

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 13: April 9, 2011

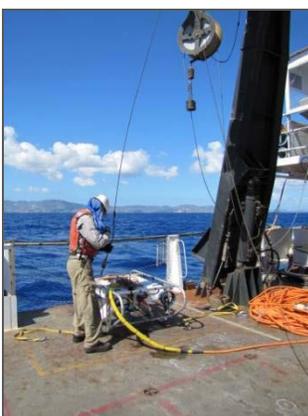
Meet Tauna

This is Tauna Rankin and I'll be taking over the daily logs for the remainder of the research cruise (unless I get volunteers to help). I work for NOAA's Coral Reef Conservation Program (CRCP) in Silver Spring, MD. The CRCP's mission is to support effective management and sound science to preserve, sustain and restore valuable coral reef ecosystems for future generations. We fund a lot of great research on coral reef ecosystems to inform management decisions, including this cruise. Although my background is in coral reef fish ecology, I'm here as a volunteer to help with communications and outreach AND learn more about the research that Biogeography Branch is doing during this mission.



Tauna writing this blog

This morning we were off to an exciting start! The federal government was operating under a Continuing Resolution until the stroke of midnight today. If Congress had not signed another Continuing Resolution or passed the full fiscal year 2011 budget by midnight, the crew of the Nancy Foster would have had to return to port in San Juan, PR, allow the scientists to disembark, and then make way to their home port in Charleston, SC. I had gone to sleep before any agreement had been reached, so I didn't know if we were on our way to San Juan or business as usual when I woke up this morning. Luckily, Congress and the Obama Administration signed a one week stopgap budget measure and we could continue to work on the mission.



Glenn Taylor detaching the ROV from the winch

Today's Agenda

This morning we began at 7:30 AM with ROV operations. After lunch, Tim Battista and another new addition to the cruise, Marty Schnure, went out in the small boat to do more groundtruthing with drop cameras. While they were out, ROV operations continued and I got to help with deployment and retrieval. Not quite business as usual, we had to stop for a fire drill and an evacuation drill, where I got to test putting on a survival (a.k.a. gumby) suit, and we had to momentarily go inshore a bit to collect another new member of the science team, Vanessa Wright, who left the vessel last night for fear of being stuck on a ride to San Juan if there was a government furlough. So, we only ended up doing four ROV deployments.

We saw higher than average coral cover (compared to shallower reefs) along the shelf, south of St. Thomas. The average depth of the area the ROV traveled was around 120 ft. At this depth we saw the coexistence of hermatypic (reef-building corals containing symbiotic algae) and nonreef-building species that can be found at much deeper depths because they don't require sunlight. We also saw quite a few fish, including a surprisingly large aggregation of squirrelfish and a nice sized school of gray snapper.



Shallow-water corals and deeper species coexisting on a mesophotic reef

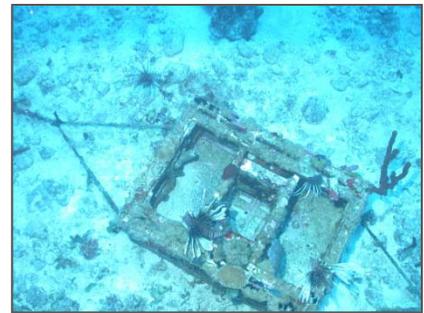
We also had less natural sightings, including 5 derelict fishing traps and 10 invasive lionfish across the 4 ROV dives.



Usually hiding under ledges or in crevices during the day on shallow reefs, these squirrelfish are out in the open at ~130 ft



A school of gray snapper, a commercially and recreationally important species



Can you find all 4 lionfish around this derelict lobster trap?

Today's Underwater Photos

Photos of the coral reefs observed with the ROV off the southwestern coast of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. Enjoy!

