

FEATURES

Where have our callaloo crabs gone?

IAN LAMBIE

MOST OF us Trinis and Tobagonians enjoy our “crab and callaloo” and our “crab and dumplin’”, but due to continuing over-hunting, continuing loss of habitat and an ever-increasing demand for our blue crabs the population is rapidly declining.

There is urgent need for legal protection and sustainable management programmes for our crabs, lobsters, conch, cascadura, crayfish and black conch, and other shellfish.

During the past four to five years market shoppers can often hear the question being asked, “Where have all the big crabs gone?” or “Dey asking so much for dem little crab!” Blue crabs (*Cardisoma guanhumi*) are becoming scarce. This is a fact known to all market shoppers whether in Trinidad or in Tobago. The demand for crabs has increased, while the crab habitat has gradually been reduced. In addition, there has been uncontrolled hunting of our crabs.

There is an urgent need for a management programme with the emphasis being placed on sustainability of our blue crab resources otherwise it can be pre-



Blue crab

dicted that within the next 20 to 30 years “crab and callaloo” and “crab and dumplings”, our Tobago specialty, will be delicacies of the past.

In TT, we do not have a “closed season” for the taking of crabs, neither is there a size limit, daily bag limit, sanctuary or any “no hunting areas” in either Trinidad or Tobago. The “open season” for crab hunting is 24 hours on each of the 365 days in the year, and crabs of any size and in any quantity may be taken.

To compound the issue, is the continuing loss of crab habitat:

our wetlands that are being reclaimed for building development. In Trinidad, over the past 60 years, the wetlands at Mucurapo, Westmoorings, Bayshore, Point Lisas and elsewhere—blue crab habitat, have been lost forever to housing and industrial development. Similarly, in Tobago most of the blue crab habitat at Lowlands, Bon Accord, Golden Grove, Buccoo, Bacolet, Roxborough and elsewhere has been lost forever to housing development.

In the absence of enforced legislation that provides for the protection of what remains of

our crab population, combined with a vigorous conservation education programme to sensitise our people to the benefits to be derived from the sustainable management of this population, one can predict within the not too distant future the extirpation of the crabs for our favourite crab dishes.

The Government must act now to prevent this from happening.

While the above appeal is for immediate action to protect what is left of our crab populations, we must recognise that, in addition to crabs, our lobsters and queen conch in Tobago, and our cascadura and black conch in Trinidad are facing similar threats, due to the absence of legal protection and continued over harvesting.

The Caribbean spiny lobster - *Panulirus argus*

The governments of most Caribbean and Central American countries (except Trinidad and Tobago) have enacted conservation legislation to sustainably manage this important marine resource.

These laws include:

- (a) a minimum size limit; (b) a daily catch or bag limit per per-



TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO FIELD NATURALISTS' CLUB

son; (c) prohibition of the taking of “berried” females; (d) prohibition of the taking of moulting individuals; (e) the requirement of a fishing permit; and, importantly (f) a “closed season” for the taking of lobsters. These laws are vigorously enforced and the penalties for their contravention are very high.

The Caribbean countries which observe a closed season for the taking of lobsters include:

- Belize mid-February to mid-June; The Bahamas: April 1 to July 31; Jamaica: April 1 to June 30; Dominican Republic: April 1 to July 31; Haiti: April 1 to September 30; St. Lucia: May 1 to August 31; St Vincent and the Grenadines: May 1 to August 31; Grenada and Carriacou: May 1 to August.

CRAW continues on page 7B

MAKE IT MULTIPLY



Just \$1.00 extra guarantees you 2x, 3x or even 4x your winnings every Monday, Thursday and Saturday when you match 3 or 4 numbers!





Cash Pot still \$4.00 per wager.



National Lottery Control Board

Must be 18 years and over to play.

WWW.NLCCB.CO.TT

FEATURES

Act now to protect shellfish fisheries

CRAB from page 6B
Studies by the Fish and Wildlife Research Institute have determined that the annual breeding season for Caribbean spiny lobsters is between the months of March and July.

Beginning in March 2010, a simultaneous closed season for the taking of spiny lobsters during the four-month period, March 1 to June 30 was adopted by the Central American countries from Belize to Panama. This four-month closed season was subsequently observed in 2011, 2012 and again in 2013.

The queen conch - *Strombus gigas*

In many Caribbean countries the queen conch is recognised as a very important food source both for local consumption and for export, and in some of these countries is second only to the spiny lobster as a fishery of economic importance.

As for lobsters, conservation laws have been enacted to sustainably manage this important resource throughout the region, with the exception of Trinidad and Tobago. These measures include: (a) the requirement of a fishing permit (Bahamas); (b) prohibition of foreign registered boats; (c) a minimum size limit; (d) a daily catch or bag limit per person; and importantly, (e) rigorous enforcement of a "closed season" for the taking of conch. In addition, in the Bahamas there are closed areas or "No-take Zones".

The Caribbean countries that observe a closed season for the taking of queen conch include: Belize: July 1 to September 30; The Bahamas: July 1 to September 30; Jamaica: July 1 to October 31;

The Cayman Islands: May 1 to October 31. It is to be noted that during the breeding season (March to September) conch migrate to shallower waters where they are unfortunately most vulnerable. The only queen conch farm in

the world is located in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Most of the produce from this farm is sent to the USA where it is packaged and exported to various countries including Trinidad and Tobago. Recently, large quantities of cleaned and

packaged conch imported from Grenada have become available here. The fishing for conch is prohibited in the USA, Honduras, Colombia, Venezuela and Haiti.

We need to act now to help ensure the sustainability of our shell-

fish fisheries and prevent over-extraction of this valuable resource. The law makers must understand this and take urgent action to end this continuing destruction. Yes, I like my "crab and callaloo" and my "crab and dumplin'" but we must take the

necessary steps now to ensure that generations yet unborn will also enjoy these delicacies.

For more info on our natural environment, you can contact the Trinidad and Tobago Field Naturalists' Club at admin@ttfnc.org or visit our website

at www.ttfnc.org and our Facebook or YouTube pages. The club's next monthly meeting will be held on

March 10 at St Mary's College, Port-of-Spain. Lecture: "Amphibians of the Aripo Savanna" by Renoir Auguste.

KFC

ALL INCLUSIVE LAST LAP

\$35
Large Popcorn Chicken
1 Regular side
116oz. drink

Go all-in
Add 1 large Popcorn Chicken for
\$25
when you spend \$25 or more!

KFC
so good