



**Toledo Institute for Development and Environment
Report to the Massachusetts Audubon Society
29 June 2008**



Funding from the Massachusetts Audubon Society allowed the Toledo Institute for Development and Environment (TIDE) to build a palapa (shade structure) at West Snake Caye in the Port Honduras Marine Reserve of southern Belize. Tourists, coral enthusiasts, bird watchers and weekend recreational visitors have made West Snake Caye one of the most popular destinations in the reserve. Only about fourteen of the cayes in Port Honduras have upland areas suitable for visitation – attractive beach areas

are available on West Snake Caye, Abalone Caye, South Snake Caye and Moho Caye. With 190 feet of shifting white beach and snorkeling on the fringing reefs, most visitors stop at West Snake Caye.

“After a while, we headed on to West Snake Caye. A spectacular view welcomed us, the dark blue ocean that suddenly turns turquoise blue at the caye, the white sand beach and the palm trees. Like right out of a picture book. Swimming, lunch, and some more swimming¹.”



The Port Honduras Marine Reserve is 160 miles recognized for high biodiversity, with a robust belt of unaltered mangroves and sandy coasts that provide a critical link between terrestrial and marine environments. Approximately 4,500 people live in adjacent communities, with additional fishing pressure stemming from poachers. The reserve encompasses estuarine near shore communities and extends to protect fringing reefs. There are over a one hundred small mangrove-fringed cayes and benthic habitats comprised of soft-bottom seagrass beds, reefal bank and fringing reefs unique to the country.

The palapa provides a place to rest in the shade, enjoy a picnic and change clothes and enhances the experience of the visitor to Port Honduras Marine Reserve.

¹ Fisher, A. (October 2004) *A perfect day with Jackie in the Port of Honduras Marine Reserve*, BELIZEmagazine.com

Funding from the Massachusetts Audubon Society also permits a fuller staffing of the sub-ranger station (*built through the generosity of the Nature Conservancy and Seacology*) on West Snake Caye in the Port Honduras Marine Reserve increase surveillance in Port Honduras to prevent illegal activities, allow for the collection of user fees, and ensure visitor safety.



Surveillance and patrol of the Port Honduras Marine Reserve is a critical factor in ensuing resource protection. Rangers conduct patrols day and night and are stationed primarily at the Abalone Caye Ranger Station. Rangers are also able to maintain a stronger presence at West Snake Caye at the sub-ranger station. Both stations have surveillance towers that allow staff on the caye to monitor activity and communicate with rangers at sea. Rangers spend time on land and at sea, monitoring activity and explaining the laws and regulations to users of the Port Honduras Marine Reserve.

TIDE is working with the Oak Foundation and others to identify funding that will allow TIDE to purchase the lease hold for West Snake Caye. TIDE, through our funders, has invested a great deal in the infrastructure on the caye to maintain it in a primarily pristine state. A small kitchen will be added for the rangers. Funding for compost toilets on the caye is being sought. Picnic tables and curtained changing areas will be added to the palapa area to augment the comfort of visitors.

