



I WAS RECENTLY FACED WITH A DILEMMA: HOW AM I TO BE ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS WITHOUT BREAKING THE BANK OR UNDULY SACRIFICING THE COMFORTS FOR WHICH I HAVE WORKED SO HARD TO OBTAIN? AS A RECENT COLLEGE GRADUATE LIVING IN LOS ANGELES, I HARDLY HAVE THE CAPITAL TO BUILD A GREEN HOME THAT UTILIZES ALL THE LATEST, MOST EXPENSIVE RENEWABLE ENERGY TECHNOLOGIES. BUT AS I GAZE OUT THE WINDOW FROM THE 30TH FLOOR OF MY OFFICE BUILDING EVERY DAY AND SEE MY CITY SHROUDED IN THICK SMOG, I CANNOT HELP BUT THINK THERE MUST BE SOMETHING, HOWEVER SMALL, THAT I CAN DO TO HELP

ONE DAY WHILE I WAS PERUSING THE INTERNET ON my lunch break, I came across an answer to my problem in the form of the most popular article on The New York Times website, "The Energy Diet", in which Andrew Postman begins by saying, "I've tried to be responsible. I've thought pro-green thoughts and occasionally even done pro-green things. I've run the dishwasher and washer-dryer only with full loads. I've recycled, as ordered, though like every New Yorker I've ever met, I suspect the system does more good for our feelings than for the environment. I've shaved while showering, although I can't remember anymore whether that's a good thing or a bad thing." Mr. Postman's feelings, I suspect, reflect the sentiments of many people who want to do good for the environment, but also do not want to give up comforts, conveniences, or routines.

"I've tried to be responsible. I've thought pro-green thoughts and occasionally even done pro-green things. I've run the dishwasher and washer-dryer only with full loads."

Mr. Postman offers a very realistic "Energy Diet" with which we can do a lot of small things that have disproportionately large effects. With the guidance of leading environmentalists and eco-experts, Mr. Postman reviews his daily activities and decides which ones he can reasonably sacrifice and which ones he just cannot afford to live without. After all "this [is] the lazy man's diet: minimum effort," he says.

The "Calculate Your Impact" survey on climatecrisis.net found that Mr. Postman's household produced approximately 20,000 pounds, or 10 tons, of CO2 last year. Using a diet as a metaphor, Mr. Postman asks himself, "As a family...couldn't we drop a half-ton, a mere 5 percent of our weight?" Seems like a very sensible goal, right? Here are some of the things he did to achieve that goal in a mere eight hours.

The 50 compact fluorescent light bulbs (C.F.L.'s) he bought after the wave of guilt he experienced after seeing Al Gore's An Inconvenient Truth made his house reminiscent of a "bus station bathroom". Amazingly, using only two bulbs reduced Mr. Postman's CO2 emissions by 300 pounds in only 20 minutes. Lowering his thermostat at night by only one degree saved him 79 pounds. Though he refused to completely forego his morning ritual of turning on the shower and leaving for several minutes until the water was hot, he could compromise and run the shower for only two minutes, saving him 342 pounds per year. Washing white loads on warm/cold instead of warm/warm saved 62 pounds.



Appliances that are not being used need not be plugged in incessantly. Also known as "vampires" for their tendency to suck energy from the wall, things such as toasters, coffee makers, and cell phone chargers can simply be unplugged when not in use. Using surge protectors and turning them off at night is also a good idea. Thermal insulating blankets can be purchased at Home Depot, and can be used to save energy by wrapping them around your water heater. No need to rinse dishes in hot water before putting them in the dishwasher to be washed with even hotter water, either.

By implementing some of these very simple lifestyle changes, Mr. Postman saved 1,700 pounds with only 68 minutes of effort. He blew past his goal.

If Mr. Postman's exercise isn't an indication that we can all save energy without sacrificing our favorite comforts and excesses, then I don't know what is. If we each make an effort to alter our lives just a little, we end up influencing others. It doesn't take much to conserve, and the benefit is a world we can walk about without worrying we are inhaling toxic fumes. It is, as Mr. Postman would say, "Very little pain, not insignificant gain." ■

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ECO WATCH

Ecology Project International Launches Blue Whale Monitoring Program

By Scott Pankratz

IN EARLY MARCH OF THIS YEAR, WE ENJOYED AN unbelievable opportunity to spend 15 days cruising the Sea of Cortez in search of the largest animal on the planet. During the first of three voyages, thirty-five Blue whales were sighted and with the assistance of whale expert Dr. Jorge Urban, 10 high school students from Loreto assisted with data collection for a critical monitoring and conservation research project that began this year.

