

THEME THREE: CONSERVING OUR RESOURCES

VOCABULARY

polyps – small animal whose skeleton makes up part of a coral reef

prohibited - against the law; not allowed

tournament - competition

breeding - to reproduce

dredge - to dig out

Conservation refers to the wise use of our resources.

LAWS FOR FISHERMEN

Some Bahamian fishermen still use **traditional methods** that have been handed down for centuries from one generation to the next. These methods are allowed by law.

Some fishermen have become greedy, and catch fish in ways that destroy the environment. The government has passed laws to prevent fishermen from using methods such as those listed below.

PROHIBITED METHODS of FISHING

- The use of **bleach** or other **poisonous substances** for fishing is prohibited.
- The use of **guns** or **explosives** is prohibited.

- It is not permitted to use **scuba equipment** to catch fish or collect any marine resources.

Some species of fish have **special protection**. These are also listed below.

Lobster: The lobster season is closed from **1st April to 31st July**. During this period no lobsters should be removed from the water. A **permit** is required for vessels (boats) trapping lobsters. Any lobster landed must have a tail length of at least 15 centimeters. Egg-bearing female lobsters should not be removed from the sea.

Conch: If a conch shell does not have a well-formed lip, it should not be removed from the sea.

Turtle: No turtles may be taken from **1st April to 31st July**. The Hawksbill turtle is an endangered species. This turtle should not be taken from the sea. It is forbidden to take turtle eggs. Minimum sizes for landing a turtle are 60 cm back length for the green turtle and 75 cm back length for the loggerhead turtle.

Scale fish: The capture, purchase or selling of bonefish is prohibited. Grouper and rockfish weighing less than 3 pounds should be returned to the sea.

Stone crab: No crabs are to be removed from the water between **1st June and 15th October**. The claw length of stone crabs should be at least 10 cm.

Sport fishing: The directors of any sport fishing tournament must have written approval for the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries to organize or hold a tournament.

CORAL REEFS IN THE BAHAMAS

Our coral reefs are among the World's most beautiful. They are an important natural resource.

A coral reef is a living community of many tiny organisms called **polyps**. Reefs form in warm, clear sea water. Because coral needs sunlight, reefs are only found in shallow waters.

A reef is a very special environment, which provides shelter, feeding and **breeding** grounds for many fish and marine plants and animals.

Reefs also help to protect beaches and coasts from erosion by waves. But a reef is a very delicate environment that is easily destroyed by even a small change in conditions.

A coral reef is built up over many **hundreds of years**. But in just a few days or months, people can destroy a coral reef forever. The damage caused to reefs all over the world by human activity is far greater than any damage caused by storms or animals.

These are some of the ways in which a coral reef can be damaged:

- When a boat is anchored to a reef, pieces of coral are broken off.
- People collect coral and sell it for souvenirs, or use it to make jewelry.
- Catching too many fish in a reef environment upsets the natural balance.
- Bleach may not be used to kill and catch lobsters. Even a small amount of bleach in the water kills coral polyps and other creatures.
- If the clean water is polluted by chemicals, oil spills or other wastes, the coral polyps will be killed.
- Any disturbance of the water, for example by dredging or construction of projects, makes the water cloudy so that sunlight cannot penetrate the water, and the polyps die.

Coral rarely grows again where it has been damaged. In The Bahamas, coral reefs are a special part of the environment and a valuable tourist attraction. People sail out in glass-bottomed boats, and go snorkeling and scuba diving to see the beauties of the reefs. So it is vital that we protect our reefs, and the plants and animals that live there.

MINERAL RESOURCES

Two minerals are taken from the sea in The Bahamas: **aragonite** and **salt**.

Salt has been produced on all The Bahamian islands at one time or another. A few islands still produce salt for local use, but it is now only produced on a large scale for export on the island of Inagua.

Here conditions for salt production are ideal:

- constant sunshine
- steady winds
- high temperatures
- low rainfall
- pure sea water
- flat land

Aragonite is a very fine limestone sand which is a particularly pure form of calcium carbonate. This is used in the manufacture of **glass, cement, fertilizers** and chemicals, therefore it's a valuable resource. It is dredged from the sea at **Ocean Cay in Bimini** and sold to other countries. It is a useful source of income for The Bahamas

The conditions are needed so that when salt water stands for a period of time in salt beds, the sun gradually evaporates the water and leaves behind thick layers of clean salt.

