

The HOME FORUM

Kids get together to save our seas

This song was written by high-schooler Kimberly Powell of the John Gray Recyclers, Cayman Islands. You can listen to Kimberly sing her song at the Recyclers' website: www.johngrayrecyclers.org

Let's Preserve Our Coral Reefs

Let's preserve our coral reefs
For years and years to come
So all the life in our oceans
Will live on and on and on

It's World Environment Day
Everybody say
Take a stand
Throughout this land
So come on clap your hands

Give earth a change
Give earth a chance
Come on
Dive in
It's the world we all live in



THE QUARTERS CLINK in the jar, and cookies fly off the table at Huff Elementary School in Redwood City, Calif. Laura Mabbott's fifth-graders are having a bake sale to protect a coral reef thousands of miles away. "If reefs 3,000 miles away die out," says student

Nina Maksimova, "we are wounded." The John Gray Recyclers are busy, too. These high school students live in the Cayman Islands in the Caribbean. They've collected small mountains of trash from island beaches, organized recycling programs, written songs about the ocean, and raised money to save the endangered Cayman blue iguana. "I feel my generation is the conserving generation," says high-schooler Cathrine Welds in an e-mail.

An ocean away on the Pacific island of Guam, students are just as committed. The Marine Mania Club at George Washington High School is organizing its own beach cleanup. The "Maniacs" also monitor sea-turtle nests, plant trees to keep soil from washing over reefs, and collect "ghost" fishing nets lost by fishermen. The lost nets can entangle and kill turtles, fish, and dolphins.

"Being in Marine Mania is a way for me to give back to the environment," says Felix Santiago via e-mail. "When we work together" adds fellow student Joseph Barrett, "it no longer seems like work."

Earth Day is also Ocean Day

Ms. Mabbott's fifth-graders, the John Gray Recyclers, and the Marine Maniacs are just a few of the kids worldwide who will celebrate this Earth Day (April 22) as "Dive In To Earth Day."

Earth Day was first celebrated in 1970 to remind people to care for the environment. "But most Earth Day events take place on land," says Brian Huse, director of the Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL) in San Francisco. Dive In To Earth Day began in 2000 "to ensure that the 70 percent of the earth that is covered by water is not forgotten." Since 2000, some 1,000 Dive In To Earth Day events have been held in 89 countries. Students, dive clubs, aquariums, and conservation groups organize fish surveys, underwater cleanups, art contests, and more. The day reminds people how much we depend on oceans and how much they need protection.

You probably know that plants produce oxygen for us to breathe. But you may not know that most of that oxygen is generated not by land plants, but by im-

mense numbers of phytoplankton (tiny marine plants) floating in the ocean. Oceans slow global warming by absorbing greenhouse gases humans pump into the atmosphere. And oceans provide food for billions of people.

Humans can harm even huge oceans without noticing or understanding the damage they're doing. "People just think of the ocean as a free food outlet or a trash can," says fifth-grader Andy Haughey.

From California to the Caymans and across the Pacific, young ecowarriors are working to preserve 7/10ths of the planet

Global warming kills reef-building corals, which are sensitive to small changes in temperature. Fertilizer, pesticides, untreated sewage, and garbage can kill sealife. Overfishing has eliminated 90 per-

cent of all large fish like tuna, swordfish, and cod. "Many people don't see what's going on under the sea," says fifth-grader Amanda Sibrian. "It can take years until people come to say, 'Why can't we catch any more big fish?'"

Some kids get involved in marine conservation because they've seen problems first-hand. Cayman Islander Cathrine Welds says her eyes were opened when she saw a Cayman reef smashed by a yacht anchor. "It was a sad and shocking scene when I snorkeled out there and saw the damage," she says via e-mail.

A Cayman beach cleanup helped classmate Melissa Smith see the need for action: "We filled 13 huge garbage bags," she says, "and we had just the week before conducted a cleanup!"

