

Karen DeMaria: Okay. On garbage, in the present, we are going to rank garbage. I am going to ask you, type of garbage. I want you to say, do you always see it now? You sometimes see it, rarely see it, or never. Okay?

Jack Burleson: Garbage.

KD: Here we go. First thing, paper products. Do you always see paper products on the reef, garbage on the reef or on the shore? Sometimes, rarely, or never. Never?

JB: On the reef?

KD: Yes.

JB: Oh, no. I see sometimes. Plastic sometimes.

KD: Plastics, bottles. Okay, sometimes. How about cans?

JB: Bottles also.

KD: What?

JB: Also, I see them sometimes.

KD: Monofilament.

JB: Yes, I see that sometimes.

KD: Rarely?

JB: Well, you have to dive to see those.

KD: Right. Not really noticing that.

JB: Around shipwrecks.

KD: Do you see that in the back country walk?

JB: No. I don't dive.

KD: Well, I mean, washing up or animals tangled in mono at all, more, or something like that?

JB: I see a lot of...

KD: Or nets?

JB: Well, sometimes nets. I see also sometimes a lot of buoy and ropes.

KD: Would you say that that is more than in the past?

JB: Probably more because there's a lot more traps now. But I see a lot. I cannot really tell before. It would be difficult because I wasn't watching. But I can tell there is a lot now.

KD: A lot more buoys now.

JB: A lot more buoys and ropes that grow in the mangrove.

KD: What about the paper products and cans and plastics? Do you see more of them now than in the past or less of them now than in the past?

JB: Probably the same.

KD: Here is a list of different species, common names and Latin names. But just look at the common names. Just go down there and see if you know something that you want to – a comment that you would like to make to me about whatever it is.

JB: That I see more or less?

KD: Or any comments. If you notice something or you have a story to tell me about one of them.

JB: For the sponges, I don't know them. I know – I can tell it is a sponge, but I cannot tell what it is.

KD: It is okay. The main reason for this sheet is it has got everything on these three pages. The sheet is to spark a memory. Some people will not remember something unless they see the name and then they remember, oh, yes. So, that is the purpose of that. If you look through and see if anything sparks a memory.

JB: [inaudible] in the water. I hate to tell you that it seems like they don't really like the sponge. But they have a lot of wrecks also, at least right here. When you come from Big Pine, you look on the left side. You sometimes stop your car and look at the reef to the right speck here.

KD: So, more like derelict vessels? Would you call them that?

JB: Just wrecks. Nobody's inside. Because you would [inaudible] Key also on the right side, there was a ship over there that was also a couple of wrecks, whatever you call it. So, there is a lot of living aboard also, but the water gorges, there is a lot of people living now between Little Torch and Big Pine, inside their boats.

KD: Have you noticed any problem with more live-aboard areas? Have you noticed something happening around those areas?

JB: Well, I'm sure if we look around the boat, we're going to find a lot of shit in the bottom, more likely.

KD: Anything else?

JB: But there is a lot of people who live here now, all year round.

KD: Have you ever seen a crinoid?

JB: Maybe. I don't know what it is.

KD: I have a book.

JB: Okay. So, I'm going to start with the spine urchin. That was the only one that [inaudible].

KD: Right. That is the diadema you are talking about. The long spine or the short spine urchin?

JB: The long spine.

KD: The long-spine urchin?

JB: Diadema antillarum.

KD: Did you know when it started happening? Was it gradually, or was this something that was obvious?

JB: Well, I didn't really notice. It went gradually.

KD: That is the crinoids. It looks like a flower. I have never seen them down here. I have been told that there used to be crinoids here, but I have never seen them. At South Pacific, we saw lots of them. That is why I was just curious.

JB: I cannot tell.

KD: Okay. You did not notice.

JB: I think they're all here. But [inaudible], I'm not doing better than [inaudible]. Sargassum, less.

KD: Less Sargassum?

JB: Yes.

KD: Anything you want [laughter] that we have not talked about. Basically, I think, most of what you said is that the water has gotten dirtier.

JB: Yes.

KD: It used to be cleaner. Now, it is dirtier.

JB: Yes.

KD: There is less fish than there used to be?

JB: Yes.

KD: Any other comments that you think I should – or I should walk away from this list?

Fernand Braun: Dirty water, less fish.

KD: More sponges. [laughter]

FB: More sponges. Less habitat for the small lobster and angelfish. A lot less mullets. A lot less ladyfish.

KD: Why would that be, you think? I do not know anything about ladyfish.

FB: Ladyfish is a fish that looks a lot like the mullet.

KD: Yes. They are long and skinny, and they've got a big eye.

FB: Yes, and they live in big schools. Just before the storm, I was fishing for those, and I got a very big catch. Once I would catch them, I would put them here and split them. [laughter] A net or can with a big net, just put that around.

KD: You were there?

FB: Yes. [laughter] He picked me up, the son of a bitch.

KD: Really? [laughter] Why would they want ladyfish? For bait, chum bait, or they are commercial?

FB: I talked to one of my friends also. He said, "I don't know why they do that because they are very abrasive smell. So, they destroy the nets very fast. . But there must be some – I don't know.

KD: Is it Americans or Cubans or what, that you think?

FB: I think they were Americans.

KD: That is interesting.

FB: See one of those rollers.

KD: Yes.

FB: Just a boat with the roller in the back.

KD: What? Right up here? I have not noticed one up here.

FB: You don't see them. They're in the back.

KD: Yes. I have seen those kind of boats down at Stock Island.

FB: Well, those probably come from Marathon. The old back country, you don't see them. That doesn't mean they're not here. Each time they see the muddy bottom, with the net around, they can be pompano. It can be a ladyfish. It can be a...

KD: So, they are just going for school. They do not even know what fish it is until they bring it on the boat.

