

BIOGEOGRAPHY BRANCH

CENTER FOR COASTAL MONITORING & ASSESSMENT
NATIONAL CENTERS FOR COASTAL OCEAN SCIENCE

Seafloor Characterization of the U.S. Caribbean 2010 Field Season March 18-April 6, 2010

Day 11: March 27, 2010

Today the group hosted a Kid's Day for local St. Thomas Youth aboard the R/V Nancy Foster. 27 5th graders and several of their teachers joined scientists to learn more about coral reefs and the work that will be completed during this research mission.

The Day's Events

It was an afternoon filled with lots of energy and excitement as 27 5th graders from the Gladys Abraham Elementary School boarded the R/V Nancy Foster. All of the students were from the school's Environmental Club, and though many of them already knew a lot about coral reefs, they were thrilled to learn more about the activities that occur on board that help us to learn about the corals around their island of St. Thomas. After a brief introduction about the days activities, the students visited three stations around the boat that aimed to orient them to the research mission underway.

Station 1 – Coral Reef Ecosystems:

NOAA Scientists Dr. Simon Pittman, and Maile Sullivan talked to students about coral reef ecosystems, their ecological and economic importance to islands like St. Thomas, the threats they face, and actions students could take to help protect them. After a brief presentation, students participated in an activity called "Build a Coral Reef" where they learned about connectivity between different reef species, and how human induced threats may disrupt important ecological connections within reef systems.



Dr. Pittman works with students to "Build a Coral Reef" ecosystem.

Station 2 – Research Tools:

Students met with UNC-Wilmington scientists Glen Taylor and Lance Horn to learn how coral scientists "groundtruth" (see Day 4 Log) some of the areas they map with the multi-beam sonar. After learning some of the basics about Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs), students enjoyed a demonstration of how Lance and Glen work together to operate the ROV, and saw examples of the detailed imagery that the ROV collected last week.



Students check out the Remotely Operated Vehicle (ROV), and all of its tools that help to explore the seafloor.



Students pose in front of the R/V Nancy Foster after an exciting day of activities on board.

Station 3 – Life on a Boat:

Perhaps considered the highlight of the day by many students, was the tour of the R/V Nancy Foster. Students got to check out the bridge, where the captain operates the ship; the state rooms, where the crew and scientists sleep; the “Mess”, where many meals are shared; and even the video lounge, where folks on board can enjoy a little relaxation when they are not working! Students learned however, that life on board comes with its risks, and so being prepared for emergencies is extremely important. Edward Owens, from NOAA-Hydrographic Branch, had students practice safety drills, including a fire drill and an abandon ship drill. Getting on fire gear or a hypothermia suit in hot weather can be difficult, but the groups were up for the challenge!

Overall it was a great day! The students learned a lot, and had fun in the process. One of the students exclaimed as she left, “That was the best day EVER! Can we come back again tomorrow?!”

Thanks to all of the staff and scientists aboard the R/V Nancy Foster, and the school teachers who helped to make this event such a success!



Students practice putting on survival gear kept on board in case of fires (left) or abandon ship situations (right)

DID YOU KNOW ...

- Corals can reproduce both sexually and asexually. During asexual reproduction, new polyps bud off from parent polyps to expand or build new colonies. This process produces polyps that are genetically identical to the parent polyp. Sexual reproduction occurs via broadcast spawning. About three quarters of all stony coral species broadcast spawn and produces male and/or female gametes that are released into the water column during spawning events.

- Whether you are a student working on a school project, a teacher looking for ways to incorporate lessons about coral into your classroom, or someone wanting to learn more about coral, many educational resources are available for you! Check out:

<http://coralreef.noaa.gov/education/>

<http://coralreef.noaa.gov/>



MEET THE SCIENTISTS ...

Alicia Clarke

Alicia works with the Biogeography Branch and has been instrumental in the coordination of all of the education and outreach activities for this cruise, including NOAA Kids Day and the VIP/Media Day. Alicia also composed the daily blogs for the first leg of the cruise.



Tracy Gill

Tracy Gill works with the Biogeography Branch, and although she is not out for the at-sea portions of the cruise, she assisted with much of the coordination for the education and outreach events that occurred in St. Thomas.

