

# *The Magic of Las Aves*

By Marcie Connelly-Lynn

Las Aves are two separate little archipelagos comprised of about sixteen islands and islets and several barrier reefs. The more easterly group is called Aves de Barlovento (windward) and the westerly group is called Aves de Sotovento (leeward). Their name comes from the large number and variety of birds that call these islands home. Because of its out of the way location, there are no theme parks here, no day tours or fishing excursions. In fact, there are no settlements here at all except a Guardacosta station in Sotovento and some transient fishing camps.

After a couple of the weeks in the Roques, we were ready to head into the “more remote” island category. Our first anchorage at Isla Oeste in Barlovento was extremely rolly and the wind howled for the two days we were there. We moved to an anchorage in Sotovento off the little island of Curricai that was much more sheltered from the waves, and though the wind continued to howl at 35+knots, we felt more snug and secure.



*Scenic lone palm of Saki Saki and a convenient post to tie up the dink*

The beach on Curricai is long and sweeping. We could walk the entire perimeter of the island in less than an hour. A small fishing camp was situated here, but the fishermen were gone most of the time. When they were in, they offered fresh fish for sale or traded battery charges for lobsters. Excellent trade, we thought! Otherwise, a lone palm, some lizards and crabs and the fishermen’s pet pelican seemed to be the only full-time inhabitants. We noted that several Portuguese Man of War had washed ashore on the windward side. Seeing their vibrant purple gelatinous masses lumped on the shore made us think twice about swimming excursions in that particular area.



*Sugar white sand on Curricai beach*

We were once again boarded and inspected by the Venezuelan Coast Guard and again impressed with their friendliness. They checked our week-old paperwork from a previous inspection in Los Roques and decided just copying the information was sufficient. They chatted briefly, offered assistance on Channel 16 should we need it and told us we were welcome to stay as long as we wished. What better welcome could you expect?

Curricai has several neighboring islands, all within dinghy range, and whenever the wind died down sufficiently, we set out to explore them. Saki Saki, about a mile away to the northwest, has a lighthouse and a drifting sand dune beach. One scenic palm stands alone midst the cry of gulls, pelicans and boobies. The lighthouse is functional, but not particularly attractive. The

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beach is white sugar marked with crab and bird prints. It is uninhabited by man, but his mark is there: a convenient stake in the ground for dinghy tie up and, of course, the endless jetsam on the windward shore.

A bit to the south lie Isla Ramon and Isla Palmeras, so close the distance between them is swimmable. Conch shell mountains 20 feet high dot the shore and a rotting whale carcass that had washed ashore caught our attention long before we discovered its location. The fishing camp on Isla Ramon is very active and the boats come and go frequently. We watched them set their nets one day and marveled at the efficiency and alacrity with which they worked...an artistry unto itself.



*Fishing camp at Isla Ramon pictured through mountains of conch shells*

Evenings are the best in the Aves. There is no ambient light save the moon and the stars. We watched in anticipation each evening as the sun was swallowed by the horizon, gratified time and again by a dazzle of reds, pinks, oranges and purples and that evasive flash of green. Our location provided another bonus in that we were able to see both the North Star and the Southern Cross. Without the moon, the night skies were so velvety black and the stars so vividly brilliant in contrast, we sat mesmerized for hours at the sheer beauty and vastness of it all. I'd read that there are more than 10 billion trillion visible stars and I'm

certain they were all present and accounted for in the boundless Aves sky.

The constant 35-45 knot easterly trades continued to blow and limited our activities. We needed diversions. Our friends, Joanne and Ken on "Rusty Bucket", were anchored nearby and suggested a windward beach clean-up of Curricai, which was littered heavily with flotsam and jetsam washed ashore. We picked up innumerable bags of trash... mostly plastic bottles and shoes... finally completing about one mile of beachfront. After our daylong effort, we dug a pit and burned the fruits of our labors in a huge bonfire and celebrated a job well done.



*Sand-covered David & Marcie pose next to windward beach cleanup sign*

Ken suggested a signpost would be an excellent way to commemorate the project. A piece of bamboo was found for the signpost and Ken used collected driftwood pieces to carve signs. We spent another afternoon assembling and erecting the sign, careful to take compass readings to insure the signs pointed in the right direction. (We knew how critical subsequent cruisers would be!) Not many

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tools were available, but a machete, a plastic scoop and hands did the job of digging the posthole.

David, being the tallest, got the job of screwing the signs onto the post. Months later in Bonaire, other cruisers stopped by to inform us that the sign was still standing, but the beach was in need of another cleanup.

Hanging on the hook certainly didn't prevent us from celebrating Valentine's Day and planning a gala event for the anchorage...all two boats.

Dressed in appropriate red finery, we celebrated aboard the "Rusty Bucket" with champagne, Bloody Marys, card playing and epicurean delights heretofore unimagined in the Aves. We exchanged handmade Valentines and flew heart burgees fashioned from old sails, scraps of red cloth and old jacklines for the hoists...even the cat sported a red ribbon around her neck.



*St. Valentines Day in Las Aves*

Four weeks in the middle of nowhere. The magic here is found in the simple nature of its beauty. Big skies, quiet solitude, green flashes and a celebration of the cruising life...far from the madding crowd.

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