FB: Absolutely. When they did it last time, I don't know if there's any market for that. I guess if it's not good, they just let them go.

KD: Imagine the waste by catching that. God.

FB: The biggest problem is that is the food for the pelican, for the tarpon, the mullet, the osprey feed on them also, and all the barracuda.

KD: Oh, I saw the coolest thing today at Peter's boat. This big osprey, it was right there. I was sort of facing the harbor, the Safe Harbor. The osprey came down like 10 feet away from Peter's boat right into the water. Crashed. Bam. It was sitting with its head out of the water, and it was going [inaudible]. I've never really watched ospreys after they totally immerse themselves in the water, fly out with a fish.

FB: We had one that did that right here.

KD: Really?

FB: I saw it.

KD: Oh, that's so cool.

FB: She's swim diving.

KD: Yes. That is what this one did.

FB: They never [inaudible].

KD: Then this one came. It came up, dried off its head a little bit and then started flapping really strong so it could get out of the water.

FB: I didn't get very close.

KD: It had the fish right there attached to its talons. I was like, oh, that is cool. It was impressive. Those are strong birds to do that.

FB: Oh, yes. They are strong.

KD: But yes, you are right. I saw...

FB: Definitely, the trout and also the ladyfish, they're pretty much together.

KD: Have you noticed— you said...

FB: Incredible decrease in that.

KD: I think he wants to go outside. Or is he just playing? [laughter] Decreased. This is food for other organisms. Are you noticing problems with birds in the back?

FB: Well, sometimes, there's a big school of – a flock of birds, and somebody [inaudible]. So, if I hear something like that, I try to just see what it is.

KD: The reason I am asking is, the back country there, that is a big bird rookery in the same area, year after year.

FB: I see less. [inaudible] are just less or more. All that – what do you call that? That boat with...

KD: Parasail.

FB: Yes. I don't even go there anymore because it's too [inaudible]. If I didn't know, I would [laughter] be scared myself.

KD: God, I hate those things. It is because of the jet skis and the marabou, right?

FB: Yes.

KD: Anything else you want to tell me or anything else that you think – that is the reason why I have some questions, different ways, is just to try to spark in general, just to tell me, and hopefully, during the course of the conversation, things will have been triggered.

FB: Decrease in tarpon as well.

KD: Why do you think that?

FB: The tarpon? It could be – I don't know. Since we started not to – we don't kill them anymore now. You need a special permit to [inaudible]. But I think you can see decrease in the permit.

KD: They [inaudible] fish before?

FB: Barracuda, sharks, but I see...

KD: Are you seeing any differences in big fish versus small fish? Are you seeing more small?

FB: Jacks, also much less jacks. I think if you go to certain places in the back country, it can be one mile, it can be two miles, with some pockets around the mullets. You have about fifty barracuda. Plus, [inaudible]. Everybody is going there. When you put a barracuda, each town, if you go after the path, it's dead. It's completely dead. There is some place, check back all those places that [inaudible].

KD: Oh, there it is. Northeast of Johnson Key.

FB: That whole thing is a bank. There is some path, if you don't see them here, but they'll sit on the – the chart isn't that accurate enough.

KD: No. This is such a large scale too.

FB: Yes. But I can tell you, those places – like last year, I was fishing. You can imagine. You had maybe, I don't know, fifty pelicans around, about ten sharks, baby barracuda, a bunch of bone shark mullets, thick in the middle, a couple of jacks. Suddenly, the next week, the paths, nothing. Dead. Nothing. Nothing at all. Completely gone. No more birds. No more barracuda. No more everything. No more food.

KD: Any other areas like that or anything?

FB: It was everywhere from here to North Keys. I know some of the places because I go there often enough, sometimes four times a week. I can really tell from one week to another, they're here, and they're gone. I know they're catching the mullets to catch trout. That's why I don't fish with [inaudible]. They catch the mullets for sport fishing. It's not you just catch the fish, and you put them in a place to stay there.

KD: Live well?

FB: It's a live well, but most of them are going to die. Maybe out of seven, just one is going to live. Just one ill be called hard a mullet. Hard mullet is a very, very strong fish. This one will almost catch a – if you go fishing [inaudible], you will catch a tarpon almost all the time. That means he was sick. He had some disease, but he survived. This one is very, very strong. But to have one, you have to kill six or seven. Those will die eventually with the tarpons. But basically, for me, it's those people who are fishing with a net are not really fishermen. They

make it easy, and it will make it easier for them to catch fish. I think we probably should not let them do that. If there was no difference in the mullet population, I will tell them to keep them. But because we have a big decrease right now, we should stop them. Also, when a tarpon is caught with a live bait, usually the hook is...

KD: In their stomach.

FB: Well, not the stomach, but it's more inside. It's more difficult to release. If you do the same thing with the fly, as an example, flies always cut very shallow. So, it doesn't damage the fish at all. So, there are ways to catch fish also. Of course, that's with that permit or the people are not – we would fish the hard to catch fish. But...

KD: God save that mighty first dollars.

FB: We probably could do it for a longer time. It doesn't need to be more [inaudible] catching them is a little more difficult. It's difficult because it's fun people. You pay, you don't catch a fish.

KD: That is true.

FB: But why not? You don't deserve it.

KD: Anything else you would like to add before I move you along?

FB: I don't know.

KD: Okay. I think we have put a lot on everything.

FB: I think the mullet is something I really would like to see coming back. The canal like here, they were full of mullets everywhere. [inaudible] in the canal. You could see them, but they're not thick. Before, you would think the canal was made of mullets. It was just mullets. It's not like that. It's over. You could trawl the night just about anywhere and catch those. So, I would say, definitely we should stop the nets. [laughter]

KD: I know. I signed my petition.

[end of transcript]