

## A MICRO VACATION on ROATAN

by E. Shary Almasi

Late, the night after this past Thanksgiving, Drew Skinner and I boarded a plane for Houston, our first leg of a journey to Roatan Island off the coast of Honduras. Arriving in Houston we had an 8 hour wait before departing for Honduras...Before our departure we met with Emilio Garcia. Emilio had invited us to join him for a week of 'relaxed' shelling. The weather was less than perfect - windy and rainy but we did land safely at Coxen Hole, which is situated near the south west end of Roatan Island. We then hailed a taxi and headed for Oak Ridge, which is about 15 miles from Coxen Hole. All in all, we traveled about 18 hours before arriving on the island! On the way we stopped in French Harbor at a supermarket to purchase groceries needed for the next few days. Near the 'village' of Oak Ridge we drove down to the water and unloaded our baggage. We then hired a 'water' taxi to take us a short distance out to the Cay where we would be staying. Thus, Drew and I found that any time you want to go anywhere you must get a water taxi to pick you up and drop you on the first leg of a journey. Cell phones are absolutely a must as we learned that the land line telephone service leaves much to be desired.



Drew Skinner photo

'The village' of Oak Ridge with the Cay in the background.

Emilio has a friend who very kindly rents her vacation home to him when he feels the need to get away from it all. The house is large and very comfortable. A caretaker, Victor and his wife, Marta look after the house and happily, they look after the guests too. It was 'Wonderful' ...

Sunday – Sorry to say that when we looked out at the sea, Drew and I thought we might still be back in Seattle. The rain came down for the best part of the day but during one break I snorkeled in very shallow water, and came away with *Trachypollia nodulosa* C. B. Adams, 1845; *Rissoina decussata* (Montagu, 1803); *Hyalina avena* (Kiener, 1834); *Arcopsis adamsi* (Dall, 1886); *Engina turbinella* (Kiener, 1835); an exquisite little *Arene cruentata* (Muhlfeld, 1829); and *Fissurella nodosa* (Born, 1778). All were under rocks in just a foot or two of water. Happily, all fit into my film cartridge! Later we had a water taxi pick us up and headed for Lucy Point, beyond Oak Ridge. There, Emilio and Drew went landsnailing and Drew found the operculate *Alcudia jansonii* (von Martens, 1890) on the rocks. I found a small cache of *Truncatella pulchella* Pfeiffer, 1839; *Acar domingensis* (Lamarck, 1819); under rocks near the bridge at Lucy Point. Then back home for a wonderful meal (cooked by Marta) of fresh sea bass with the usual beans and rice. Still overcast and grey.



Shary Almasi photo

A lobsterman with shells he has for sale.

*Voluta polypleura polypleura* Crosse, 1876; *Voluta polypleura hilli* (E.J. Petuch, 1987). Emilio says the *Voluta polypleura polypleura* used to be commonly obtained from the shrimpers, who trawled them in about 60 meters of water but not any more. The *V. polypleura hilli* comes from lobster traps and has always been VERY uncommon. I also purchased a beautiful *Distorsio robinsoni* Petuch, 1987; and a *Vasum muricatum* (Born, 1778) with a beautiful chocolate brown periostracum. Back home, a quick dip in the sea brings *Nitidella nitida* (Lamarck, 1822); *Pilsbryspira albocincta* (C. B. Adams, 1845); *Bailya morgana* Watters, 2009; two Rissoidae – *R. decussata* Montagu, 1803 and *R. cf. princeps* (C.B. Adams, 1850) and *Engina turbinella* (Kiener, 1835).

In the evening we had a wonderful meal of fresh shrimp and beans and rice. It has been a beautiful day and we sat out on the deck before dinner and watched the sun go down. Soon the moon came out and it's so good to be here breathing



Shary Almasi photo

Shary's *Rissoina decussata*



Our boat sailing through the mangroves.

the fresh air and listening to the water lapping at the seawall. It doesn't get any better than this.

