

THE BEAT

Blanchisseuse Environmental Art Trust



What's news with BEAT

Welcome to the first issue of The Beat, a quarterly publication of the Blanchisseuse Environmental Art Trust (BEAT). In this newsletter we will highlight activities of the organization and present topics of interest to the Blanchisseuse community.

✍ BEAT welcomes the following new members:

Gerald Debisette

Lucianna Olivierre

Stephanie Peru

Inside The Beat:

The Blanchisseuse seamoss project	2
About the seamoss	2
The Marianne River Bridge	3
Washerwoman: the story of how Blanchisseuse got its name	3
Survey of seamoss harvesters	4
What's ahead for the seamoss project	4

BEAT RECEIVES UNDP PLANNING GRANT



Photo: BEAT president Ken Fournillier signs the grant. On his right is Richard Laydoo, of the United Nations Development Programme, Global Environment Facility – Small Grants Programme (UNDP GEF – SGP)

BEAT received a planning grant from the UNDP GEF – SGP, which was signed on Tuesday 15th June 2004, at the Blanchisseuse Community Centre. Our project combines scientific data and local knowledge on seaweed harvesting methods. The information gathered will

allow the community to develop a plan for managing the seamoss harvest and to obtain economic benefits from it. Project results will be spread via a public awareness and community education programme.

Mr. Laydoo talked about

his programme and its mandate to help communities.

Judy our Vice President, organized a reception following the signing. We enjoyed coconut bake and fried fish as well as seamoss drink made from local stocks.

See pages 2 and 4.

BEAT AT ASA WRIGHT

On Sunday March 21, 2004, BEAT members attended an art workshop hosted by the Asa Wright Nature Centre.

Our guest lecturer was Glen Roopchand, thanks to Ken Critchlow, Director of the Creative Arts Centre at UWI.

Under the cool shelter of the converted cocoa house, Asa Wright's Conservation Director Howard Nelson welcomed BEAT to the Nature Centre and reiterated their commitment to conservation and the communities in the Arima/Blanchisseuse valley.

Glen gave BEAT an inspired talk, reminiscing about the times he spent in Blanchisseuse as a youth, his success at winning an art scholarship with his composition entitled "Blanchisseuse" and the satisfaction of earning a living as an artist.

BEAT members then enthusiastically set about painting a potted cattail using their viewfinders to gain unique perspectives of the plant. Amid animated brush strokes, Glen walked around the



Glen Roopchand

cocoa house giving individual pointers to each artist.

Also attending the art workshop were Ellie Nelson, Elizabeth Rose Legall and Allison Bennett.

Allison Bennett

about the seamoss
Gelidium serulatum



The north coast of Trinidad is an important area where the seamoss is harvested.

Seamoss is usually harvested during the month of August.

The agar has a high gel strength and is the best quality of any seamoss found in the Caribbean.

Found in exposed, rocky conditions.

When dry, it has a very long shelf life of three years and more.

Seamoss stocks began to decline during the 1980s in the region.

Trinidad is among the first of the Caribbean islands where seamoss stocks began to decline.

Crabs, sea lice, sea cockroaches, fish, snails, oysters and several other small animals live among the roots of the seamoss.

This species cannot be cultivated.

Information courtesy Alan Smith, CANARI

The Blanchisseuse Seamoss Project

The genesis of the Seamoss Project is found among the research done by BEAT members into the environmental issues facing the Blanchisseuse community. The method of seamoss harvesting was of great concern since it was done in a reckless and unsustainable manner. BEAT felt the need to address this issue as harvesting seamoss is an important community tradition.

In 2002, a project proposal was developed to determine the scale of harvest at Blanchisseuse, its importance to the community and the

potential for increasing the benefits from the resource. Funding for this project was secured through the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) Small Grants Programme which is supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID).

This aspect of the project saw BEAT members conduct an informal survey of 120 households in the Blanchisseuse community, the results of which are presented below.

In June 2003, a formal function was held at the Blanchisseuse Community Centre to present the

findings of the survey. Anna Sandy, then Secretary, summarized the results and emphasized the need for the community to benefit from the harvest.

BEAT wishes to thank the following for their support of this project: Mr. Kirk Amour, Ms. Allison Bennett, Ms. Judy-Ann Bennett, Mr. Erol Caesar, Ms. Gillian Cooper, Ms. Robyn Cross, Dr. Carol James, Mr. Louis Julien, Ms. Abidah Khan, Mr. Vijay Krishnarayan, Ms. Lori Lee Lum, Mr. Reynaldo Phillip, Mr. Alan Smith, Ms. Donna Spencer, residents of Blanchisseuse and members of the Blanchisseuse Community Council.

Results from the Seamoss Project

Harvesters' response on page 4

Does anyone in the household use seamoss as a consumer or commercially?

Consumer	86.9%
Commercial	6.6%
Do not use	6.5%

Is seamoss harvesting and use an important community tradition?

Yes	92%
Other	8%

Is seamoss important to commercial users?

Yes	86.6%
No	13.4%

Can the community benefit from seamoss?

Yes	91.3%
No	5.2%
Don't know	4.5%

What changes have you seen?

Availability

Less available	64.3%
More available	14.3%
No change	9.5%
Other	6.3%
Seasonal	5.6%

Quality

Better quality	36.6%
No change	33.3%
Poorer quality	17.1%
Other	7.3%
Varying quality	5.7%

Price

Increased prices	35.2%
Other/Don't know	31.1%
Depends on supplier	14.8%
Reasonable	13.1%
No change	5.8%

Demand

Great from outside	45.16%
Other	27.95%
High all around	17.2%
Equal demand	6.45%
Low all around	3.22%

How can the community benefit from seamoss?

