

## YOUTH EDUCATION PROGRAMS

### Season Report 2024/25

Engaging our youth is a fundamental investment in the future of conservation and our island community. Friends of Virgin Islands National Park's Youth Education 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!

Highlights of a successful 2024/25 season:

- School Kids In The Park (SKIP) aims to encourage educators to use the park as a "living classroom," In all, 76 educational opportunities were facilitated, including 62 field trips, 12 in-class presentations and 2 all school events. In total the SKIP program serviced 1,315 students on St. John and St. Thomas from 18 schools.
- School Events: 1,030 students from St. John and St. Thomas schools attended Culture Day and Earth Day Fairs.
- Learn To Swim: 240 youth and adults attended free clinics that took place every Saturday throughout the year and every weekday during the summer. Being able to swim is an important safety issue, not to mention being the pathway to a world of joy above and below the water as well as a number of employment opportunities in the tourism and marine industries and areas like marine research and conservation.
- Summer Camps: Swimming, fishing and eco-lessons provided to 180 students from 4 summer camps.
- Learn To Fish: 15 students learned the basics of sustainable fishing in Virgin Islands National Park over the summer.
- Summer Trail Crew: 11 high schoolers participated in this eight week summer job opportunity for students to gain professional experience, develop leadership skills, work outdoors as part of a team, and learn about Virgin Islands National Park
- Undergraduate Scholarships: 8 scholarships were awarded thanks to the Jeffery Matheny Scholarship and the Noble Samuel Scholarship and Internship.

NOT ALL  
CLASSROOMS  
HAVE FOUR  
WALLS



# 2024/25 BY THE NUMBERS

# LEARNING IS FUN

# SKIP

# School Kids In The Park

# 62 field trips

# 12 classroom presentations

**1,315  
students from  
18 schools**

# learn to swim

**240** youth/adults  
taught to swim

**34** instructors/lifeguards trained or recertified

2

## all-school events

**1,030  
student  
attendees**

**180 summer campers  
from 4 camps**

## 11 summer trail crew

9

## undergraduate scholarships



15

# learn to fish students



# NURTURING THE CONSERVATIONISTS OF THE FUTURE.

# SCHOOL KIDS IN THE PARK (SKIP)

The School Kids in the Park (SKIP) program encourages educators to use the park as a “living classroom,” facilitates visits to the park, and works to remove barriers that may limit students’ participation by covering transportation costs and more! The Friends organization has enabled thousands of youth and their educators to establish a personal connection with their Virgin Islands National Park.

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

This season, the School Kids in the Park (SKIP) Program facilitated 76 educational opportunities, including 62 field trips, 12 in-class presentations and 2 all school events. In total the SKIP program serviced 1,315 students on St. John and St. Thomas!

Field trips and education sessions that were offered included Sea Turtle Presentation, Network to Freedom/Annaberg Tour, Seashore or Bird Walk, Cinnamon Bay Loop hike, Volunteering on Trail Crew, Visitor Center Talk, Plant Nursery Tour, hiking Ram Head and Lind Point trails, presentations from our Young Professionals Board, and interactive viewings of “Out There: A National Parks Story” film.

Overall, 18 local Title 1, private and parochial schools participated in SKIP (3 STJ, 15 STT) including Gifft Hill School, Julius E. Sprauve School, St. John Christian Academy, Bertha B. Boschulte Middle School, Edith Williams Alternative Academy, Lockhart Elementary, Jane E. Tuitt Elementary, Joseph Gomez Elementary, Joseph Sibilly Elementary, Ulla Muller Elementary, Yvonne E. Milliner-Bowsky Elementary, Charlotte Amalie High School, Ivanna Eudora Kean High School, Antilles School, Montessori, All Saints Cathedral, Sunshine Sprouts and Good Leaf School.

During the scheduling process of the 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 help students understand what to expect on their field trip.



**62 FIELD TRIPS**

**12 IN CLASSROOM PRESENTATIONS**

**1,315 STUDENTS**

**18 SCHOOLS ON ST. JOHN & ST. THOMAS**

**EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES**

**TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**FINANCIAL SUPPORT**

**THE PARK IS A “LIVING CLASSROOM”**



# SCHOOL EVENTS

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park holds two all school events to foster community and share the rich cultural and natural resources found in the Virgin Islands.

## 2 SCHOOL EVENTS



### CULTURE DAY

- 570 STUDENTS
- 8 SCHOOLS
- 20 BOOTHES



### EARTH DAY

- 470 STUDENTS
- 5 SCHOOLS
- 30 BOOTHES
- 1 LITTER STOMP PARADE

### Culture Day

Culture Day for schools continues the 34 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, Black History month. This year, 570 students from St. John and St. Thomas participated in the event. A number of 4th grade classrooms from St. Thomas also joined in the celebration including Lockhart, Yvonne E. Milliner-Bowsky, Joseph Sibilly, Joseph Gomez and Jane E. Tuitt Elementary. Students were able to travel from booth to booth and interact with local culture bearers and scientists to learn about the Guinao Taino Tribe of Virgin Islands, St. John history, Caribbean archeology, Bamboula dancing, traditional and medicinal uses of local plants, drumming, Moko Jumbie heritage, traditional food carving, local juices, and more!