Tuesday – It's a beautiful morning. We can see the mainland about 30 miles away. Today we are going landsnailing – much to Drew's delight. Our boatman Hassan makes his way past Oak Ridge, past Jonesville and Lucy Point. Then into the sun crossing a lovely lake where we enter a channel absolutely filled with mangroves. We travel quietly through this channel which cuts through the trees – which hang overhead. It's cool and beautiful and occasionally I spot a Little Blue Heron or a White Heron and even an occasional sandpiper. What a thrill. After about 40 minutes we arrive at our destination which is at the West Side of Carib Bight on Roatan. We head for limestone outcroppings and start working through leaf mold. I found one species in leaf mold up against the rocks. Altogether Drew and Emilio found 4 species – *Helicina hondurana* Richards, 1938; *Tudorica andrewsae* (Ancey, 1886); *Alcacia jansoni* (von Martens, 1890) and *Subulina octana* (Bruguiere, 1798). Emilio and Drew also found some very aggressive

red ants which they took great pains to avoid!

After working this locale we stopped at a nearby beach and I was delighted to find *Favartia alveolata* (Kiener, 1842), *Iniforis turrishomae* (Holten, 1802); *Rissoina cf. princeps* (C. B. Adams, 1850); *Risomurex caribbaeus* (Bartsch & Rehder, 1939); *Diodora minuta* (Lamarck, 1822); *Nerita versicolor* Gmelin, 1791; *Chione cancellata* (Linnaeus, 1758)- this chione being so tiny I didn't realize it was a veneridae until I put it under the microscope! I'm happy. We head home, making a stop at Jonesville where Hassan offered us a fresh coconut. I took him up on his offer and drank coconut milk on the way 'home'.



Left - *Tudorica andrewsae* Right - Emilio Garcia collecting landsnails on a limestone outcropping.

Wednesday – Today we headed for Punta Gorda – Fat Point – to explore the area. We get there by taxi (as usual), stopping at a souvenir stand but nothing attracted us – so we continued on. After walking through the town, I waded out into the water and with a hand dredge brought up *Nassarius albus* (Say, 1826), *Columbella dysoni* (Reeve, 1858); *Zafrona pulchella* (Blainville, 1829); *Nassarius vibex* (Say, 1822); *Tegula fasciata* (Born, 1778); and another wonderful *Diodora minuta* – and boy, is it minute. Home for another beautiful sunset and gee, fresh shrimp again! Tough.

Thursday – We head back to the West Side of Carib Bight for land snailing. As we passed the boats moored along the way between Oak Ridge and Jonesville I noticed the names painted on each one. Practically all of them are "Captain" something – Captain Carib, Captain Jack, Captain Ray, Captain Iverson, but then I come to the best one, Shirley Belle, – So Seductive! That cracks me up.

After we arrived, I opted to walk the beach and dangle my feet in the warm water while the men look for their landsnails – going through leaf mold just makes me want to sneeze. Then we head home, making a stop for more coconut milk. Tonight we have fresh lobster – again and after watching yet another stunning sunset earlier. The moon and Venus are bright and glorious and the sky is/was a beautiful rose red. I look to the north and find Orion. At home, of course, it's always to the south.

Friday – our last day and we are returning to French Harbor, but first I try my hand at shelling out front again. Each day I venture a bit further from the house. Today I found *Columbella mercatoria* (Linnaeus, 1758); a tiny *Nassarius albus* (Say, 1826); *Truncatella scalaris* (Michaud, 1830); *Schwartziella bryerea* (Montagu, 1803); *Barbatia cancellaria* (Lamarck, 1819);



The view from our deck with the sunset.

*Vitreobalcis cf. nutans* (Muhlfeld, 1824); *Echinolittorina ziczac* (Gmelin, 1791); and my favorite shell of the trip – *Muricopsis chesleri* Houart, 2006. A tiny beauty. Drew and Emilio also found a *Melampus* species on the concrete seawall below our 'home' but took no specimens.

Then on to French Harbor. We walk through the same depressed area but this time no young child appears with beautiful volutes. We wander down to the docks where we find the large fishing boats but no one is around. Back home to spend a quiet afternoon reading and readying for tomorrow's departure. Once again we had a lovely sunset and the clouds were glorious. The moon was higher in the sky and Venus was as bright as ever. Later in the evening we watched a wonderful lightning storm behind the clouds. This is a fitting end to a 'micro' holiday .... At least for me!

A warm thank you to Emilio for inviting us along. One of the pluses for traveling with Emilio is that he will identify your micro's for you – which means you are doubly blessed!