Education/training/awareness	24.84%
Sell more seamoss	16.56%
Regulate harvesting	16.56%
Market the product	13.37%
Create employment opportunities	11.46%
Set up businesses	8.91%
Other suggestions	8.30%

The Marianne River Bridge *researched by Lloydann Williams*

Would you have guessed that the bridge came all the way from Mayaro?

The Marianne River spring bridge was first used in Mayaro and then was dismantled and brought to Blanchisseuse. According to Mr. Ranny who worked on the bridge in Blanchisseuse, construction started in 1955 and ended in 1956.

The spring bridge's main structure consists of four suspending cables which are fastened onto four iron pillars, two on either side of the Marianne River. These pillars are anchored into two columns on the river's banks. The cables are paired one over the other and iron rods are placed vertically between them. The top cables are loosely stretched across the river while the bottom

cables are tightly pulled and fastened into the pillars.

The iron rods play a very important role in anchoring the top cable to the bottom cable and this acts like ribs and gives the bridge its spring effect.

Slats of hardwood, such as Balata, form the floor of the bridge. These slats were spiked by hand and the joints between the wood assist in the spring effect when there is weight on the bridge. It is important to note that no welding was done to make this bridge – every joint was done by nuts and bolts except for the spiking of the floorboards.

The spring bridge is the only one of its kind in Trinidad today. Even

though it is in a dilapidated state, the bridge is still used as a passageway for housing and agriculture on its eastern side; logging, fishing and even as a scenic backdrop for music videos and local advertisements. Communities to the east of Blanchisseuse are serviced by this bridge.

The Marianne River Bridge is synonymous with Blanchisseuse and has immense cultural and historical value for the Blanchisseuse community. One could well imagine that it was at this bridge that women were seen washing beneath the massive structure, so giving the name "Washer Woman" to the village.

Washer Woman: the story of how Blanchisseuse got its name.

The year was 1797 and the census takers were in town – so to speak. At that time women washed their clothing at any of the many pristine rivers that traversed the area, pounding away at the fabric to wash out the daily grime. It was at one such river that a census taker met some women washing their clothing and after getting their particulars, asked for the name of the community. The women were at a loss. There was no name for the community, so the census taker decided to name the area "Ladies River" after his encounter with the washer women. Eventually, the French Creole villagers renamed the area Blanchisseuse.

Art Competition

BEAT members prepared art for a poster competition "From the Mountains to the Sea" organized by the Asa Wight Nature Centre and the Guardian Life Wildlife Trust Fund. Committee members will meet with Mr. Ken Critchlow of the Creative Arts Centre, UWI on July 14th 2004 to deliberate on the submitted art work.



THE MARIANNE RIVER SPRING BRIDGE

Blanchisseuse
Environmental
Art Trust

Mission
**To promote
environmental
conservation through
the arts**

President
Kenneth Fournillier

Vice-President
Judith Aaron Debisette

Secretary
Lloydann Williams

Assistant Secretary
Anna Sandy

Treasurer
Jenny Mulligan

Public Relations Officer
Gemma Murray

Youth Officer
Dawn Aaron

Trustees
Irvin Goden
Nigellica Smith

E-Mail:
bsseuse@yahoo.com

Editorial

Allison Bennett
Judy-Ann Bennett



c/o Blanchisseuse
Post Office,
Blanchisseuse.

Survey of Seamoss Harvesters

Fourteen persons were surveyed regarding their livelihoods as seamoss harvesters. Their responses are important to the development of a management plan for seamoss.

Some areas where seamoss was found:

Marianne, Morne Cadet Bay, Lomaque, Jean Baptiste, Bhagan Bay, Paria Bay, Las Cuevas, Damien Bay, Las Murphy, La Fillette, Gran Tacarib, Petite Tacarib, Tabalele, Upper Blanchisseuse, Madamas, Fat Pork Island, Las Point, Ti Riviere, Toco, Old Man Riviere, Yarra Beach, Morne Poui, Cachipa, Las Palmiste, Morne Brave.

Areas no longer used:

Beaches around the village, popular beaches

Phase II

What's Ahead for the Seamoss Project...

Phase II of the Blanchisseuse Seamoss Project is currently being developed for funding. It includes a two-year research programme designed to determine the life cycle and regenerative capacity of the seamoss with the aim of developing a management plan for its harvest. At the same time, an education and environmental awareness programme will be established to go hand in hand with the research. BEAT members will take an active part in designing educational posters and a booklet, among other activities as a means of sharing information about the project.

When is seamoss harvested?

After it has a chance to grow	35.7%
With a change in the tide from rough seas	28.6%
Year round	28.6%
When it is ready to be picked	0.07%

How long must one wait before harvesting seamoss again?

1-3 months	14.3%
4-6 months	35.7%
1 year	21.4%
Don't know	28.6%

How often do you harvest?

Occasionally	21.4%
Every month	0.07%
Once a year	21.4%
Every 5 years	0.07%
Other responses	0.43%

How long have you been harvesting seamoss?

0-5 years	21.4%
6-10 years	14.3%
10 - 15 years	0.00%
16-20 years	14.3%
More than 20 years	28.6%
No response	21.4%

What is the best method for harvesting?

Cut the seamoss	85.7%
Root out the seamoss	14.3%

Who should control the harvest?

Relevant authorities	42.9%
Villagers	21.4%
Harvesters	14.3%
No control	21.4%