ERIC hosts the Trinidad and Tobago Bioblitz – LF and NC

For the first time in its four year history the Trinidad and Tobago Bioblitz visited Tobago, descending on Charlotteville for 24 hours from 24th to 25th October 2015. “An intense period of biological surveying in an attempt to record all the living species within a designated area”, a Bioblitz gives researchers, scientists and enthusiasts the opportunity to document as much biodiversity as possible within a project site. ERIC was the basecamp for the Bioblitz, providing facilities, services and staff for the team and around 100 visitors. And what a great celebration of Tobago’s biodiversity it was!

Survey teams included plants, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, birds, invertebrates, fungus, and aquatic, and the specialists headed out into the roads, forests, streams, paths and coral reefs around the Charlotteville area, from ridge to village to ocean. From midday on Saturday until midday on Sunday, in the sun, the rain, the day and at night, the groups documented as many species as they could find.

Throughout the weekend the ERIC centre was a hive of activity. We were not sure how over 100 people managed to operate from our base but they did! As the timer ticked away, teams streamed in and out of base camp to sample, identify and log their specimen and regroup. ERIC was transformed into a natural history museum with several species of arachnids, frogs, snakes, brittle stars and crayfish to name just a few. Of course all were released back to their habitats at the end of the Bioblitz. As time wore on and fatigue crept in, teams stole short sleeps and continued on their mission.

The marine arm of the aquatic team, alongside ERIC staff members Neil and Jacob, covered sites right from Charlotteville shore to the island of St. Giles in a series of day and night dives. Sites were chosen to offer a variety of habitats and theoretically more species, and included shore dives and boat dives, soft coral gardens, reef walls and current-swept reef slopes. Armed with cameras, dive slates, sediment sampling equipment and fully loaded tanks, they recorded fish, invertebrates, corals, marine plants and anything else they came across. Stand out sightings included bottlenose dolphins, a seahorse, electric rays, basket stars, a curious tarpon and a critically endangered hawksbill turtle.

As Sunday’s electrical storm passed and the sun came out the final species totals were announced, with everything from bacteria to dolphins being counted. In just one small corner of Tobago, a total of 972 species were identified in just 24 hours, a higher number of species than any previous Bioblitz in Trinidad. This was a fantastic achievement by everybody involved and highlights how unique and important the biodiversity of northeast Tobago is for the country and for the region.

It was a great honour to be involved in the Bioblitz, and ERIC Tobago looks forward to welcoming more scientists and researchers to the area as we continue to work towards participatory co-management and conservation of resources for a sustainable future for northeast Tobago.

Visit our Facebook page to see more photos from this great weekend!
UTT visits Charlottesville - LF
A group of Masters students from The University of Trinidad and Tobago visited ERIC for a day, as part of a marine field methodologies course. The day began with sandy shore sampling and a discussion session on important considerations and requirements for designing their sampling methods. Armed with sand corers, sieves and bags the group set out to discover the hidden world of sandy beaches. Highlights included a wide variety of polychaetes and isopods, a reminder of the biodiversity that is found throughout all types of environments. A Discover Reef Check programme in the afternoon introduced Reef Check, indicator species and survey methods. In-water conditions were not ideal with limited visibility and rough seas, but the group persevered with enthusiasm, as they were able to observe the reef’s biodiversity.

ERIC launches Eco Weekends - NC
As part of our commitment to raising environmental awareness in the community and engaging the public in conservation measures, we have launched monthly eco weekends. With various topical themes including Reef Check training and coral reef surveying, shark and ray assessments and conservation, and lionfish ecology and management, the weekends are a chance for divers and snorkelers to spend time with our team of scientists, build their knowledge about the resources on their doorstep and of course dive and snorkel northeast Tobago, with a conservation objective. Email ericexpeditions@eric-tobago.org for more information.

Working with ERIC – Welldon Mapp
Welldon is a local fisherman and one of our community trainees, as well as a staff member of the community based organisation North East Sea Turtles. Since August 2014 he has completed PADI Open Water and Advanced Open Water dive training with ERIC, achieved certification as a Reef Check EcoDiver, and is fully trained in our seabird monitoring protocol. Welldon lives in Charlotteville.

ERIC: Why did you become involved [with ERIC] in the first place?
Welldon: “I wanted to be a part of the implementation of a marine park because I was concerned that net fishing would just be stopped in the community without fishermen consultation.”

ERIC: What has been your experience so far?
Welldon: “Personally, I have seen my communication skills, knowledge and awareness of impacts in the environment develop, as well as developing new life skills.”

ERIC: What message would you give to people about their environment?
Welldon: “Take good care of it, preserve it while you have it before you lose it.”