



# OCEANA 2013



OCEANA

Protecting the  
World's Oceans

## Annual Report

## 2013

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In February 2013, Oceana launched an education campaign to increase general knowledge on the organization's work in Belize. Marine Scientist Leah Biery visited primary schools throughout Belize to interact with students and shared key information regarding Oceana's campaigns: the campaign to ban offshore drilling and exploration; the campaign to ban the use of gillnets and our campaign to increase protection for juvenile fish. The sessions included multi-media presentations including an oil spill simulation and examples of juvenile fish.

February 2013 was also the launch of Oceana's Ocean Heroes initiative. Oceana invited recommendations from the general public to nominate persons who they feel were committed to helping and inspiring others to care about marine environments. Dr. Melanie McField of the Healthy Reefs for Healthy People initiative became the second recipient of the award joining Lionel "Chocolate" Heredia, the 2012 awardee.



Oceana's work in March 2013 included the sponsorship and support of Oceana's Wave Makers team in the annual La Ruta Maya River Challenge. Chris Guydis, Bob Vincent and Andy Schnuerer represented Oceana in the four day canoe adventure race and placed 1st in the masters category.



The team was supported along the 170 mile route by Oceana Belize staff members.

As a part of our sponsorship, Oceana also produced a promotional video about the event. The video highlighted that in order to adequately protect our marine environment we must all be committed, dedicated and hard working— much like a world class canoe team.



Oceana also participated in the first annual Belize City Reef Fair along with conservation partners in the NGO community. The objective of the fair was to inform the public and draw attention to the importance of our reef and ways in which everyone can contribute to it's sustainability.

The event culminated with the first ever Sea Carnival Boat Parade in the Belize City Harbour. High school students decorated boats that slowly traveled along the Belize City shoreline.



As part of Reef Week 2013, Oceana also organized a snorkeling trip for underprivileged students from Belize City. The 150 participants were high school students from Excelsior, Maud Williams and Sadie Vernon and were all nominated by their teachers because they had never visited the Belize Barrier Reef.

By introducing the students to Belize's incredible marine environment, Oceana was able to educate the young persons on the importance of our natural resources and ensured that the participants would support efforts to protect them.



Oceana also hosted a clean up competition in the southern town of Dangriga between Delille Academy and Ecumenical High school. The schools were designated to areas on both the southern or northern coastline. Oceana provided trash bags, gloves and Oceana T-Shirts to each participant. At the end of the day, the students of Delille Academy High School won the competition by collecting more than a hundred bags of trash while Ecumenical High Schools collected seventy trash bags. All the trash collected was removed from the area by officials of the Dangriga Town Council and properly disposed of. The initiative highlighted the impact of debris on the marine environment and the aesthetics of the area.



In April 2013, Oceana in Belize secured a monumental and historic supreme court ruling. Following legal proceedings initiated by Oceana, the Coalition to Save Our Natural Heritage and activist group Citizens Organized for Liberty through Action (COLA) against the Government of Belize via the Attorney General, Supreme Court Justice Oswald Legall declared that all oil lease contracts were null and void and issued an injunction against their continued implementation. In his judgment Justice Legall said that the Minister who signed the contracts “exceeded his jurisdiction when he entered into the agreements without first having or considering an environmental impact assessment of oil exploration on the environment”. Justice Legall further explained that the entire intention of the Environmental Protection Act is to make environmental assessment so as to protect the environment. Oceana heralded the ruling as a historic victory for the people of Belize.





In June 2013, as a part of World Ocean's Day, Oceana launched "Sea People", a photo exhibition. The exhibition attempted to bridge the gap between science and art. Each photo was also accompanied by a detailed caption written by scientist Leah Biery. Biery and Oceana's photographer Alexander Ellis travelled to coastal villages in Belize to document life in these communities and to interview fishermen about fishing practices. The photos were displayed in the lobby of the Radisson Fort George Hotel and since then, have been displayed at various locations throughout the country.



