

YOUTH PROGRAMS

Environmental and Cultural Education
Experiences

SEASON REPORT 2023/24



OVERVIEW

Engaging our youth is a fundamental investment in the future of conservation and our island community. Friends of Virgin Islands National Park's Youth Programs aim to create a pipeline of environmental and cultural educational experiences for youth from preschool to college and beyond that encourage empathy for plant and animal life and promote environmental stewardship and community engagement!

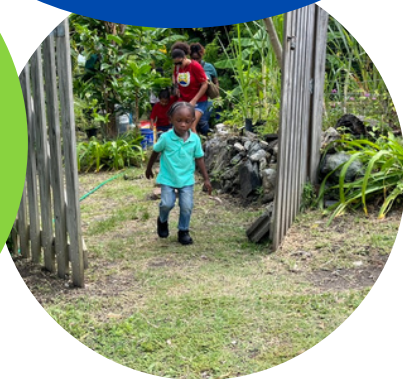
During 2023/24 Friends' Youth Programs included:

- **School Kids In The Park (SKIP):** This season the SKIP Program facilitated 72 opportunities to learn including 57 field trips, 13 in-class presentations and 2 all-school events (Earth Day and Culture Day) engaging St. John and St. Thomas students from 10 schools.
- **Learn To Swim:** Over 100 youth and adults attended free swim clinics that took place every second Saturday throughout the year and every weekday during the summer.
- **Summer Camp Learning:** 300 youth from St. John and St. Thomas Summer camps participated in over 70 hikes, visits to Annaberg, Learn To Fish, Learn To Swim, and presentations on turtles, plants, fish, birds, drumming, johnny cake baking, and more.
- **Summer Trail Crew:** 15 students participated in this eight-week summer job opportunity for Virgin Island high school students ages 15 to 18.
- **Scholarships and Internships:** 7 students received undergraduate scholarships for the 2023/24 academic year and interned on projects like climate science education and snorkel guide development.

The Friends' Youth Programs are possible thanks to our members and donors, our community education and business partners, our National Park counterparts, and public and private grants. Thank you for sharing our passion for nurturing our youth. Your support makes a difference.

Not all classrooms have four walls

BY THE NUMBERS

SKIP**57**
field trips**13**
classroom
presentations**952**
students from
10 schools**2**
all-school
events**15**
summer trail
crew youth**summer in**
the park**300**
campers
from 7 camps**70**
educational &
swim sessions**7**
undergraduate
scholarships**nurturing the**
conservationists
of the future

SCHOOL KIDS IN THE PARK (SKIP) PROGRAM

The School Kids In The Park (SKIP) program aims to encourage educators to utilize the Park as a “living classroom” by facilitating visits to the Park and working to remove barriers that may limit students' participation like transportation costs. These trips to the Park offer options for your class to explore and learn in the park and include beach talks about sea turtles, visits to the Annaberg historic district, bird walks, nature and plant walks, and hiking the National Park Service Network to Freedom trail in Leinster Bay.

Following best practices in STEM education, SKIP is structured to offer interactive learning experiences that build cognitive development, critical thinking, and math and science skills. The program aims to encourage empathy for plant and animal life and promote environmental stewardship and community engagement.

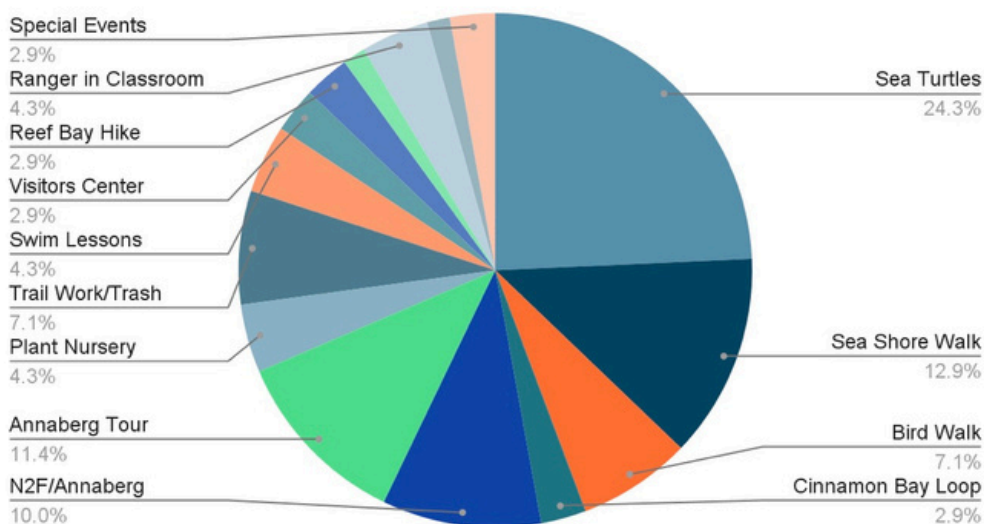
SKIP strives to achieve a 3 Touch Model including an in-class presentation or pre-trip educational videos and resources, a field trip to the park, and a follow-up survey and email with education materials. In all 952 students from 10 schools on St. John and St. Thomas participated in 72 field trips and classroom presentations during the 2023/24 academic year

