

# Bonaire brings home the gold



Bonaire's Special Olympics team returned home victoriously from the World Special Olympics to a welcoming balloon and flag waving crowd complete with a brass band on June 26.

The athletes brought home gold and silver medals for Bocce and Swimming. An amazing 7000 athletes from 190 countries competed in 26 sports in the games held June 17 – 25 in Berlin, Germany.

Bonaire athlete Su-endry Weef won gold medals for Bocce double and a silver medal for Bocce single. Revelino Engelhart won a gold medal for Bocce single and Genrick Mercera won a gold medal for Swimming 25m Freestyle.

The team was accompanied by coaches Rolvin van Hellburg for Bocce and Chislain Makaai for Swimming.

An estimated 3,000 coaches and 20,000 volunteers supported this year's Special Olympics athletes at the World Special Olympics.

The Special Olympics began as a small backyard movement in the 1950s by Eunice Kennedy Shriver in the United States. Shriver realized the unjust treatment of people with intellectual disabilities and took action to create a movement that has spread worldwide.

This was the first time the games were held in Berlin.

The Special Olympics winter and summer games are held separately every two years. Bonaire competes every four years in the summer games and trains in the off years. Fundraising for the athletes is held yearly through Bonaire's Special Olympics Walk-a-thon. For more information visit the Bonaire Special Olympics Facebook page. Congratulations to all the athletes of Special Olympics.

**L- R - Revelino Engelhart and Su-endry Weef display proudly display their hard earned medals.**



# Restoring Lac's Conch

What do conch and palm trees have in common? The support of a California-based organization called Seacology! Recently, representatives of Seacology came to Bonaire to meet the partners and players of the two projects they support on the island.

For centuries, islanders have easily captured Queen Conch in Lac Bay. As the waters are so shallow in this area, neither specialized skills nor expensive equipment is required to bring home this tasty source of healthy protein. Monique van de Water, a biologist leading the Dutch Caribbean program of the World Wide Fund for Nature the Netherlands (WWF-NL) explains, "Our goal is to include Piskabon (Bonaire's fishing cooperative with more than 70 members) in the project from the start. They have valuable passed-on knowledge of the Queen Conch, or karko, that you can't learn elsewhere".

Who better to train and control the area than those who know the area and stand to benefit the most from the project? Compensating fisherfolk for this task can be considered as trading habitat protection and sustainable resource management for agreeing to personally protect the area by not allowing others to poach the area. Doing so will give karko a chance to grow to maturity and to reproduce.

"We are hopeful the project's success could allow for karkos to be sustainably harvested after a period of 10 years," van de Water projected.

The cultured karko juveniles are supplied by the Queen Conch Hatchery of the Curaçao Sea Aquarium. Project coordinator and scientist Michiel van Nierop outlined the project to representatives from multiple organizations at the Lac Bay meeting point. Starting with the larvae-to-snail process van Nierop exhibited the tools and technology the project will utilize.



Nierop said, "Our first results are promising with low mortality and good growth!"

One-year old juveniles are about 3 inches (~7.6 cm) long, big enough to support the Passive Integrated Transponder (or PIT tag) to be cemented to the shell to enable monitoring. However, juvenile conch burrow into

the sand to feed and avoid predation, making them difficult to monitor. To locate the deceptive young conch, custom-made reading frames pick up the unique signal emitted from the PIT tag, allowing for data management and map making.

New approaches are being taken by Judith Raming, STINAPA Marine Park manager.

"We are proud to work with our fishing community," said Raming.

Long-time fisherman and Piskabon representative Edmundo "Eddy" Christiaan said, "I speak the truth. Karko is part of our culture. Bonaire needs conch."

He later invited Seacology representatives to visit his fishing cottage, the last remaining one of its kind on Bonaire's shores.

WWF-NL is the primary funding supporting the pilot project to study the effects of outplanting cultured 1-year-old juveniles. Monitoring of growth, migration and survival rates will be the indicators to provide guidelines to future large repopulation projects. Seacology's support will allow the fishing community to self-police the area and educate the community regarding the long-term viability of the project.

Seacology director Duane Silverstein said, "Working directly with communities to preserve their cultures and improve their lives is a premise of Seacology projects"

Protecting the Queen Conch is not just about fritters! This pretty pink mollusk keeps seagrass and coral reefs healthy by grazing on macro algae and organic matter. Look forward to a next article on how Seacology is helping to save one of the world's most endangered plants—on Bonaire!

*Story/photo Lynn Costenaro*