Spearheaded by the U.S.-based nonprofit Ecology Project International (EPI), this voyage was the culmination of a unique partnership for conservation and education that brought 30 high school and university students from Loreto together with Dr. Urban, leader of the Marine Mammal Research Program (PRIMMA) at the Autonomous University of Baja California Sur. EPI staff and instructors spent the two months preceding the voyage preparing for the participation of the local students and research scientists.

Ecology Project International's mission is to improve and inspire science education and conservation through field based student-scientist partnerships. In addition to Baja California Sur (BCS), EPI involves youth in critical conservation projects in Costa Rica; the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador; and in Montana, USA. At each site, students spend multiple days in the field collecting data and exploring their relationship to the natural environment. Students study and monitor critically endangered leatherback sea turtles in Costa Rica, restore giant tortoise habitat in the Galapagos Islands, and assist the U.S. Forest Service with bear and wolf surveys near Yellowstone National Park. During their time in the field, students learn what scientists do and why they do it; most importantly they become a part of the conservation solution.

EPI started working in BCS in 2005, involving students from La Paz and the USA in research and conservation efforts on spectacular (and well-known sea kayaking destination) Espiritu Santo Island, a recently declared Natural Protected Area in the Sea of Cortez. The whale program initiated EPI's first involvement in the community of Loreto, and the first student-scientist partnership with Dr. Urban and the incredible Blue whales (*Balaenoptera musculus*) which reach up to 100 feet in length and find their way into the Sea of Cortez for a few short weeks each winter.

Three groups of students spent five days each aboard Dr.

Urban's research vessel learning about the size and health of the Blue whale population. Each day the students stood sentry in search of whales as they cruised between Loreto and Cabo Pulmo. When a whale was spotted, a group of six students and researchers hopped into a panga and headed off as close to the whale as possible in order to take identification photos, environmental data and genetic samples. This information will increase the researchers' understanding of the structure and health of this migratory population of endangered cetaceans.

Searching for whales is unpredictable: you never know how many (if any!) you'll find. But our timing was impeccable. In the first week alone, the students spotted 35 Blues and several Fin, Pilot and Bryde's whales in the same waters. In addition to the whales, they were surrounded at times by enormous schools of dolphins, hundreds to thousands all swimming together, jumping and playing in front of the boat. The Pilot whales were particularly stunning; one even splashed everyone on the boat with a slap of its tail on the water.

If you would like to support or get involved with the work of Ecology Project International, they can be contacted at info@ecologyproject.org or in the USA at (406) 721-8784. ■

www.ecologyproject.org



photo: Michelle Gliders

Eco Centro Del Mar y El Desierto

On August, 25, 2006, Grupo Ecologista Antares, A.C. (GEA) sponsored a reception and symbolic “groundbreaking ceremony” on the building site of GEA's future home, Eco Centro Del Mar y El Desierto. The Friday night event culminated three days of educational programs celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the Bay of Loreto National Park.



Happy participants shown above are: (left to right) Ricardo Hernandez, Hugo Quintero, Ramona de Davis, Rodolfo Davis, President of the Municipal of Loreto, Linda Kinninger, Javier Mercado, Fernando Arcas and Sergio Morales.

GEA's greatest achievement for the protection of the ecosystems in the Loreto region of the Sea of Cortez has been the creation of the National Park which was decreed by President Zedillo on July 19, 1996. Another important milestone occurred when the Park achieved international recognition and was inscribed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site on July 14, 2005.

GEA's present location has served the organization well in the past - but the small offices and museum are not sufficient for its growing specimen collection, library and programs. The current location for GEA is very limited in museum, office and meeting space and is in serious need of repair. To help fulfill GEA's long-held dream of a home of its own, one of GEA's loyal supporters purchased a strategically located parcel in the Loreto historical center, near the marina, and donated the land for GEA's new headquarters. This purchase has catalyzed the GEA Board of Directors and staff to consider a vision for GEA's next steps in its marine conservation, environmental education, urban and coastal conservation projects and freshwater programs.

Considering the central geographic location and the important historical significance of the Loreto region with its

National Park, GEA believes Loreto is the optimal location to build a Center for education and research dedicated to the protection of the marine and terrestrial environment and nearby protected areas. The facility will be a 6,000 square-foot building to house a museum showcasing marine mammals and fish from the Sea of Cortez (a whale skeleton), library, office and lab space, a roof garden of endemic desert species, conference and meeting rooms, office space for GEA staff, students, researchers, volunteers, guest lecturers, and other conservation NGO's working in the region. There is a second floor dormitory for visiting students and researchers working at the Center.

