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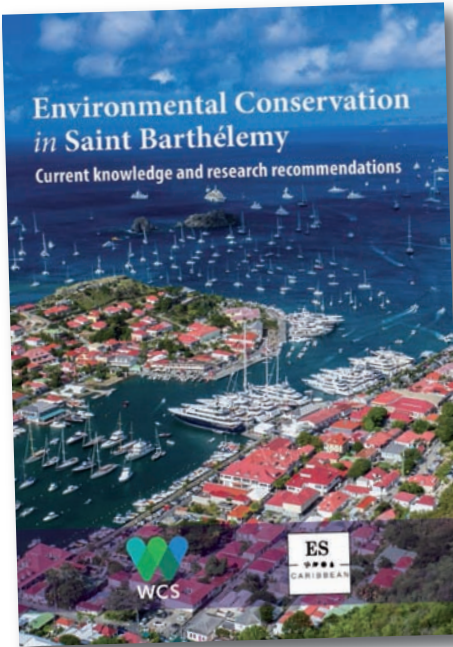
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Deborah Brosnan Comments On WCS Environmental Study

St-Barth : A Wake Up Call

BY DEBORAH BROSNAN PH.D.



increased from 152 to 522 fish/100m² accompanied by a suite of positive changes. Other studies confirmed that nearly twice as many fish lived inside the reserve as outside it. This was a good news story.

A few years later the positive trend reversed. Fish densities dropped by about half (one study found 206fish/100m² inside the reserve and 47fish/100m², outside it). Corals themselves were in trouble. What would have happened without the Marine

Reserve, I shudder to imagine.

The newly released WCS report addresses changes in land and marine environments. It reveals major environmental losses that have needlessly accompanied development and with few reme-

dies implemented along the way. Lack of attention to the environment, a mistaken belief that development must always be at a cost to nature, fragmented approaches, and the absence of environmental policies that can be reliably enforced contribute to the sorry environmental plight of the island.

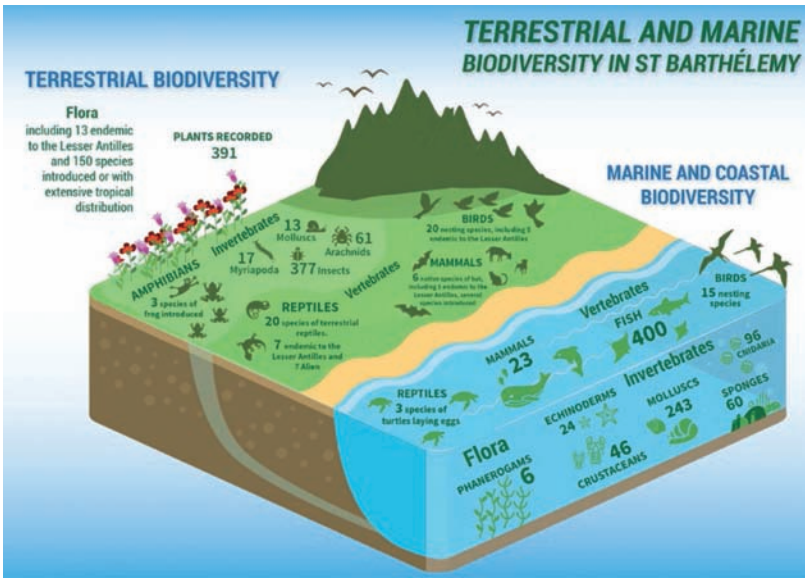
This is 2016, and ironically the twentieth anniversary of the creation of the Marine Reserve. During the intervening two decades we've become much better at knowing how to balance the environment with growth and development. Studies show that, on islands, environmental degradation is linked to lower social and economic resilience. Around the world, island nations are becoming leaders in sustainable development through novel energy and environmental actions that also foster economic growth. There's no reason why St Barth

The recent Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) Report on the St Barth environment* is a wake up call. It should alarm and galvanize all of us who want to see a resilient and prosperous island.

In 1996, along with my team of scientists, I had the privilege of working with the then St Barth government, island residents, and other concerned entities to establish the Marine Reserve. We were recruited to assist because residents themselves had witnessed the decline in fish and the degradation of marine ecosystems. Our goal was to create a network of diverse habitats that would serve as the island's environmental insurance policy—a refuge for marine life, a source of fish for fisheries and a support for tourism. By 2001 we were reaping benefits: fish density had



Coral Restoration : Coral tables with Acropora cervicornis from Coral Restoration, St Barth - 2016 © Didier Laplace



The terrestrial and marine biodiversity in Saint Barthélemy

cannot be among the leaders. It has the resources and the talent but seems to lack the will. The report should be a wake up call to all of us to step up our efforts.

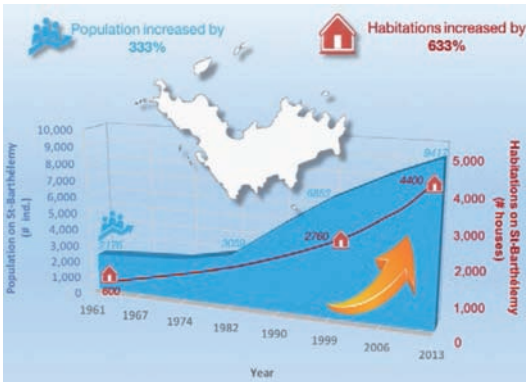
St Barth faces unprecedented and complex challenges stemming from its own success and from external factors like a changing climate. We need a coming together of govern-

ment with economic, social, and environmental interests to acknowledge the alarming risks and to find solutions that work at the right scale and for the modern and developed island that is St Barth today. Currently, dialogue is haphazard and driven by unwillingness of participants on opposite sides to engage constructively with each other.

We need transparent and reliable environmental policies like environmental impact assessments for major projects that openly evaluate consequences and identify and incorporate workable solutions to minimize risks. These can create win-win outcomes. Coherent and scientifically sound project implementation can ensure environments and public health are protected while realizing project benefits.

As individuals we can all do our part by the choices we make in how we engage with the environment, how we develop and manage our properties, and by serving as visible role models for more sustainable options. There is an abundance of talent and experience on St Barth including from accomplished residents whose off-island expertise and experience is directly relevant for solving the challenges facing St Barth. Let's do our part to make sure this excellent report doesn't just sit on a shelf. Let's go!

** Environmental Conservation in Saint Barthélemy by Catherine Jadot*



Evolution of St-Barthélemy Population and Habitations from 1961 to 2013

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