



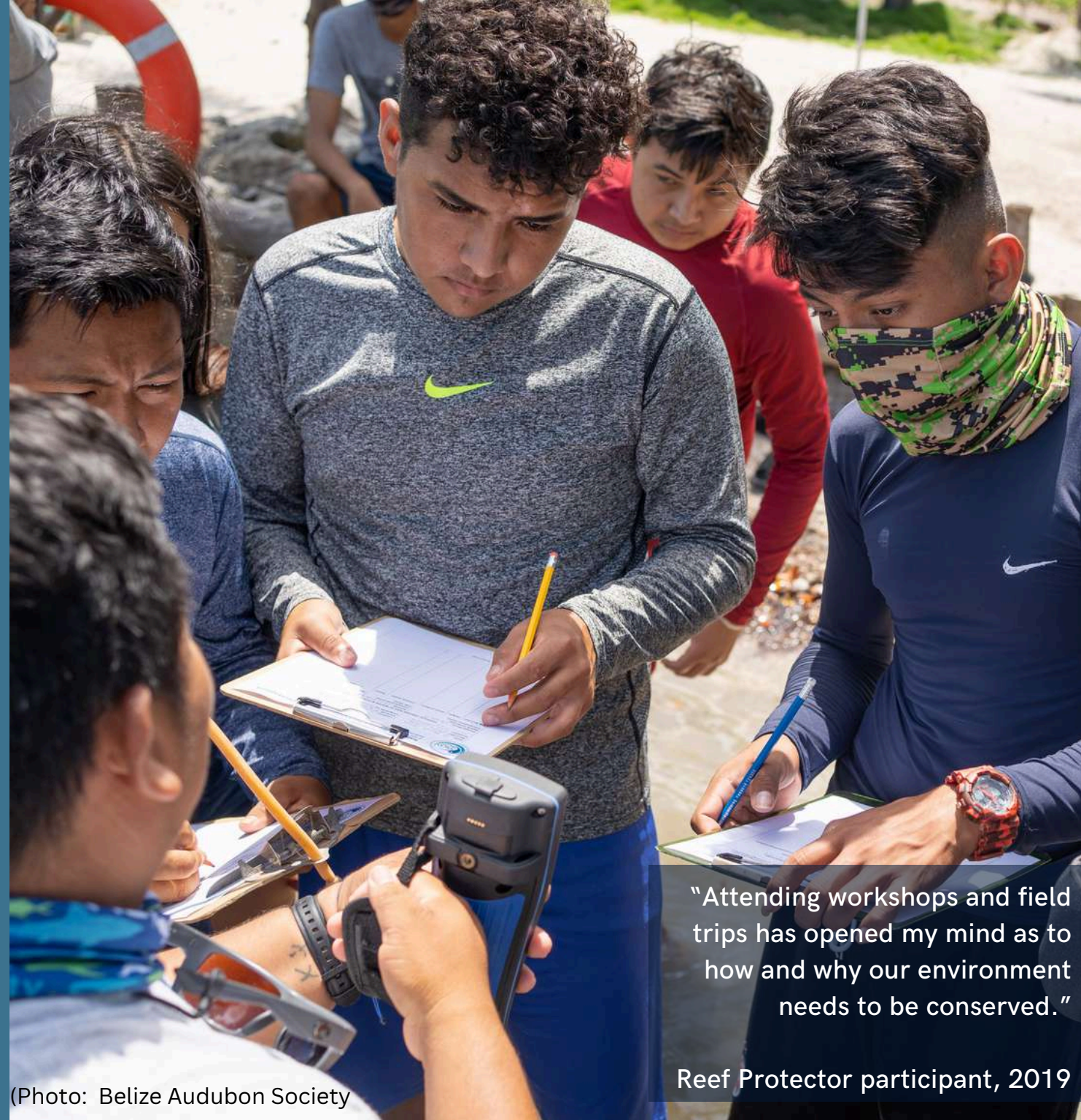
Reef Protectors

Belize Marine Fund Case Study

The Reef Protectors Program

Belize Audubon Society

The importance of engaging youths cannot be over emphasized – young people will be the custodians and stewards of Belize’s natural resources in the future, and need to be engaged to prepare them for that role.