No island is an island

The California students study different islands around the world and learn how our environment connects us. "Everyone has heard the phrase, 'no man is an island,'" Mabbott says. "The kids learn that no island is an island, either."

A few years ago, Mabbott asked her fifth-graders to raise \$5 each to contribute to Seacology, an environmental group based in Berkeley, Calif., that works with islanders around the world. But her students wanted to do more - much more. Last year they raised \$3,650. Besides having bake sales at recess, they washed cars, sold T-shirts, and asked for donations instead of presents at birthdays. This year they've raised more than \$3,000. The money will pay for a village kindergarten in Fiji. In exchange, villagers will make part of their fishing grounds a marine reserve.

The students have made a difference. Duane Silverstein, Seacology's executive director, says Mabbott's class "set the example." Other schools heard about Mabbott's fifth-graders and were inspired to help, too. Word even reached the John Gray Recyclers in the Cayman Islands.

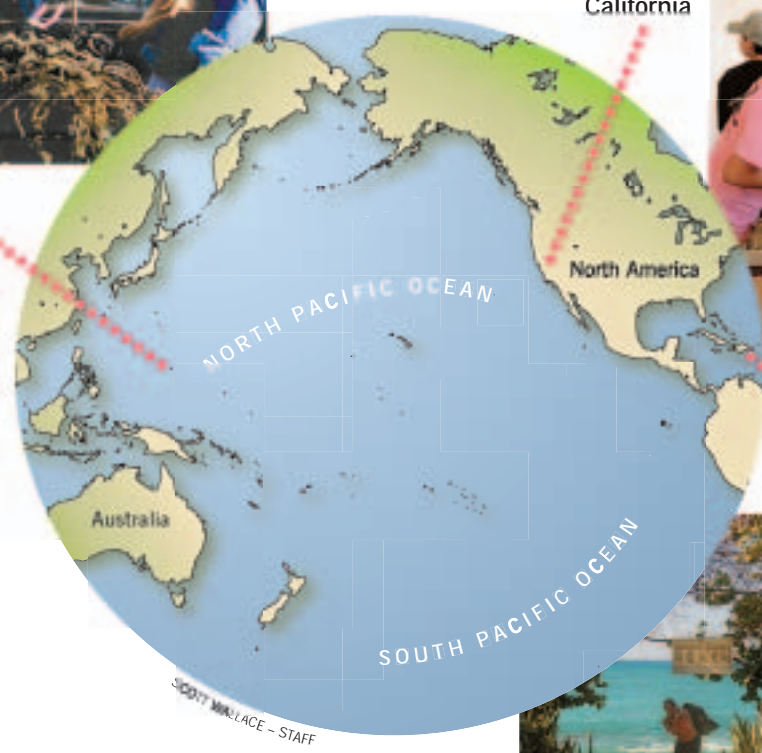
The Recyclers have their own reefs to protect. But the Cayman students wanted to help Fijians, too. "We are helping to preserve reefs in Fiji because we ... have come to realize that the world around us

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LINDA TATREAU

Guam



SCOTT WALLACE - STAFF



PAMELA S. TURNER

Cayman Islands



CHRIS WHITEHEAD

How inappropriate to call this planet Earth when it is clearly Ocean."

- Arthur C. Clarke, British science fiction writer.

OCEAN ADVOCATES: (Clockwise from top) Keith Juarez (ctr.) and fellow Marine Maniacs show off a 'ghost' fishing net taken from Pago Bay, Guam, last year. Fifth-grader Miruna Predescu (l.) sells baked goods to second-graders Magda Woroniecka (ctr.) and Madison Bahl in Redwood City, Calif., to raise money to save coral reefs in Fiji. John Gray Recyclers Cathrine Welds (r.) and Jeremy Forbes haul trash collected from a beach on Grand Cayman.

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is like one huge chain," writes teenager Jeremy Forbes, president of the Recyclers. "We are all linked together."

