," said Lindsay, "and if this is because of human activities, we need to take appropriate steps to restore a better balance."

At a May 2008 meeting of IRF's Board of Trustees, President Bruce Potter reluctantly accepted the resignations of long-serving trustees, **Henry Wheatley** and **Charles Consolvo**. Henry was first elected to the IRF Board in 1973 and Charles in 1978, representing a combined service to IRF of 65 years.

President Potter thanked both for their commitment and loyalty and for their decades of support for IRF and its conservation mission. From the beginning of their joint board tenure in the late 1970s, Wheatley and Consolvo constituted the Board's Finance Committee, only one area of governance in which they provided wise and judicious counsel to IRF's management team. They will be sorely missed as trustees, but each has confirmed they will continue their support of the Foundation and its programs.

The 2007 Euan P. McFarlane Award for Outstanding Environmental Leadership in the Insular Caribbean was granted by IRF to the late **Dr. I. Earle A. Kirby of St. Vincent and the Grenadines**, who passed away in 2005. The Award, including a \$1,000 grant, was presented posthumously to Dr. Kirby's widow at the annual general meeting of the St. Vincent National Trust. "Doc" (as Dr. Kirby was affectionately known) was nominated for the McFarlane Award by the Natural History Committee of the Trust in a tribute that focused on his environmental leadership in St. Vincent, especially as a proponent of the natural environment and archaeology.

The McFarlane Award was established by Island Resources Foundation in 1987 to recognize annually individual conservation leadership in the insular Caribbean. Contact Judith Towle at jtowle@irf.org for information about the nominating process for the 2008 Award.

IRF has begun development of an *Environmental Profile* for Jost Van Dyke and its neighboring islands in the British Virgin Islands. The *Profile* is the first phase of a new project to be undertaken by the **Jost Van Dykes (BVI) Preservation Society**, which designed the 16-month effort to bring a fresh approach to community awareness and understanding of the local environment.

On the evening of May 6th, the Society hosted a public meeting with island residents to launch the project which is funded by the United Kingdom's Overseas Territories Environment Program (OTEP). His Excellency, **BVI Governor David Peary** was in attendance to announce the new project on behalf of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office which funds OTEP initiatives. Kevel Lindsay, Clive Petrovic, Jean-Pierre Bacle and Judith Towle attended the meeting representing Island Resources Foundation. Bacle and Towle serve as IRF joint coordinators for the *Profile* phase of the project.

Coral reef systems within the Caribbean remain at risk from land-based sources of sedimentation. The lack of adequate empirical data to quantify the effects of land development on sediment production is often cited as a reason for ineffective mitigation strategies. For a decade, IRF's **Dr. Carlos Ramos-Scharrón** has been studying the impacts of land development by quantifying sediment production rates at sites in Puerto Rico and St. John, U.S. Virgin Islands.



Dr. Ramos-Scharrón

Data analyses have been carried out by Dr. Ramos-Scharrón to develop comprehensive erosion models that quantify watershed-scale sediment yields. Application of the models as GIS tools will allow land managers in similar areas of the Caribbean to evaluate surface erosion problems and sites at the watershed level and to standardize and improve erosion control strategies. At Fish Bay in St. John, Ramos-Scharrón and his IRF colleagues, in collaboration with local home owners, have applied these new tools to implement best management practices for erosion modeling and sediment control in the Fish Bay watershed.

The Foundation's erosion studies have, most recently, been funded by the Caribbean Coral Reef Institute-University of Puerto Rico, the Gulf of Mexico Foundation, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

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