“Attending workshops and field trips has opened my mind as to how and why our environment needs to be conserved.”

Reef Protector participant, 2019

(Photo: Belize Audubon Society)

2017 -2022

BELIZE MARINE FUND

Thematic Area 3: Effective Marketing of Belize's Reef at National and International Levels

The BMF Investment Strategy flagged the low awareness and engagement of the general public as a critical gap in the conservation of Belize's marine resources, even in fishing communities. Improving awareness, good stewardship and ownership are therefore considered as priority strategies for investment.

Total number of Grants

3

Total number youths impacted

45

Number of youths certified as PADI Open Water Divers

18



The Belize Audubon Society (BAS) Reef Protectors Program targets high school students from Belize's northern fishing communities, particularly Chunox and Copper Bank. It raises awareness and understanding of the need for conservation of the marine environment, providing young people with firsthand experience of marine conservation and protected areas management in Belize.

This is based on the belief that, given the proper mentorship, skills training and support, participants can become environmental stewards and take on conservation leadership roles in their communities.



Photo: Belize Audubon Society



Find out more

<https://marfund.org/en/belize-audubon-societys-reef-protectors-program-empowering-youths-as-champions-of-marine-conservation/>

The targeted youths are from the northern fishing communities, the primary stakeholders of Half Moon Caye and Blue Hole Natural Monuments on Lighthouse Reef Atoll. These protected areas are managed by BAS in partnership with the Belize Government.

Encouraging these youths to pursue career paths outside fishing by providing them with training and experience will help to reduce pressures on the marine environment and improve management effectiveness of the two protected areas.

BAS has been running the Reef Protectors Program over a 2-year cycle for 10 years, focusing on a series of cohorts of 15 to 16 youths, with BMF support for three of these cycles. Participants are recruited from the local high school based on a competitive process, with the submission of written essays and a set of criteria that include displaying a genuine interest in the program activities, and engaging team players who display leadership characteristics.

Activities are structured through a series of meetings and workshops focusing on:

- team building,
- development of communication skills,
- building capacity for biodiversity monitoring,
- preparation for dive training.

Three field trips are conducted to marine protected areas during the program, including Half Moon Caye and Blue Hole Natural Monuments, and Bacalar Chico National Park and Marine Reserve. Eight participants are then selected for dive certification, followed by a two-week internship at Half Moon Caye Natural Monument.

Challenges and Lessons Learned:

For the Reef Protectors Program

- Language barriers – the northern fishing communities are predominantly Spanish-speaking.
 - > Activities also need to build English and social communication skills of participants if they are going to be competitive in competing for jobs in conservation and marine biology.
- There are no follow-on activities for Reef Protector participants to continue to be engaged and to channel their skills and enthusiasm.
- There are few relevant employment opportunities in the northern fishing communities, and many young men find that, even with the Reef Protector training, they still have to enter the fishing sector.
 - > There is a need to create or identify opportunities for engaging Reef Protector graduates beyond the life of the program. This could be through recruiting past participants to assist with marine research / monitoring activities and community outreach.

For the Belize Marine Fund

- Strategic, multi-year investments can transform an initiative into a successful ongoing program with added value. This ensures consistent implementation on an ongoing basis, beyond project cycles, critical for strengthening true community engagement.
- The implementation of well planned strategies that ensure community outreach investments provide the platform for a consistent presence in the communities - this is the foundation that builds strong community partnerships.

THEMATIC AREA 3: Effective Marketing of Belize's Reef at National and International Levels

PROJECT	ORGANIZATION
2017: Capacity building of fishing communities youth in Northern Belize as a fisheries management tool	Belize Audubon Society
2019: Building capacity of fishing stakeholders for participation in marine conservation, through education, public awareness and collaboration	Belize Audubon Society
2021: Building knowledge and understanding, managing perceptions, and engaging fishing communities of the North Eastern coast of Belize towards improved stewardship of marine resources	Belize Audubon Society