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Interest growing in mangrove restoration project

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The Department of Environment recently completed its first phase of a project to help restore locally devastated red mangroves by planting more than 800 reef ball units containing thousands of mangrove seedlings.

Governor, Stuart Jack, accompanied by his wife, Mariko, planted the last seedlings on Friday, 19 January.

The project was sponsored by US Fish and Wildlife Service's Neo-tropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act for its practical contribution towards the restoration of migratory bird habitat, said a GIS press release.

The DoE has worked with the Reef Ball Foundation (who manufactured the reef balls overseas) to build a red mangrove nursery at the CI Sailing Club in Red Bay. The Sailing Club is a Darwin Initiative partner and donated the use of the site for the mangrove nursery.

"With approximately 860 'reef balls' of seedlings planted in pots made out of marine-based cement (Ph balanced for marine environments), the young mangroves are protected against storms and have a better chance of surviving," said DoE Assistant Director Tim Austin.

"We are hoping to establish this as a technique to restore other areas that were damaged by Hurricane Ivan in 2004," continued Mr. Austin. These areas include, but are not limited to, North Side Public Beach near the Kaibo and South Sound.

The project, which started in November 2006, has drawn the interest of school children and community groups. Many people have assisted the DoE in collecting and planting thousands of seedlings, including students from Cayman Prep, St Ignatius and John Gray Recyclers.

"After the coming hurricane season, when the seedlings have reached a reasonable size, we are going to transport them to areas that need restoration," explained DoE Research Officer James Gibb.

"This will head-start the restoration of our coastal mangroves, and encourage the re-establishment of habitats critical to the health our marine systems, and resident and migratory birds' populations.

"The DoE is currently obtaining the moulds for the reef balls, so that, if the project is successful, we will be in a position to build more reef balls on island, rather than having to import them from overseas."

After planting the last two sets of seedlings, Mr. Jack commented, "It is vitally important to look after the mangroves. This is a great project, and it's pleasing to see young people getting involved – this is a fun and interesting way for them to learn how important mangroves are to our natural habitat."

FYI

If you would like more information about the project and how to participate please contact Tim Austin at the Department of Environment on 949-8469.