## July

In July 2013, Oceana sponsored a lion fish tournament which was held in Placencia as part of the 2013 Lobster Festival. The tournament was a highlight of the weekend of activities and consisted of three teams with a maximum of four scuba divers, each equipped with a handheld spear. More than a thousand pounds of Lionfish was collected during the tournament. The fish was cleaned and the seafood, both safe and delicious, was distributed to interested persons free of cost.

The lionfish is considered a significant threat to juvenile fish populations. They have no natural predators, multiply quickly and are voracious consumers.





August



In August 2012, Oceana sponsored Oceana volunteer Amber Rivero in her bid to become Ms. Earth Belize. As a part of her participation in the contest, Rivero selected the environmentally conscious topic of mangrove protection. Rivero spent several hours with Ocean staff members preparing and researching the importance mangroves to the Belize's coastal and marine environment. Rivero won the local competition and went on to represent Belize at the global event which was held in Manila, Philippines.



In an effort to exhibit their personal appreciation and commitment to Belize's marine resources, in September 2013, Oceana Belize staff members completed open water dive certification course.

The objective of this certification was to allow staff members to better understand and appreciate what they are fighting to protect. Alain Alexis and Alex Ellis were able to utilize their new skills by filming of manatees in the wild within the Swallow Caye Wildlife Sanctuary. Those images now form part of Oceana's photo and





In September 2013, Oceana launched a unique educational tool—a website called TA (Teaching Assistant) Belize. The website, [www.oceanateachbz.com](http://www.oceanateachbz.com), was created by volunteer, Idaila Machuca and was designed to educate Belizeans on key environmental issues by providing key data, images and links to helpful documents, serve as a resource of information for teachers and to encourage Belizeans to play an active role in the preservation of our environment.



In October 2013, Oceana participated in and assisted in the coordination of a national coastal and river-way clean up initiative. Oceana provided garbage bags to teams in Corozal, Orange Walk, San Ignacio and Santa Elena, Dangriga and Punta Gorda.

Oceana staff members, joined by a team of enthusiastic Wavemakers, assumed responsibility for the Belize City clean up. The volunteers were able to collect approximately 500 pounds of garbage from the Belize City shore line. The plastic, Styrofoam and other material was later collected by the Belize City Council and properly disposed of. Once again, the event highlighted the impact of garbage on the marine ecosystem and how trash degrades the aesthetics of the natural environment.





In November, the soundtrack of Belize is the rhythmic beat of the Garifuna dram. In November 2013, Oceana was proud to be a diamond sponsor for the annual Battle of the Drum competition, held this year at the Sporting Complex in Punta Gorda Town, Toledo. Eight groups hailing from Belize, Guatemala and Honduras gathered in Belize's southernmost town to display their musical artistry and competed in five different categories of Garifuna drumming. Staff members Alain Alexis and Floyd Neal attended the event and were able to address the audience about Oceana's campaigns in Belize and also participated in the presentation of prizes to winners.

## DECEMBER



In December 2013, Oceana was honored to welcome internationally renowned photographers Manu San Félix and Cristina Ozores to Belize. Félix and Ozores used San Pedro Town, Ambergris Caye as their base and visited several sites offshore to document sharks, rays and other species of wildlife. The impressive images collected during their visit now form an important resources in Oceana's database and will be used in media campaigns and presentations.





Also of note is the visit of actresses Rashida Jones and Angela Kinsey to Belize to film a public service announcement for Oceana. The video was shot at the Hol Chan Marine reserve by photographers including acclaimed photographer Tony Rath. The PSA will include footage of the actresses snorkeling with an array of marine life as well as a personal thank you from them to Belizeans for supporting Oceana's campaigns in Belize.



# Welcome 2014

In the last four years Oceana has gone from a brand new organization to a house hold name. That's an impressive legacy to have as a foundation.

We welcome 2014 with enthusiasm as we continue to work with Belizeans for the sustainable development and protection of Belizean marine resources.

