

## *Nature Studies and Education in the Region Isla Mujeres und Cancun*

**Amigos de Isla Contoy A.C. (AIC) had a very busy year working its network of local stake holders to promote sustainable development in coastal communities such as Isla Contoy, Isla Mujeres, Cancun and Tulum in the northeast of the state of Quintana Roo in the Yucatan Peninsula, Mexico.**



Report by Catalina Galindo de Prince

During 2014 AIC developed and carried out different projects, activities, monitoring programs and events that reached 50,583 people at Isla Contoy National Park and 14,435 local people who gained knowledge and awareness of the marine environment, biodiversity, ecosystems and natural resources, that may help them to make decisions and take actions that contribute to a sustainable world.

### **Nature Studies**

AIC contributed to the conservation of Isla Contoy National Park by working with its administration (CONANP, The National Commission of Nature Protected Areas) and staff, biologists, national and international universities, volunteers, tour operators, captains, crews and guides. AIC fulfilled its obligation in the maintenance and servi-

ces of the Public Use area of Isla Contoy National Park for the benefit of its visitors. AIC provided two training courses for 37 guides, captains and crew of different tour operators to enable them to do nature interpretation in Isla Contoy. AIC continues as a member of the Advisory Committee of Isla Contoy National Park.

AIC accessed federal funds to conduct its fourth study in collaboration with a bird specialist from Universidad de Guadalajara to register and monitor the birds of Isla Contoy, completed an update of the different bird species that are found in Contoy during the summer and fall. In this update 35 new bird species were identified bringing the total of bird species to 219, which includes marine, aquatic and land birds. AIC also constructed a map of the vegetation of the island with the nesting sites of the most abundant bird species.

AIC accessed federal funds and conducted a study in collaboration with two bird specialists from the University of Illinois, to identify and monitor migratory birds in Isla Contoy during the fall. In the capture, marking and releasing of 1,371 birds, 83 species were identified, of these 65 species were migratory birds and 18 resident bird species. The study revealed that Isla Contoy is a very important stop over for migratory birds. AIC organized an international 2 day workshop with specialists in migratory birds to exchange



View from the center of the nationalpark Isla Contoy

experiences.

AIC accessed federal funds and conducted a monitoring study of the three species of marine turtles that nest on the beaches of Isla Contoy, from the north to the south point, during the summer and fall. 2,826 hours were invested in monitoring the beaches, checking turtle nests,

counting eggs, and cleaning nests. 157 surveys were conducted by a team of 3 people, 684 nests were marked, 57,014 eggs were protected, and 50,342 baby turtles hatched. Maps of the nests of the three species of marine turtles on the beaches of Isla Contoy were constructed.

AIC accessed federal funds to continue into its fifth year working in projects with transplants of Acropora in collaboration with the National Park Costa Occidental de Isla Mujeres, Punta Cancun and Punta Nizuc, and continued into its second year to rehabilitate Punta Nizuc coral reef barrier. 700 fragments of Acropora cervicornis were successfully transplanted from the coral nursery located in the marine park in Isla Mujeres. Today Punta Nizuc coral reef barrier has a total of 1,300 colonies. This project is part of the Program of Conservation of Species in Danger of the CON-ANP.

AIC presented to different government dignitaries and representatives of important institutions the research studies for conservation carried out by AIC in 2013 in collaboration with various institutions, foundations and NGO's. This event was held at the City Hall of Isla Mujeres in early February 2014 to communicate to the local community the work that had been done by AIC.

#### Education and Public

AIC raised public awareness of Isla Contoy National Park in the local community, among national and international tourists through its information center in Plaza Bonita, Cancun, and its two web sites. The two mobile exhibitions "Isla Contoy, a natural jewel of the Mexican Caribbean" and "The conservation program of the whale shark" were displayed at the state government event for the International Day of the Environment held at Isla Mujeres Convention Center. The exhibitions were displayed at the new Museum of Prehistory located at Dos Ojos, Tulum, where they remained for one month. The exhibitions were also displayed at the Planetarium Ka' Yok' in Cancun for 3 months, from August to November. In December the exhibitions were displayed on the grounds of Cancun's City Hall. The exhibitions reached more than 13,200 children and adults in Cancun, Isla

Mujeres and Tulum, and were received with great enthusiasm.

