

# NHM and Smithsonian Researchers Team to Study Marine Biodiversity

BY JOEL W. MARTIN

**B**iodiversity encompasses the study of species and their diversity as well as their habitats, evolution, ecology, and more. Knowledge of biodiversity even helps us shape public policy that guides the use of public lands.

For years, the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute (STRI) has conducted biodiversity studies in Panama. Recently, STRI opened a new marine research station just outside the town of Bocas del Toro, Panama. Local habitats include sea grass meadows, coral reefs, mangrove swamps and more.

As one of the new lab's first priorities, STRI has invited marine invertebrate researchers to Bocas to begin to document the area's biodiversity. It will probably come as no surprise to Angelenos that among the invitees are experts in echinoderms (Gordon Hendler), polychaetes (Kirk Fitzhugh, Leslie Harris), mollusks (Ángel Valdés), and crustaceans (Jody Martin)—all from the Research staff of our Museum. The scientists will begin assessing the invertebrates around Bocas this summer, with the work sure to continue for years to come.

One measure of the impact and stature of a research staff is the degree to which they are involved in such truly global partnerships. That so many of the world's experts in marine invertebrates work here and are involved in global biodiversity and conservation efforts is reason to take pride. As Bocas and STRI celebrate the opening of this new lab, we take time to applaud the developing partnership between the Smithsonian and our curatorial staff, as both groups strive to further our understanding of, and appreciation for, global biodiversity.

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