

Foreword

Museum scientists tend to be specialists in a particular discipline and to work alone. Those of us, however, who study living organisms learn sooner or later that we cannot hope to understand our animals and plants fully without some knowledge of the environment in which they exist. We also learn at some point to appreciate the benefits of collaborating with fellow scientists whose disciplinary focus may differ from ours, but whose interests are related to our own through the "environmental" link. That is to say, a great natural ecosystem such as the tropical coral reef draws together researchers of many diverse disciplines.

The project "Investigations of Marine Shallow-Water Ecosystems" (IMSWE) off Carrie Bow Cay has done this very thing for many of us at the Smithsonian Institution and elsewhere, and thus we have learned far more about our organisms and their environment than we might have done otherwise. As a result, we are more than enthusiastic about IMSWE's progress. We started with only a few investigators, but as the years have passed we have grown into a multidisciplinary contingent.

Needless to say, part of IMSWE's success stems from the efforts of the principal investigator, Klaus Rützler. He is responsible for the organizing, scheduling, coordinating, and orchestrating. He has done all this with good humor and energy.

Of course, such an effort would not have been possible without the support and encouragement of the Belizeans themselves. They love their barrier reef and have high regard for its economic, recreational, and aesthetic value. Recognizing the need for understanding and protecting this precious resource, Belizean officials have approved and assisted our various endeavors since IMSWE's modest beginnings. In particular, Winston Miller, Fisheries Officer, has helped us in every way, as have members of the staff at the Ministry of Trade and Industry (after 1979 the Ministry of Health, Housing, and Cooperatives), and the Ministry of Finance.

We all know that research cannot go forward without adequate funding. The Exxon Corporation has provided part of our support, and has done it in a most generous fashion, allowing the scientists to go about their studies independently.

This volume thus represents the culmination of research effort and support from many quarters. It is the first of an open report series and serves as the basis for future contributions. It not only "sets the scene" by determining terminology and summarizing our knowledge to date, but it also points out the gaps yet to be closed. We look forward to the next decade.

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Porter M. Kier, Director (1970-1979)
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