

BIOGEOGRAPHY BRANCH

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



Sea Floor Characterization of the U.S. Caribbean 2011 Field Season Day 10: April 6, 2011

All Young Scientists Aboard!

The science and crew aboard the NOAA Ship *Nancy Foster* took a break from the science to engage the local community. This morning, 30 students from three elementary and middle schools in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas came aboard the ship for the first of three outreach and education programs while we are in port.

The students' excitement grew as they lined up in front of the ship and then walked up the gangway and onto the deck. During the course of the morning the group cycled through three stations where they learned about the technology the scientists use to collect data, expanded their knowledge about coral reef ecosystems and even stepped into the shoes of coral reef scientists and collected biological survey data.

Things got started in the movie room where chief scientist Tim Battista met the group and told them a little about why the scientists and crew aboard the *Nancy Foster* were studying the coral reef habitats south of St. Thomas and St. John. After watching a short clip about the Biogeography Branch's mission in the area, the kids were off to meet the researchers.

Tauna Rankin, a researcher with the Coral Reef Conservation Program, greeted the students in the mess (dining area) and taught them a thing or two about coral reefs and how scientists sample the plants and animals that live in these ecosystems. Tauna was thrilled that the students already knew the answers to many of her questions and often took the words right out of her mouth! After Tauna's short lecture, the students sampled two coral reef ecosystems created from paper cut-outs. The room quickly filled with excited chatter and the kids worked together to collect biological data.



Students from the Gladys A. Abraham Elementary School are all smiles on the main deck.



Tim Battista gets the day off to an exciting start!



After learning the basics of coral reef ecosystems, the students are off to collect biological data.

Just down the hallway in the dry lab, Bryan Costa and Chris Taylor used 3D animations to explain how they use sound to map/characterize the sea floor and study fish populations. Next door in the wet lab Lance Horn and Glenn Taylor showed off the cool capabilities of the ROV. The students even got to watch footage of last week's ship wreck discovery!

The day didn't end there. The students also got to check out the ship's bridge, see a stateroom shared by the scientists and try on some of the safety equipment.



Some pictures as the groups of students having fun on board the Nancy Foster. Bryan Costa (left) explains how sound is used to map the sea floor; students having fun in immersion suits (center); Lance Horn explains how the ROV works (right).

A special thanks to everyone who helped organize and/or donate materials for the 2011 sea floor mapping mission Kids Day in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas! And thanks to the crew of the NOAA Ship *Nancy Foster* for participating!

