

# Annual SEA Earth Day EcoFair Provides Outdoor Classroom

BY CAROL BUCHANAN — APRIL 23, 2015 (TAKEN FROM ST. CROIX SOURCE.COM)



[Ras Lumumba of Ay-Ay Eco Hike shows students how to weave items from screw pine \(Carol Buchanan photos\).](#)

What better classroom for about 700 St. Croix students on Earth Day 2015 than the St. George Village Botanical Garden? On hand to give lessons and answer questions on subjects as varied as recycling, global warming and renewable energy were representatives from two dozen organizations and agencies.

Thursday wrapped up a two-day event that had roughly 400 students attending on Wednesday and 300 on Thursday. The topics were varied but the message was the same for the students – “This is our earth, our environment. We are responsible for taking care of it.” This year’s theme is “It’s Our Turn to Lead.”

Activities at stations spread around the gardens ranged from 15 to 30 minutes each and included games, quizzes, nature hiking and demonstrations.

Eulalie Rivera sixth-grade teacher Jasmine French-Thomas said it was a great way to expose students to various local environmental issues all in one place.

“This is a wonderful educational experience for the students,” French-Thomas said.

The 22nd annual Earth Day EcoFair was organized by the St. Croix Environmental Association and sponsored by the V.I. Water and Power Authority.

All around the lush green lawn of the great house, tents were set up providing some shade for the students and presenters. The walking tours were through shady rain forest areas of the garden.

[Olasee Davis from the UVI Cooperative Extension Services talks about pests on bougainvillea.](#)



Local “bush lady” Veronica Gordon, Ras Lumumba of Ay-Ay Eco Hike and Tours, and Olasee Davis from the University of the Virgin Islands Cooperative Extension Services gave the walking tours. They asked the students to pay attention and be observant of their surroundings as they explained names and uses of trees and fruits.

“The East End Marine Park belongs to you and future generations,” interpretive park ranger John Farchette told the students.

He gave information on the park location, size and natural resources within the boundaries of the park that are out in the Caribbean sea.

Eulalie Rivera Elementary fifth-grade teacher Catherine Brown said her students were really impressed with the idea that the Marine Park belongs to them. Brown said the EcoFair is perfect because SEA gets a variety of presenters and not the same year after year.

Nadija Packauskas, outreach director for CORE Caribbean Oceanic Restoration and Education Foundation, spoke about lion fish and taking 6,000 of them out of local waters. Packauskas had the children take a pledge to become ambassadors and good stewards of the sea.



*Students rest by a fountain at the great house.*

Kris Vandenberg, a SEA volunteer, showed the students recycled items reused and made into art and useful items. Carol Burke, SEA program director, hiked with the students conducting a bird habitat assessment scavenger hunt looking for crucial things birds need in their habitat.

Renaldo Rivera and Adrian Fernandez, National Park Service law enforcement park rangers, spoke about the importance of keeping the island clean and why littering is considered a crime. Rivera said the students had no idea littering was a crime and people could be arrested and fined.

The students had a checklist of 12 pieces of litter to find and identify in an area rangers cordoned off as a crime scene with yellow tape.

“We asked the kids what they know about crime and they only think about violent crime,” Rivera said. The rangers told students how the crime of littering affects natural resources and why it has to be stopped.

The Jazzy Blue Band members helped students create rap songs with environmental and nature lyrics. Botanical Garden volunteer Michael Mongeau helped children plant pepper, tomato and chive seeds to take home.

[Veronica Gordon shows students the unique blossoms on a cannon ball tree.](#)



V.I. Waste Management Authority representatives hosted a quiz bowl on recycling. Lee Elvins, from the Recycling Association of the Virgin Islands, talked to the students about can recycling and gave each teacher a manual can crusher.

Juanita Gardine fifth-grader Chrismel Berra said, “I learned a lot of new stuff.”

Betanya Green, also a fifth-grader at Juanita Gardine, said it was a good idea to celebrate Earth Day because they learned what happens to the reefs when there is pollution.

N'Neka Fenton, a teacher's assistant at Eulalie Rivera, said her students were recording and writing everything down they observed and learned.

“We're very proud of their independence and working on their own,” Fenton said.

On Wednesday students marched to protest litter in the “Litter Stomp” down Queen Mary Highway from the Waste Management offices to the garden.



[SEA volunteer Kris Vandenberg shows students art made from recyclables.](#)

There were around 40 teachers with students from Alfredo Andrews, AZ Academy, Church of God Holiness Academy, Claude O. Markoe, Good Hope Country Day, Eulalie Rivera, Evelyn M. Williams, Lew Muckle, Pearl B. Larsen, and Seventh-day Adventist elementary schools.

EcoFair's participating organizations and agencies included Ay-Ay Eco Hike and Tours, Caribbean Oceanic Restoration and Education Foundation (CORE), Jazzy Blue Band, National Park Service, Seven Seas Water, St. Croix Environmental Association, St. George Village Botanical Garden, UVI Cooperative Extension Services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Veronica Gordon, V.I. Energy Office, V.I. Marine Advisory Service, V.I. Public Television, V.I. Waste Management Authority, WAPA, East End Marine Park, DPNR and Youth Engagement Enhancement Education Programs.