

# Mangroves of Utila – A wasted treasure

By Steve Box Utila Centre for Marine Ecology



Flourishing mangrove

Approximately 80% of the total area of Utila, the smallest of the Bay Islands, is mangroves, wetlands and associated vegetation. Both the red mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*) and black mangrove (*Avicennia germinans*) are abundant on the island yet Utila has all of the four mangrove species that are found in the Caribbean.

The mangroves of Utila are an integral part of the islands economic and structural security. They protect the unstable sands and rubble, which make up most of the islands land, from storms and erosion by wave action. They are also essential to the future prosperity of the community because they maintain the health of coral reefs that supports fisheries



Mangrove destruction

and tourism, which both underpin the islands economy. Recent research has shown that areas of reefs associated with mangroves have up to 60% more fish present than similar areas that have no mangroves. These increases include important commercial fish such as the snappers as well as fish that are essential to the health of reefs such as parrotfish. In addition the mangroves of Utila support a wealth of biodiversity both above and below the waterline, are a signifi-

cant bio-filter improving lagoon water quality, and remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and in so doing form the base of multiple food webs.

So in short the mangroves of Utila are of huge biological and commercial value that is critical to the future prosperity of the island. However, whilst protected by local and national law (which prohibits their clearance) these essential habitats are increasingly being felled and filled in. Whilst the short term benefit of this may be increased land or access for the individual doing the felling, the long term repercussions of mangrove loss which will affect the entire community are being ignored.

Whilst new marinas, canals and access ways may seem "essential" to the islands prosperity, and filled in areas useful for business expansion, the real price of mangrove loss will be high. Think of a Utila that no longer has the protection which the mangroves give this low lying island, and what will support the economy if there are few fish left on the reefs either to catch or to entice tourists who spend their money on the island whilst diving.

Development and mangrove conservation do not have to be incompatible and in fact preserving mangroves during developments makes business sense, protecting your property and land from future erosion. The laws protecting mangroves were developed for good reason; to safe guard the prosperity of coastal communities who knowingly or unknowingly are reliant on these mangrove areas. Surely the community of Utila should start respecting and protecting these important resources rather than letting them go to waste.

*Aproximadamente 80% de la área total de Utila, el más pequeño de las Islas de la Bahía, son mangles, pantanos y vegetación asociada. El mangle rojo (*Rhizophora*) y el mangle negro (*Avicennia germinans*) son abundante en la isla pero Utila tiene todas las cuatro especies del mangle encontrados en el Caribe.*

*Los mangles de Utila son una parte esencial de la seguridad económica y estructural de las islas. Protegen las arenas y el escombros inestables de tempestades y erosión por la acción de onda. También son esenciales para la prosperidad futura de la comunidad porque ellos mantienen la salud de los arrecifes que sostienen pesquerías y turismo, que ambos apuntalamiento la economía de islas.*

*Investigación reciente ha mostrado que áreas de arrecifes asociados con mangles tienen hasta 60% más pez que áreas que no tienen los mangles. Estos aumentos incluyen pez comercial importante tal como los pargos así como pesca que son esencial para la salud de escollos y parrotfish. Además los mangles apoyan la abundancia de biodiversidad en Utila encima y debajo del nivel del agua, son un bio-filtro significativo que mejora la calidad de agua de laguna, y quita bióxido de carbono de la atmósfera y por eso forman la base de múltiples telarañas de alimento.*

*Así que en resumen los mangles de Utila son de inmenso valor biológico y comercial que es crítico para la prosperidad futura de la isla. Sin embargo, mientras protegido por la ley local y nacional (que prohíba quitar mangles) estos*



Aftermath

*hábitates esenciales están cada vez más derribados y llenados. Mientras el beneficio corto del término de esto pueda ser el aumento de la tierra o el acceso para el individuo que hace los llena, las repercusiones a largo plazo de la pérdida del mangle que afectará a la comunidad entera son ignoradas.*

*Mientras nuevos puertos deportivo, canales y accesos puedan parecer "esenciales" a la prosperidad de islas, y llenar áreas parece útil para la expansión del negocio, el precio verdadero de la pérdida del mangle será alto. Piense en un Utila que ya no tiene la protección que los mangles que dan a la isla, y lo que sostendrá la economía si hay poco pez en los arrecifes para agarrar o engatusar a turistas que gastan su dinero en la isla mientras bucean.*

*La conservación y desarrollo del mangle no tiene que ser incompatible y de hecho la preservación de mangle durante desarrollos hace sentido de la vista del negocio, protegiendo su propiedad y la tierra de la erosión futura. Las leyes que protegen los mangles fueron desarrolladas por razón buena; para asegurar la prosperidad de las comunidades costeras que dependen sin saberlo o astutamente de estas áreas del mangle. Seguramente la comunidad de Utila debe empezar el respeto y proteger estos recursos importantes antes que permitiendo que ellos ir a malgastar.*

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**Happy 1st Birthday Zeb!** from all your friends and family!

**Gefeliciteerd Mam** met je verjaardag op de 27ste! Leuk dat we het hier samen kunnen vieren! Ainhua, Matt & Izidor

**Happy 1st Birthday Izidor** from your mom and dad!

**Gefeliciteerd Izidor** met je eerste verjaardag van Oma, Opa en Tio Gaizka!

**Happy Birthday Izidor on the 30th** from all of us at the UEW and all your little friends!

**Happy Birthday Nanny** from Jake & Isabella

**"Getting there now!" Happy Birthday Erin** from all of us on Utila

**Happy Birthday Uncle Gareth** from Isabella and Jake

**Happy Birthday Daisy Coburn** 6 years old!

**Happy 39th Birthday Dad** from Naomi

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