### Earth Day

This year's Earth Day Fair was the 16<sup>th</sup> annual fair hosted by Friends and is part of a week long celebration of conservation and community with hundreds of school students from St. John and St. Thomas gathering for a fun day of learning. The Fair kicked off with a Litter Stomp Parade led by VI Waste Management's Litter Critter. Students marched in the parade with posters and crowns to raise awareness about protecting our planet and conserving its resources. Booths at the event this year included numerous organizations, nonprofits, federal organizations and local advocates to teach youth about conservation in the USVI. 470 students from the 3 St. John schools, and students from Jane E. Tuitt and Montessori on St. Thomas learned about marine life, plants, recycling, sustainability, and more! In addition, 4th grade students presented their completed Junior Ranger workbooks to the National Park Rangers, recited the Junior Rangers Oath, and were sworn in as official Junior Rangers by the National Park Service.



Photos by  
Nancy Borowick



# 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. We believe that everyone on our island should be able to swim.

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park 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.

This season 190 youth attended swim sessions on Saturdays and as part of summer camps. 14 instructors and 19 lifeguards were newly trained or WSI re-certified and Tara Murza, who coordinates the Learn To Swim Program became a certified trainer.



## 240 YOUTH/ADULTS TAUGHT TO SWIM

- 50 IN SATURDAY SESSIONS
- 190 IN SUMMER FROM 4 SUMMER CAMPS



## 34 INSTRUCTORS & LIFEGUARDS TRAINED

- 19 NEW/RECERTIFIED LIFEGUARDS
- 14 NEW/RECERTIFIED INSTRUCTORS
- 1 TRAINER



# LEARN TO FISH

Fishing is a significant aspect of Virgin Islands life and culture. Our Learn to Fish Program presents a valuable opportunity to engage the next generation of conservationists with meaningful outdoor experiences and educate them on the fish species in our waters, safe and sustainable fishing practices, healthy living, and environmental protection.

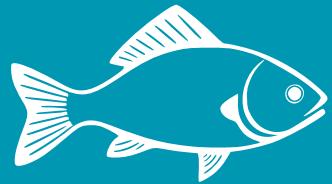
over the summer, 15 Virgin Islands youth (ages 9-15) participated in three workshops over three weeks learning to fish from shore and from a boat.

All the necessary fishing gear was provided, and participants took home a rod and reel upon completion of the program. During the program, the junior anglers learned about the history of fishing, the laws of fishing, types, sizes and eligible "take" options, the appropriate safe sites, and proper use of fishing gear.



15

YOUTH TAUGHT TO  
FISH



# SUMMER TRAIL CREW

The Friends of Virgin Islands National Park's Summer Trail Crew is an 8 week program that provides a professional job opportunity to Virgin Islands high school students (ages 15 to 18) interested in conservation. This year the 11 crew members worked hard clearing trails and historic sites, planted at the senior center, gained CPR skills, learned about turtles and marine ecosystems as well as the traditional uses of plants. They also had fun in and on the water.

Summer Trail Crew 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. The crew works in the park on St. John under the supervision of the Friends Trails Coordinator. One of the goals of the Summer Trail Crew program is to help the participants gain an appreciation and passion for the natural world, conservation, and environmental stewardship. It is common for crew members to return for consecutive years.



# UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

Friends of Virgin Islands National Park awarded nine scholarships to Virgin Islands youth studying at the undergraduate level in 2024/25. The awards totaling \$42,500 fall under the auspices of the Friends' two scholarship programs: the Jeffery Matheny Scholarship and the Noble Samuel Scholarship and Internship.

The **Jeffery Matheny Scholarship** was established in 2010 by his family in recognition of Jeffery's love of St John and is awarded to a St. John or St. Thomas student who is attending or entering an accredited college or university with a declared or intended major in a field related to the protection and management of natural resources in the Virgin Islands. Recipients of this scholarship for the 2024-25 academic year are Una Alexander (Howard University), Lindsay Barr (Colorado State University), Caliyah Helliger (Howard University), Lyric Vacharat (University of North Carolina Wilmington) and Dennis Bigrigg (University of Virgin Islands).

The **Noble Samuel Scholarship and Internship** was created in 2021 and is inspired by Park Ranger, Noble Samuel. The scholarship reflects the values embodied by Noble Samuel and supports students who demonstrate a commitment to community, stewardship, and sustainability of the territory. The Noble Samuel Scholarship is awarded to a St. John or St. Thomas student who is attending or entering an accredited college or university with a declared or intended major in a field that contributes to the environmental, social, or economic well-being of the Virgin Islands. Recipients of this scholarship, which is inclusive of a paid internship, are Sanaa Burke (University of Delaware), Kaj Gerard (University of Virgin Islands), Maxim McMahon (University of Virgin Islands) and Ameir Sprauve (University of Virgin Islands).

In their application essays, first time scholarship recipients, Maxim McMahon and Dennis Bigrigg both attributed their passion for conservation to vibrant childhoods in the Virgin Islands.

Maxim who is studying marine biology at UVI and is an avid scuba diver and longtime lifeguard in the Friends Learn To Swim program as well as a former member of the Summer Trail Crew, wrote: "Through research and advocacy, I hope to develop and implement strategies to protect our marine ecosystems and promote sustainable practices. My vision for the future includes thriving reefs, abundant fish populations, and a flourishing tourism industry that respects and benefits our natural resources."



2 UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

9 SCHOLARSHIPS AWARDED