Field Trips and Classroom Presentations

This season, the School Kids in the Park (SKIP) Program facilitated 72 opportunities to learn including 57 field trips, 13 in-class presentations and 2 all-school events serving 952 students. In all 10 local Title 1, private and parochial schools on St. John and St. Thomas participated: Julius E. Sprauve School, St. John Christian Academy, Giffit Hill School, Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, Bertha B. Boschulte Middle School, Lockhart Elementary, Montessori School, Antilles School, STT/STJ 7th Day Adventists, and homeschool pods on both islands.

Field trips that were offered this year include: Network to Freedom hike, Annaberg tour, Sea Turtle Presentation, Leinster Bay Seashore Walk, Francis Bay Bird Walk, Cinnamon Bay Loop trail hike, Iowa State University Mangrove Presentation, Volunteer with Friends Trail Crew and a Tour of Friends Plant Nursery. Additional trips that took place this season included Caribbean Oceanic Restoration and Education Foundation (CORE) presentation, Friends Learn to Swim Lessons, NPS-led hike on Reef Bay trail with a boat pickup back to Cruz Bay, and a Tour of NPS Visitor Center. Demonstrators and educators are drawn from Friends staff, National Park Service staff, and local community experts and culture bearers.

Field Trips





4th Grade Junior Ranger Program

The National Park Service across the United States focuses particularly on fourth grade classrooms through their Junior Ranger program. The Junior Ranger program is an activity based program inviting students to complete an activity book and take a field trip into the park before being sworn in as official Junior Rangers. The swearing in includes the recitation of the Junior Ranger oath to "Protect parks, continue to learn about parks, and share their own ranger story with friends and family!" NPS Rangers then sign the certificates in their workbooks and students receive their official Junior Ranger Badge and their Every Kid Outdoors pass which allows them and their parents to access federal lands without paying an entrance fee. All 32 fourth graders on St. John were sworn in as Junior Rangers at the annual Friends Earth Day Fair.

Online Resource Library

During the scheduling process for field trips, a link to the Friends Virtual Resource Library is sent to the trip lead. On our website, teachers can take advantage of educational videos, articles, audio recordings and reports to accomplish Step 1 of the Three Touch Model and prepare students for their field trip. Through our resource library, classrooms can virtually follow Retired Ranger Golda Hermon on the Cinnamon Bay Loop trail, and Retired Ranger Laurel Brannick giving her Leinster Bay Seashore Walk and Francis Bay Bird Walk as well as learning all about the endangered sea turtles found in our waters. They can listen to an oral history of St. John told by local St. Johnians and scientists, and hear from culture bearers who have participated in the Folk Life Festival in the Passing It On documentary.

Accessibility & Financial Support

The SKIP program works to remove any barriers that limit students from accessing the National Park. To remove the biggest barrier, transportation, the Friends is able to pay for all transportation services on St. John. In an effort to reach more classrooms on St. Thomas, the SKIP program also purchases ferry tickets for Title 1 schools, in addition to taxi services on St. John. Special thanks to Varlack Ventures, Chico's Taxi and Island Vibz and Whiz Taxi for providing transportation services at a discounted rate for student trips.

In addition to funding transportation, the Friends offers mini educator grants of up to \$500 to help teachers purchase STEM supplies and materials that may be used to elevate the learning experience. Examples of STEM materials include magnifying glasses, microscopes, water quality testing kits, field guides, maps and more!

All School Events: Culture Day and Earth Day

Culture Day and Earth Day are school events that celebrate the natural and cultural resources in the Virgin Islands. They are open to all local schools and all ages and aim to encourage a sense of community and shared curiosity beyond individual classrooms and schools.

