



# Marine Education Poster Contest 2011

Sponsored by Blue Lagoon Island & Marine Vendors from Nassau

Dolphin Encounters-Project BEACH

Contest Deadline: April 8th, 2011



## Here Today...Gone Tomorrow? Endangered Wildlife in the Bahamas



What do the Dodo bird, Stellar's sea cow, Passenger Pigeon, and the Bahii River Dolphin have in common? Well they are all now extinct, gone forever from our planet! When you think of an endangered or extinct animal, dinosaurs and giant mastodons may come to mind but, believe it or not, many animals are at risk of extinction right here in our Bahamaland.

Imagine going to the beach and having a colony of seals a few hundred yards from you sunbathing. In the Bahamas? Yes! When Columbus came to The Bahamas, he noted in his journal seeing "sea wolves" which were actually passive Caribbean Monk Seals.

As late as 1707, sailors, whalers, and fishermen could kill as many as a hundred of these non-aggressive seals in one night and use them for valuable food and oil. The last confirmed sighting of this once abundant marine mammal was in 1952, but they are now classified as **extinct**, with not even one seal of this species is alive today.

Let's take a look at three animals—the Bahama Parrot, the West Indian Whistling Duck, & the Bahama Boa — that are **endangered** today but still have a chance of being protected and surviving in the wild in The Bahamas.

### The Bahama Parrot

When Columbus visited our shores he also saw another unique animal: the **Bahama Parrot**.

He noted in his journal seeing so many of them that when they flew they "darkened the sun". Only found in The Bahamas, this parrot once lived on at least seven different Bahamian islands.

Today, the Bahama Parrot is restricted to just two islands, Abaco and Inagua. With only an estimated 3,000 individuals left today, these precious birds are severely endangered and at high risk of becoming extinct.



The Bahama Parrot eats a variety of fruits ranging from wild guava, poisonwood berries, pigeon berry, and the fruit from gumbo-limbo & pond-top palm.

Unlike any other bird, a parrot can use its foot to bring food up to its mouth. They can wrap their toes around a piece of food in the same way that you can wrap your fingers around a glass.



**Parrots in Abaco make nests in the ground.**

The parrots that live in Inagua nest in trees like our national tree, *Lignum vitae*, while the parrots that live in Abaco look to nest in **limestone cavities** on the ground of the pine forest. Nesting in the ground may result in a 100% survival of a forest fire, which are quite common to pine forests.

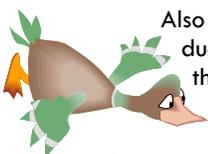
The choices in nesting has put both populations at risk to predators like cats and raccoons, **deforestation** and, in the case of the parrots in Abaco, flooding. Sadly, parrots are not adapting fast enough to these threats fast enough and their numbers are quickly dwindling.



**Deforestation started as early as the 1600's.**

### The West Indian Whistling Duck

Within our country many species face the threat of extinction due to **pollution**, poor land development and poor resource management. A prime example of this would be the plight of the **West Indian Whistling Duck**.



Also known as the "night duck" (active at night), this bird is a large goose-like duck with relatively long legs that extend beyond the tail in flight. Sometimes entire flocks are seen at dusk flying in search of food, especially

looking for the fruit of the Royal Palm. In the Bahamas this species is considered rare and is known to occur in the Inagua National park and on Hog Cay, Long Island.

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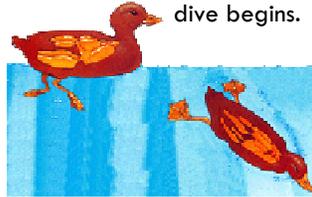
## The West Indian Whistling Duck

The feathers of ducks are **waterproofed** by a protective oil that is produced at the base of the tail and the duck spreads this oil to the rest of the feathers by grooming.



**Waterproof feathers!**

A duck's **webbed feet** are excellent for paddling but do give them a distinct waddle when walking on land. Ducks have internal air sacs that help them float on the water. The air is released just before a dive begins.



The W.I. Whistling Duck has suffered extensive **hunting** for its eggs and for sport. The wetlands in which they live are becoming a very limited habitat, due to poor land development. More than 50% of remaining **wetlands** are seriously degraded by the cutting of mangroves and swamp-forest, pollution and natural catastrophes such as droughts and hurricanes.



This species of duck has also been pushed to the brink by introduced predators such as wild hogs, raccoons, cats, dogs and rats within its home range as they are known to eat the eggs and the ducks themselves.

## The Bahama Boa

Some species are endangered because of false perceptions such is the case of... the Bahamian Boa! As scary as they may seem, snakes play an important role in keeping the ecosystem in balance. The Bahamas has a total of 3 species and 7 sub-species, all of which are endangered.



**Miss Universe contestants meet a friendly boa at the Ardastra Zoo & Gardens.**

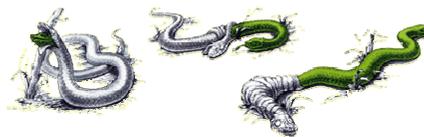
These slim, harmless snakes have a beautiful coloration that shines in the sunlight. They do not get very thick and grow to a maximum of 8 feet in length.

All animals shed their skin but not quite like the snake. Most animals shed their skin in tiny flakes but the snake sheds the whole skin in one go. It usually takes about a day or two, but sometimes up to five.

Bahamian boas are on their way to becoming extinct. Their current status is due to the fact that they are heavily

feared and therefore killed on-sight in the Bahamas. There are many false stories about these snakes that have been passed on throughout the ages. Truth be known: we need these natural predators.

Boas are very adaptable and can be found in a range of habitats. From trees to brush piles, they can hunt prey like insects, lizards, rodents, frogs, small birds and even other snakes.



**Shedding a Whole Skin**



**Boa in a Mangrove Tree**

Snakes help control the insect and rodent (rats and mice) populations which we know spread disease, eat our fruits and vegetables and cost us thousands of dollars in pest control. If there were more of these non-poisonous snakes living in the bush, they could help reduce the amount rats and other rodents running around our streets and backyards.

## Here Today, Here Tomorrow & Here Forever!

The Bahamas has certainly changed from the time of Columbus to now. The question is how will it change in our lifetime? Will we **conserve** and protect the species that are here now, or will we have them join the Caribbean Monk Seal in museums and legends! How do we protect them?

The first step is to learn more about these animals, what they need to survive and from what they need to be protected. **Trash** is a major problem that can hurt that many kinds of animals, such as marine

mammals, birds, reptiles and fish. When an animal becomes entangled, the debris can strangle or suffocate the animal or become so tight that it leads to wounds and infection. **Entanglement** can also limit an animal's ability to swim, fly or even escape predators which usually results in death. When an animal **eats trash**, it can cause starvation or malnutrition if the items cannot be digested or broken down in the body. An object with sharp edges can damage the airway or stomach of the animal leading to infection or pain.

The next step is to practice **conservation**, such as the 3R's... Reduce, Reuse & Recycle. Small changes to your behavior add up! For example, you can take your **recycle totes** to the food store instead of using new plastic bags each time OR you can refill a **reusable** water bottle rather than buying small bottles of water each day. And of course, making sure litter gets in a **trash can** and not the ground is essential.

Another important step is to get involved! Join one of the environmental groups that help



in protecting nature such as The **Bahamas National Trust**, **Friends of the Environment**, **BREEF**, or **Proud Paws**. Take some time and visit your local parks and zoos to see these amazing animals in person. By making small changes, we can create a big change in our country and thus the world. So whether they fly, swim or slither, we can protect the animals that share our country with us!