The envisioned Eco Center, now in the planning, architectural and engineering development phase is the outcome of an early brainstorming process, voted three years ago as number one priority by the Board. This important building will give GEA visibility and added prominence to further enhance GEA's presence in the community. The Eco Center will become a center of influence for local decision-makers by hosting meetings, workshops and conferences that are now held at hotels or government buildings. The facility will provide GEA with a stable and permanent presence, which will in turn

increase local involvement, including memberships, docents, visitors and eco tourism. The Center will serve as an educational "hub" for local schools with field trips to the museum and the marine park, summer programs, and educational films. It will also offer opportunities for local citizens, tourists coming from cruise ships, the boating community, sport fishermen and second home buyers to learn about the fragile marine, desert and coastal environment and the reason for protecting this special place on the planet.

The building itself will be a model for a "green ethic" - an energy-efficient, water efficient building full of features that stress the natural over the chemical, the recycled over the new. The Eco Center will utilize design, construction and maintenance practices which significantly reduce or eliminate the negative impact of the building on occupants and the environment. Integrated strategies that solve multiple problems will be used.

The plans include a state of the art building system that allows architects and designers to create beautiful, envi-



Fernando Arcas, Executive Director of GEA, has built a strong “Eco Center Team” to bring GEA's long held dream of a “home of its own” to a reality. Shown attending the celebration and fund raising event at the Eco Centro building site are: Ricardo Hernandez and Fernando Arcas presenting framed certificates in recognition for their generous contributions to: Anthony Kinninger, Linda Kinninger, Be and Charles Licha, and Mark Spalding, President of Loreto Bay Foundation.

ronmentally sensitive structures. The structural concrete insulating panels withstand hurricanes, retard fires, defend against pests and mold, and provide the highest levels of energy efficiency. The building system produces massive energy/power savings. The Eco Center will feature a "Green Roof" specifically designed to mimic the endemic ecosystems and habitats found in the coastal and mountain region of Loreto and will build community and visitor understanding and appreciation for the fragile desert environment. GEA is also considering solar heating for its hot water system and other "green" techniques as part of its final design process. Utilizing “green” building processes will provide local architects, engineers, construction companies, and real estate developers with tangible examples of sustainable practices that can be replicated in commercial and residential buildings in Loreto and beyond. ■

www.geantares.org.mx

Sea Watch Alert #24

A new method utilizing hooka divers and long inshore monofilament gill nets allows pangas to clean the inshore reefs of the lower gulf Islands. On the reefs, each panga kills from 1,000 to 1,500 reef fish daily. Unless there is the political will to stop inshore monofilament gillnets, the fisheries declines in the Sea of Cortez cannot be stopped.

Most of the fish are already gone from the Sea of Cortez. One of the only areas left with a few fish are the southern gulf islands, located between Loreto and La Paz in BCS. These islands are some of the most beautiful and at one time these islands and the nearby seamounts were a major attraction to divers from around the world. The majority of the world dive community moved on long ago, due to depleted fisheries on the sea mounts, but novice divers, snorkelers, kayakers and other eco-tourists continue to arrive to enjoy the tropical waters and reef fish around the islands. Millions have been spent on these islands to stop their commercialization, but nothing has been done to protect the waters around the islands and now they are becoming a wasteland.

Two La Paz fishing cooperatives with at least nine boats are targeting the reef fish populations around the lower gulf Islands. This new fleet of boats and the young fishermen running them are armed with new 225-meter long inshore monofilament gill nets. They have new large Yamaha motors, new dive compressors and the latest diving gear. Five of these boats were observed working the Islands of San Jose, Santa Cruz and San Diego for the last several weeks. On one day at Santa Cruz Island, it took the Bahia de La Paz just over

3 hours to kill over _ ton of small reef fish (about 1,000 reef fish). They can easily set their net two to three times each day. The 250 meter monofilament net is set at the base of the reef along the rocks and then both ends are brought up over the reef. 2-4 divers using compressors (hooka) then swim into the semicircle of the net and drive the fish into the net. The divers can within one hour drive all the fish inside this 250 meter semicircle into the nets. This scenario is being repeated many times daily along the shores of the southern gulf Islands between Loreto and Cabo San Lucas. Local fisherman say they have repeatedly reported this to Sargarpa and as always nothing has been done. According to local fishermen from San Evaristo, the commercial fishermen operating from Playa Blanca in the Loreto Marine Reserve are even worse offenders.

The Federal Government (SARGARPA) and/or the new BCS State Consejo Estatal de Pesca y Acuicultura must ban inshore gillnets from the Sea of Cortez, or they shouldn't waste their time trying to stop the destruction. By eliminating the gillnets, they will stop the worst destruction of all, the killing of huge schools of breeding pargo and other snappers every spring. Nothing short of a complete ban will stop the decline. All the commercial fishermen we interviewed this summer (except those using these gillnets) said the nets had to go if the Sea was to survive. The dramatic declines in the Sea of Cortez started with the advent of monofilament gillnets in the mid 1970s. Now there are thousands of these nets in use in BCS. The last of the fisheries here will soon end with those same nets. ■

www.seawatch.org