AIC as member of the Network of Environmental Educators of Cancun (REA) participated in educational activities and workshops for children and youth in summer courses, and in workshops for children with special needs. The courses reached more than 280 children in Cancun. AIC offered 10 courses on Neotropical migratory birds to 320 students of 5 elementary schools



Catalina Galindo de Prince presenting „Environmental education for a sustainable development“ in an expert workshop.

and one Junior High School in Isla Mujeres, the courses are carried out in collaboration with the program Bridging the Americas of the Migratory Bird Center of the Smithsonian National Zoological Park.

AIC for the 7th year facilitated the visit and stay of a group of 18 students from the University of Southern California at Isla Contoy National Park, for four days in March. The students carried out many activities as volunteers to help the protected area. AIC also facilitated the stay of two international students, one from Wake Forest University in North Caroline, U.S.A. during one month, and one from the University of Liverpool, England, for 10 days. Both international students had a project to research the work of AIC, its role in Isla Contoy National Park, other protected areas and coastal communities.

### Waste Problem

AIC worked together with the department of the environment of the local government of Isla Mujeres to continue to promote the participation of local residents in the Community Program of Sorting and Collection of Recyclable Materials, and placed new signs in Spanish and English on 38 containers for the collection of plastic bottles on the island.

### Conferences and Presentations

AIC was invited by the University of Guadalajara to participate in the III Encounter of the Regional Centers of Experience in Education for Sustainable Development of America, held at the city of Autlan, Jalisco, from July 28 to August 1. We attended the conferences of experts from Canada, U.S.A., Mexico and Latin America, and had an information booth at the Fair of Good Practices for Sustainable Development. AIC attended the IV International Congress of Organizations of Civil Society “From the Non-Profit Organization to Social Entrepreneurship, the International Trend” at the National University of Mexico (UNAM), in Mexico City, September 18-19.

AIC was invited to give a presentation on “Experience in Environmental Education for the Separation of Solid Waste in Isla Mujeres” at the 7th Encounter of Experts on Solid Waste and 3rd National Forum of Engineering and Environment, organized by the Technological Institute of Toluca and the Mexican Society of Science and Technology Applied to Solid Waste, held at the Technological Institute of Toluca, September 29 to October 3.

The executive director of AIC, Catalina Galindo de Prince, was invited to participate in the workshop of experts for updating the Master’s Program in Environmental Education for Sustainable Development of the Quintana Roo University, held at Planetarium Ka’Yok’ on October 4. The executive director of AIC attended the workshop “Strengthening the professional skills for the conservation of marine turtles”, at the Ka’Yok’ Planetarium in Cancun, October 29-30.

### Public Awareness

AIC received recognition from the Council of Science and Technology of Quintana Roo, Planetarium Ka'Yok', and the State Commission of Drinking Water and Sewer, for its valuable contribution to the spreading of scientific knowledge. The State Government of Quintana Roo through its Secretary of Ecology and Environment gave recognition to AIC for their participation in the celebration of the World Day of The Environment 2014, with the exhibitions on Isla Contoy and the Whale Shark. The Municipality of Benito Juarez (Cancun) gave recognition to AIC for its participation in its Recycling event with the exhibitions on Isla Contoy and the Whale Shark.

AIC received recognition from Mexiro A.C. for its participation in their 2nd Festival of Awareness Cinema. AIC received recognition from Ocean Conservancy for its participation in beach clean ups in Isla Mujeres and Isla Contoy in 2013.

AIC prepared two projects to take advantage of federal funds available from the National Fund of Construction: 1.To build new tourist infrastructure in Isla Contoy National Park, and 2.To build a breakwater to protect the wall and walkway along the northeast coast of Isla Mujeres. The two projects costing 7.5 million dollars were submitted for endorsement to the municipal president of Isla Mujeres but were not signed, so the projects did not proceed at the federal level.

The project for the deployment of three demarcation buoys off the northern corner of the Yucatan Peninsula, critical to the protection of significant masses of marine life congregating in areas around Isla Contoy and Isla Mujeres, worked in collaboration with, Seacology, Chooj Ajauil A.C., CONANP, the Marine Merchant Secretary, and the municipal government of Isla Mujeres did not proceed at the federal level and Seacology cancelled the grant.

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90.000 US\$

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