

Multilayered commitment on Isla Mujeres and beyond

Amigos de Isla Contoy A.C. (AIC) continued expanding its network of local stake holders in order to promote sustainable development in coastal communities such as Isla Contoy, Isla Mujeres and Cancun in the northeast of the state of Quintana Roo in the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico.



A Report by Catalina Galindo de Prince

During 2013 AIC developed and carried out different actions, activities, studies and programs with the participation of 6,561 children, youth and adults who gained knowledge and awareness of the marine environment, biodiversity, ecosystems and natural resources enabling them to make decisions and take actions that contribute to a sustainable world.

AIC contributed to the conservation of Isla Contoy National Park by working with its administration (CONANP, National Commission of Nature Protected Areas) and staff, biologists, research centers, volunteers, tour operators and guides. AIC conducted a study to monitor three species of marine birds with the most abundant populations in the island, frigates, brown pelicans and cormorants; the study also completed an update

of the different bird species that are found in Contoy during the fall.

In collaboration with the Unit for Water Studies of the Center of Scientific Research of Yucatan (CICY) a study to evaluate the quality of the surrounding waters of Isla Contoy, a characterization of the prairies of sea grass and macro algae, and an evaluation of the upwelling associated to the aggregation of whale sharks was done during the months of August to December.

With the help of 82 volunteers from different universities of Cancun, the University of Southern California, and from Isla Mujeres four beach clean ups were done in Contoy to remove plastic garbage that travels with marine currents and it is washed on beaches that are nesting sites for marine turtles in danger; we found garbage items from countries in South America, they



A total of 1,100 children attended the exhibition on biodiversity and on the biology of whalesharks



Participants of the workshop on mitigation and adaptation to climate change in the tourism industry.



The mobile exhibition communicates the issues of biodiversity and marine protection in the municipalities.



Participants of the workshop on the management and protection of sea turtles in Puerto Morelos

had traveled thousands of miles north until they reached the beaches of Isla Contoy.

AIC assisted with the maintenance and services of the visitor's center and tourist area. AIC provided three training courses to 47 guides, captains and crew staff of different tour operators to enable them to do nature interpretation in Isla Contoy. AIC raised public awareness of Isla Contoy National Park in the local community, among national and international tourists through its information center, two web sites, meetings and a mobile exhibition in local events.

AIC continues as member of the Advisory Committee of Isla Contoy National Park. In the annual meeting of AIC in October a new board was elected for the 2014-2015 period, the meeting was attended by the newly elected mayor of Isla Mujeres, Agapito Magaña Sanchez, who congratulated AIC and Lighthouse Foundation for their contribution with the environmental education program for the community to promote sustainable development. The mayor presented an award to the C.E.O of Lighthouse Foundation, Mr. Jens Ambsdorf, as distinguished guest of the island. In December and with the assistance of two professors from Universidad del Caribe an 8-hour workshop was organized by AIC for the tour operators of Isla Contoy, the aim was to develop a strategic plan for the management of the tourist area of the national park.

AIC created three new courses for its Environmental Education Program to raise awareness in children about the marine environment to promote actions and values for the conservation of sea life and the marine ecosystem. The courses developed were a Lottery of the Sea, a fun workshop titled "Let's care for the sea all together", and "The marine turtles that visit my island". More than 1,800 children and 66 teachers were offered the courses in schools of Isla Mujeres.

AIC together with the department of environment, the Network of Environmental Educators of Cancun and the Mexican Navy coordinated three beach clean ups and one lagoon clean up in Isla Mujeres, more than 450 students and adults par-

ticipated and removed tons of plastic garbage, glass bottles and garbage to prevent pollution of the sea and its impact on marine life.

AIC presented its mobile exhibition “The whale shark in the Mexican Caribbean” and “Isla Contoy, a jewel of the Mexican Caribbean” in three ecological festivals in Cancun and Playa del Carmen, in one international environmental event (Blue Flag) in Cancun’s hotel zone, and at Universidad del Caribe reaching more than 1,800 people who were delighted to admire the beautiful real size figures of marine fauna made with recyclable materials. The exhibitions helped people to learn about the biodiversity of sea life from the region where they live and or visited.

An important contribution of AIC in 2013 was the coordination of two courses for environmental educators and researchers of Cancun and Isla Mujeres; 25 people participated over a ten day period to acquire new skills, to learn new tools and methods to become better professionals in this field. The third course for the certification of the group of environmental educators will take place in 2014.

AIC became member of the Network of Environmental Educators of Cancun (REA) and participated in many educational activities and workshops for children and youth such as summer courses, workshops for children with special needs, and courses where the main focus was water conservation and the marine environment; the courses reached more than 1,270 students of Cancun.

As member of REA, AIC works closely with the environmental programs of the new Planetary Ka’ Yok’ of Cancun which offers good facilities for courses and workshops. AIC offered 7 courses on neotropical migratory birds to 121 students of elementary grades in schools of Isla Mujeres, this is part of a collaboration with the program Bridging the Americas of the Migratory Bird Center of the Smithsonian National Zoological Park.

During three weeks in December AIC offered workshops to 55 children, youth and adults of Isla Mujeres to teach them how to make color-

ful Christmas decorations and handicrafts using old plastic bottles, cardboard, newspapers and magazines. Throughout the year AIC worked together with the department of the environment of the local government of Isla Mujeres to promote the participation of local residents in the Community Program of Sorting and Collection of Recyclable Materials, and offered courses for parents on Sustainable Consumption.

During the fall AIC in collaboration with the marine park of Isla Mujeres and Cancun and the National Commission of Nature Protected Areas (CONANP) conducted a project to restore the first barrier reef of Punta Nizuc in the southern part of Cancun’s hotel zone, by transplanting 600 fragments of *Acropora cervicornis* and *Acropora*



The fishery has great importance in the region. The Amigos support the development of management plans.



Plastic and trash on the beach is on the tourist island Isla Mujeres a problem

palmate. This project is part of the Program of Conservation of Species in Danger of the CON-ANP. In the summer AIC participated in a course on Environmental Leadership for Competitiveness offered by Universidad del Caribe and PROFEPA.

We can conclude that the accomplishments of Amigos de Isla Contoy in 2013 in partnership with Lighthouse Foundation continue to be successful, they have had an important impact on different tiers of stakeholders that together with AIC participate in the sustainability of a region that includes Isla Contoy, Isla Mujeres and Cancun, their marine environment as well their interdependence with human activities.

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