Culture Day continues the 33 year history of Virgin Islands National Park's Annual Folk Life Festival. This day celebrates and promotes the rich culture of the Virgin Islands every February which is Black History month. This year 430 students from St. John schools and several 4th grade classes from Lockhart Elementary on St. Thomas came out to celebrate!

Students moved from booth to booth interacting with local culture bearers and scientists to learn about St. John's natural and cultural resources and Virgin Island heritage. Booths at this year's event included Bamboula Dancing, Taino Culture & History, Caribbean Archaeology, Drumming, Moko Jumbie Heritage, Local Plants & Their Historical/Medicinal Values, Local Crafts, Local Food & Drinks, and more. 10 students from the University of the Virgin Islands contributed to community engagement by volunteering at the event.

Friends of Virgin Islands Annual Earth Day Fair celebration took place in Powell Park in April with 505 students from all three St. John schools as well as Lockhart Elementary from St. Thomas attending.

The Fair focuses on learning how to work and live sustainably in the Virgin Islands. Students participated in a Litter Stomp Parade, showcased artwork, songs and dances they had created, participated in a Junior Ranger Award Ceremony, and visited booths from a broad range of organizations. Subjects learned about included coral reef protection, Cruz Bay history, birds, plants, turtles, recycling, and mangrove protection.





Friends of Virgin Islands National Park
LEARN TO SWIM

FREE SATURDAY SWIM CLASSES AT CINNAMON
 LEARN HOW TO SWIM, TREAD WATER, OR REFINE YOUR TECHNIQUE

AGES 4+ WELCOME! ADULTS AND KIDS!

EVERY FIRST AND THIRD SATURDAY MORNING ON CINNAMON BAY BEACH (LEFT OF THE RUINS)

9:30AM-11:30AM | SWIM CLINIC

Free transportation is available from/to Cruz Bay. Morning departure from Cruz Bay is 8:30am. Return leaves Cinnamon at 11:40am.

EVERYONE WHO ATTENDS AT LEAST FOUR LESSONS WILL RECEIVE PERSONAL SWIM GEAR AND A RASH GUARD.

REGISTER TODAY AT
WWW.FRIENDSVINP.ORG

LEARN LOVE RESPECT

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park
LEARN TO SWIM

CLASES DE NATACION GRATIS LOS SABADOS EN CINNAMON
 APRENDE A NADAR, FLOTAR, O REFINAR TU TÉCNICA

BIENVENIDOS ADULTOS Y NIÑOS DE 4 AÑOS EN ADELANTE!

CADA PRIMER Y TERCER SÁBADO DEL MES EN LA PLAYA DE CINNAMON BAY (A LA IZQUIERDA DE LAS RUINAS)

9:30AM-11:30AM

Transportación gratis saliendo y volviendo a Cruz Bay Sale de Cruz Bay a las 8:30am y sale a las 11:40am de Cinnamon para volver a Cruz Bay

TODOS LOS QUE PARTICIPEN EN AL MENOS 4 CLASES RECIBIRÁN EQUIPO DE NATACION PERSONAL Y UNA CAMISA PROTECTORA

REGÍSTRATE HOY EN
WWW.FRIENDSVINP.ORG

LEARN LOVE RESPECT



LEARN TO SWIM

More than a safety issue being able to swim opens up a world of joy above and below the water as well as employment opportunities in the tourism and marine industries and areas like marine research and conservation. Friends of Virgin Islands National Park believes that everyone on our island should be able to swim.

Friends has offered free swim lessons to the St. John community for more than a decade. Our Learn to Swim program is designed after the American Red Cross Water Safety Course and includes beginner to advance instruction levels for all ages. Friends sponsors the training and employment of instructors and life guards and provides transportation to and from Cruz Bay.

In 2023/24, over 100 youth and adults attended free swim clinics that took place every second Saturday throughout the year and every weekday during the summer. Summer campers participated in 24 swim clinics focused on getting swimmers comfortable in the water and improving their skills with 60 swimmers at Level 1, 20 moving up to Level 2 and 5 moving to Level 3 (Red Cross Water Competency Levels).



SUMMER CAMP LEARNING

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park offered Learn To Swim, Learn To Fish, and School Kids in the Park (SKIP) programming to the 4 summer camp providers on St. John: Sports, Parks, & Recreation, Boys and Girls Club, Art and Literacy Initiative and Giffit Hill School. 115 St. John campers learned the basics of swimming and water safety while also gaining an appreciation and understanding of the natural and cultural resources of Virgin Islands National Park.

