

**Larval Drift and its Implication  
for Conch Management**

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**ABSTRACT**

In order to maintain a conch fishery, each year new conch must settle from their free-floating planktonic stage and become juvenile bottom-dwelling conch. Because the floating stage lasts for approximately a month, these larvae can be carried great distances away from their parental populations. Biochemical-genetic studies can tell us which conch populations are related and from that we can infer larval drift patterns. We now have a better understanding of which conch populations are mainly self-replenishing and which are dependent upon other islands for new conch each year. For example, the Bermuda population appears differentiated from stocks in the Caribbean and may be self-sustaining. Populations in the upstream areas of the eastern Caribbean also show differentiated stocks, even around a single island (St. Lucia). The downstream populations of Belize and the Turks and Caicos Islands appear very similar, however, suggesting that they receive recruits from a mixture of upstream populations. These data and their implication for management of conch resources will be discussed.