



September 2017

Newsletter

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Hurricane Irma leaves windward Islands in ruins

On the 6th of September, 2017, Hurricane Irma struck the windward Caribbean with devastating effects on the islands in its path. The category 5 hurricane with 185 MPH winds is the strongest hurricane that ever hit the Caribbean. The Dutch Caribbean island St. Maarten was one of the islands hit most intensely. With the community of St. Maarten struggling to start their lives back up and rebuild their homes, disaster relief for the island's people and its nature is highly needed.

The two smaller Dutch Caribbean islands, Saba and St. Eustatius, also sustained severe damage, but were located farther away from the eye of the hurricane. Electricity on Saba was restored within 24 hours after Irma passed the island and the Saba Conservation Foundation was able to bring back people from Saba that were stranded on St. Maarten. The nature on St. Eustatius is heavily affected as the majority of the trees on the iconic Quill National Park have lost their leaves. Fortunately, the coral reefs of Saba and St. Eustatius seem to have sustained only minor damage. Both the Saba Conservation Foundation and STENAPA Sint Eustatius have now resumed their work.



Mangroves on St. Maarten pre Hurricane Irma

Picture: © DCNA

The situation on St. Maarten, which was located right in the path of the eye of Irma, is much more worrying. Irma struck St. Maarten with 185 MPH winds, causing widespread damage to the island and its infrastructure.

Right after the storm, the Sint Maarten Nature Foundation conducted a rapid qualitative assessment to determine the level of impact.

Terrestrial Impacts

Hurricane Irma caused significant damage to the island's flora. The majority of large trees, some with historical and cultural significance, have been toppled. Most foliage on the island has been burnt by wind and salt spray. Most hills, valleys and other green areas have been completely defoliated leaving the island brown and leafless.

Avifauna (birds) have also been hard hit by Irma's significant winds. Although some species are showing signs of recovery, other species have been particularly hard hit. Rookery sites being monitored by the Nature Foundation of the Brown Pelican, Sint Maarten's National Bird, have been decimated and recovery will take some time.

Marine Impacts

An estimated 90% of mature mangroves have been destroyed. The area of Mullet Pond, a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance, has suffered particularly significant damage. Mangroves strands were also uprooted because sailboats tied unto mangrove roots illegally causing significant damage. Most of these vessels have now sunk.



Picture by Sint Maarten nature Foundation

Significant debris was recorded in all wetlands and coastal areas from various sources, including an estimated 120 sunken vessels of differing size. Because of the large amount of sunken vessels large quantities of fuel have been spilled in especially the Simpson Bay Lagoon and Oyster

Pond wetlands. Estimated fuel spilled in the Simpson Bay Lagoon exceeds 100,000 gallons.

There has been significant run-off from land as a result of Irma's torrential rains, drastically reducing water quality at all beaches. Several areas have raw sewage entering directly into the sea and into wetlands. There has also been a significant fish-die off in the Great Salt and Fresh Ponds due to a reduction in water quality.

During assessments in Simpson Bay and in the Simpson Bay Lagoon large areas of seagrass beds have been uprooted and decimated.

Although coral reef assessments have not yet been carried out, the damage is expected to be extensive and significant.

The Nature Foundation Coral Nursery Project structures, acoustic hydrophone transmitter arrays, conch and seagrass experiments and scuba dive moorings are non-existent due to the passage of the storm.

Beaches have experienced significant erosion due to the storm surge brought on by Hurricane Irma.

It is also expected that solid waste disposal due to infrastructure challenges and cleanup will have a significant impact on the community. The Philipsburg landfill was already over capacity before the storm and collected storm debris will contribute to the challenges regarding solid waste significantly.

You can help the Nature Foundation Sint Maarten in their work to restore and protect the beautiful nature of St. Maarten by making a donation on their website.

Donate to restore and protect Nature & Marine Life after the massive destruction of Hurricane Irma!

www.naturefoundationsxm.org/donate

ST. MAARTEN

The Nature Foundation is a non-profit organization which aims to preserve and enhance the natural environment of St. Maarten for generations to come

Having tea with sharks

The World Wildlife Fund regional team Haaglanden, in cooperation with Save Our Sharks, will give people a tour of the world of sharks during a “Haai Tea” organized in Scheveningen on Sunday October 8th. The afternoon will be filled with shark info and tea,

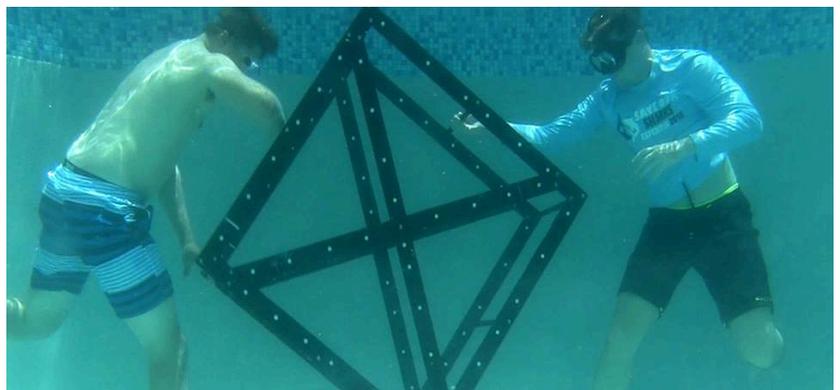


teaching people about the biology of sharks and rays and why it is so important to protect them. A marine biologist from Save Our Sharks will make an appearance to give a presentation about the habitat and behavior of sharks, both in the North Sea and the Dutch Caribbean. A special shark-themed tour through Sea Life Scheveningen will show people the actual shark species. There will be a Haai Five corner for the smaller kids, where they can get a picture with Shark Stanley and put their shark creativity to the test. And of course, it would not be a Haai Tea without a great spread of tea and snacks.

Video research continues on Bonaire

As part of an ongoing monitoring program throughout the Dutch Caribbean, STINAPA Bonaire, in cooperation with Wageningen Marine Research, has extended their shark study on Bonaire. The Baited Remote Underwater Video (BRUV) study, funded by Save Our Sharks, was recently extended with the arrival of new interns. The interns were trained on the use of the cameras and they will spend the coming time gathering additional data on the community structure of sharks and rays around the island. The BRUV method is based on attracting fish with a bait bag that is secured in front of two cameras. The structure with the cameras is lowered to the bottom of the sea for about an hour and then pulled back up, after which the video footage can be analyzed for the presence of sharks.

Species most likely to appear on the video are nurse sharks, Caribbean reef sharks, spotted eagle rays and southern stingrays. Previous assessments in the Dutch Caribbean have also recorded great hammerhead sharks and tiger sharks.



Picture by Twan Stoffers

If you have any questions or comments regarding this newsletter, please contact info@saveoursharks.nl