The **extraction** of both **aragonite** and **salt** is important to the economy of The Bahamas, but operations must not be allowed to disturb marine life over a greater area than necessary.



The Hawksbill Turtle

1st April to 31st July



Stone crab

June 1 to October 15th



The Nassau Grouper

Dec. 1st – Feb 28th



PROTECTING OUR LAND
BAHAMAS NATIONAL TRUST
(BNT)

VOCABULARY

extinct – no longer existing

Hectare - 2 1/2 acres

There are not as many species of plants and animals now as there were even a short time ago. It is vital that we save those that remain.

The Bahamas National Trust (BNT) was set up in 1959 to protect some of these environments, plants and animals, in eleven protected areas, seven of which are national parks.

The total area now protected by the Trust covers 96,000 hectares. Each of the protected areas is patrolled by Trust Wardens who make sure that people do not harm or destroy the natural habitat.

The **aims** of the Bahamas National Trust include:

- To teach people about conservation
- To manage the national parks for the enjoyment of Bahamians and visitors
- To preserve our rich historical heritage.

ENDANGERED SPECIES

Many of the plants and animals that live on our islands are different from those anywhere else. Some of the greatest threats to island wildlife are plants and animals brought in from other places by people. For, example, the Australian pine was introduced to The Bahamas. This tree grows to a great height, and it has widely spreading branches. The pine needles drop to the ground in a thick layer, and a few other plants are able to survive where this tree has become established.

Animals that are introduced to an ecosystem, called an invasive species, can also be very destructive, may prey on ground-nesting birds.

Unlike endangered species, plants and trees have not acquired special protection. However, the Bahamas National Trust encourages government and private citizens to preserve the following: hardwood trees, such as the **lignum vitae**, **Madeira**, **silk cotton**, **cedar** and others, such as **yellow elder**, **royal Poinciana** and a variety of palms.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP?

- Do not cut down trees for firewood
- Do not pick flowers or dig up plants from protected areas.
- Plant a tree.

It is great fun to plant a tree and watch it grow. It will provide shade, and be a home for birds and insects. It will also make oxygen, and help to improve the atmosphere. Perhaps you should plant a tree in your garden.

Your school could also plant some new trees. It is a good idea to ask an expert what is the best one to grow – the best tree for Grand Bahama might not grow so well in Mayaguana, for example, because conditions on the two islands are different.

ANIMALS THAT NEED OUR PROTECTION

'**Endangered species**' are protected by law.

Iguanas: These are large lizards. The Bahamian species is now found only on Exuma, Andros and Mayaguana. Their meat is tasty and rich in protein, so many are caught and eaten.

The White-crown pigeon: It is carefully protected by the Ministry of Agriculture and The Bahamas National Trust. The opening of the White-crown pigeon hunting season usually begins late in September. The **closed season** always begins **March 1st** each year.

The Loggerhead and the Hawksbill: Both of these species were once plentiful, but many have been killed for their meat, and their shells used to make jewelry.

Hutia: This rabbit-like rodent is found only in The Bahamas. It was thought that they had all died out – become extinct- but in 1965 a few hutia were found on Plana Cay. They were taken from there to Little Wax Cay, off Exuma, which is part of the Exuma cays Land and Sea Park.

Now, under the careful protection of the National Trust, the hutia are increasing in numbers.

Bahama Parrot: These too were once plentiful but are now rare. Columbus described great flocks of parrots when he arrived here in 1492.

Today they are to be seen only on **Abaco** and **Great Inagua**.

The Flamingo: A large beautiful bird, the flamingo is a part of one of our national symbols. The world's largest breeding colony of West Indian flamingoes – as many as 50,000 birds- are found on the island of Great Inagua National Park.

The Fowl Snake and the Boa Constrictor: These snakes are not poisonous, but they are often killed because they eat chickens and their fowl.



Boa constrictor



Flamingo



Hutia



White crowned - pigeon