Each of these summer camps received a combination of in-water swimming lessons and onshore educational activities. In all, Friends of Virgin Islands National Park funded and managed 34 educational sessions and hikes as well as 24 Learn To Swim classes and a two week Learn To Fish program over a 9 week period.

Swimming lessons were directed by our Learn to Swim Coordinator, Tara Murza, with support from a cohort of certified lifeguards and swim instructors. The onshore educational experiences were organized by Friends' Program Manager, Taylor White, and consisted of presentations by local scientists, subject matter experts, culture bearers and community partners. In addition to presentations and swim lessons at Cinnamon Bay, all summer campers hiked the Leinster Bay Network to Freedom Trail, and received a tour of Annaberg Historic District with a National Park Service ranger and visited with the Annaberg cultural demonstrators.

Learn To Fish/Junior Angler was a new addition this summer and was offered to 10 Sports, Parks & Recreation campers. The two week program led by Enzo Newhard focused on teaching the basics of sustainable fishing in Virgin Islands National Park. Workshops were led by ancestral fisherfolk, expert anglers, marine biologists, and Friends staff on the history of fishing, the laws of fishing, types, sizes and eligible "take" options, the appropriate safe sites, and proper use of fishing gear. Thanks to a grant from the National Park Foundation, all the necessary fishing gear was provided and participants were able to take home a rod and tackle box upon completion of the program.

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park also supported 200 campers from 3 St. Thomas summer camps: Yvonne E. Milliner-Bowsky Elementary Camp, Rising Stars Youth Steel Pan Orchestra, and the University of Virgin Islands Camp with a guided tour of Annaberg with a National Park ranger and the 3 Annaberg cultural demonstrators. One camp also hiked the Network to Freedom trail and another visited Trunk Bay.

SUMMER YOUTH TRAIL CREW

Summer Trail Crew is an eight week summer job opportunity for Virgin Islands high school students aged 15 to 18. This program is an opportunity for students to gain professional experience, develop leadership skills, work outdoors as part of a team, and learn about Virgin Islands National Park. As the next generation of environmental stewards, participants gain an appreciation and passion for the natural world and conservation.

This year, the hard working, dedicated crew consisted of 15 youth, 4 of whom were returning for a third year. The participants were V'Kesha Adams (crew leader), Jack Oram (crew leader), Kemoi Thomas (crew leader), Aleja Meade, Ebony Torres Cordero, Romari Munoz, Aubrey Logsdon, Tumayah Bartlette, Xenia Brathwaite, Taire Barnes, Alexia Brookes, Taila Williams, Shari Raphael, Makaiya Woodrup and K'Nyah Molyneaux. They were supervised by Friends' Trails Coordinator, Frank Barton.

The crew performed trail work, habitat restoration, and historic site maintenance throughout the Park. Trail work was interspersed with learning opportunities including CPR and First Aid, financial literacy, recycling, swimming, and presentations from local experts on traditional arts and crafts, sea turtles, coral, native plants and frogs. Every Friday is Friday Fun Day with students enjoying recreational activities such as paddle boarding, kayaking, snorkeling, scuba diving, cooking local foods, and yoga.



SCHOLARSHIPS & INTERNSHIPS

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park offers two undergraduate scholarship programs to local high school seniors or undergraduate students studying in a field related to natural and cultural resource conservation: the Jeffery Matheny Scholarship and the Noble Samuel Scholarship and Internship. In the 2023/24 academic year, 7 students received scholarships.

The Jeffery Matheny Scholarship was established in 2010 by his family in recognition of Jeffery's love of St John and supports Virgin Islands students at the university level studying fields related to natural resource management and protection. Recipients of this scholarship for the 2023/24 academic year were Una Alexander (Howard University), Lindsay Barr (Colorado State University), Caliyah Helliger (Howard University), and Lyric Vacharat (University of North Carolina Wilmington).

The Noble Samuel Scholarship and Internship launched in 2021 is endowed by anonymous donors inspired by the life of Noble Samuel who was a beloved ranger in the Virgin Islands National Park known for generously sharing his love for our park with passion and humility. Recipients of this scholarship, which is inclusive of a paid internship, were Ki'Janne' Alfred (Stetson University), Sanaa Burke (University of Delaware), and Kaj Gerard (University of Virgin Islands).

Through the Friends internship program, these students also contributed to summer camp curriculum content and demonstrations and aided with research for the Friends snorkeling app.



Visit our website to learn more
www.friendsvinp.org