When the Recyclers won a \$1,550 Commonwealth Youth Award, they gave the money to Seacology. Another Fijian village will get a kindergarten in exchange for creating a marine reserve. Five of the Recyclers plan to travel to Fiji for the opening of the kindergarten along with their teacher, Christine Whitehead.

Sometimes protecting the ocean requires speaking out, even when others disagree. The Marine Maniacs protested a "Birdman Rally" at a newly established marine reserve in Guam. Competitors (mostly Japanese tourists) built large hang-gliderlike kites and ran off a large ramp into the water. "The reef flat is a prime snorkeling location and could have been damaged by the ramp and the crash landing of kites and people," notes teacher Linda Tatreau. The Maniacs also thought it was unfair that fishermen were excluded, but not foreign tourists.

The students also protested against "shark finning" around Guam. Shark-fin soup is popular in many Asian countries. When shark finners catch a shark, they slice off its fins and throw the shark back in the water to die. The Maniacs began a petition and performed skits on shark finning at local schools. Students wrote letters to restaurants serving shark-fin soup asking them to stop. Students got many nasty replies from restaurants, but that didn't stop them.

The Birdman Rally was held despite the protest. But shark finning was recently banned in all United States waters, including the waters around Guam. (Guam is a US territory.)

Events planned worldwide

Laura Mabbott's class, the John Gray Recyclers and the Marine Maniacs will all celebrate Dive In To Earth Day 2004. Mabbott's class will "dive in" by telling fellow students about marine conservation and by giving Seacology the money they've raised for Fiji. The Recyclers plan to give media interviews on marine dumping and littering. They also plan to visit local schools. "To spread the word about trying to keep our island clean is truly a joy for me," writes student Cheyenne Rankin. And in Guam, the Maniacs will monitor sea-turtle nests and stencil warnings on storm drains. The stencils will remind people not to dump harmful chemicals into waterways that flow into the sea.

The students in California, the Cayman Islands, and Guam will have plenty of company. Dive In To Earth events now account for a quarter of all Earth Day activities. Notes Recycler Melissa Brown, "My hope and desire is to see people come to appreciate and take care of what we have been so greatly blessed with, a clean and beautiful environment in which to live."

Pamela S. Turner

Test your ocean notions

THE MARINE MANIACS won last year's FishBowl, a marine academic competition for students from Guam and the Northern Marianas Islands. Their prize? Naming rights to an underwater volcano! (The Maniacs named the volcano Patgon Masala, after a mythical giant from Guam.) How many of these sample questions can you answer correctly?

- At what temperature do reef-building corals grow best?
 - 25 to 31 degrees C.
 - 75 to 82 degrees C.
 - 10 to 15 degrees C.
 - 40 to 50 degrees F.
- What geological period is known as the Age of Fishes?
 - Jurassic (208 million to 146 million years ago)
 - Silurian (440 million to 410 million years ago)
 - Devonian (410 million to 360 million years ago)
 - Triassic (245 million to 208 million years ago)
- What are the two most abundant elements in seawater?
 - Sodium (Na) and chlorine (Cl)
 - Nitrogen (N) and oxygen (O)
 - Hydrogen (H) and oxygen (O)
 - Carbon (C) and oxygen (O)
- What unique marine organism's scientific name is *Latimeria chalumnae*?
 - Bluefin tuna
 - Vampire squid
 - Leatherback turtle
 - Coelacanth

(1) a. Water clarity and salt content also affect coral growth. (2) c. Sharks, bony fishes, and lung fishes – also wingless insects and amphibians – developed then. (3) c. Sodium and chlorine form table salt, NaCl. Nitrogen and oxygen are the most common gases in our atmosphere. Carbon and oxygen make carbohydrates (sugars). Hydrogen and oxygen make H₂O. (4) d. The coelacanth (SEE-uh-cant) was known only as a fossil until a live specimen of the large fish was caught off South Africa in 1938.

ANSWERS: