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Lionfish Derby Project
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ANTIGUA OPEN LIONFISH TOURNAMENT AND FESTIVAL

[St. Johns, Antigua]- The Lionfish Derby Project, under the umbrella of Elkhorn Marine Conservancy (EMC) <https://www.emcantigua.org> and Lionfish University (LFU) <https://www.LionfishUniversity.org> will present the first Antigua Open Lionfish Tournament on Nov 18-19th, 2022, with a Festival on Nov 20th from 1pm until 5 pm.

The tournament program includes a lionfish hunting competition, lionfish cooking competition, marine conservation youth poster contest, and lionfish jewelry workshop. **A total of \$12,650 USD (34,155 EC) in cash prizes will be awarded, offering one of the largest purses of cash prizes that has been given in a tournament in Antigua.** Prizes to be awarded include: Lionfish hunter teams --1st prize for the most (\$3000 USD), the largest (\$2000 USD) and the smallest (\$1000 US) lionfish, there will also be second and third place prizes for each category. Chefs cooking competition - 1st prize, \$1000 US and youth poster contest – 1st prize, \$500 US. The program will also include a series of mini-lectures on various marine conservation topics given by leading experts in the field. The exhibitions and prize giving will take place on Sunday Nov 20th in historic Nelson's Dockyard, a world heritage site, and will reward lionfish hunting and raise awareness about this invasive species in the context of marine conservation.

In 2019 the Mill Reef Club generously funded a visit by a team of five American lionfish experts to assess the lionfish problem facing Antigua and Barbuda. Lionfish are known to invade and destroy native fish populations on the coral reefs, leading to the reefs' destruction. A larger team of invasive lionfish experts will return to introduce control methods starting with the derby and festival Nov 18-20. They will focus, in particular, on commercial opportunities arising from hunting lionfish. Experience from other countries shows that these commercial efforts can be an important complement to control efforts undertaken by government.

Interested lionfish hunters can register at <https://antigualionfish.com/lionfish-derby-sign-up/> to enter the derby and join in the removal of this invasive and destructive lionfish. Participants are encouraged to enter the derby as an individual, or as a team (1 to 4 persons per team). The

cost is 80 EC (\$30 USD) per person. For any problems registering online please contact event coordinator Martha Watkins Gilkes. (marthawatkinsgilkes@gmail.com)

An exciting component of the program will be a class on how to make jewelry from the fins and tails of invasive lionfish. Lionfish jewelry offers an opportunity for anyone interested in protecting the reef to get involved. No prior jewelry making experience is required. The fee for the class is EC\$40 which covers both instruction and a starter kit of jewelry making tools and materials. All participants are guaranteed to leave the class with at least one finished jewelry item! Advance registration is required. Interested parties can sign up the Antigua Lionfish Open website or by email to Antigua.lionfish.jewelry@gmail.com

Field Code Changed

The program is being organized by the superstar team of international and local experts, including: Dr. Steve Gittings (Chief Scientist for the event, Festival Administrator and Chief Scientist for NOAA's Office of National Marine Sanctuaries), Alex Fogg (Event Co-Director and marine biologist), Ruleo Camacho (Event Co-Director and marine biologist), Mehgan Heaney-Grier (Project Educator and Spokesperson and conservationist, TV personality and lecturer), Jim Hart (Project Documentarian and professional screenwriter, producer of film and television and co-founder of Lionfish University 501c3), Martha Watkins Gilkes (Project Coordinator and Festival Administrator and leader in the diving community for over 35 years and marine conservationist), Stacy Frank (Project Co-Coordinator and marine conservationist and co-founder of Lionfish University 501c3), Scott Gonnello (Website and Tech Expert and CEO of Lionfish Central, Inc), Dr. Holden Harris (Weigh-in Lead and post-doctoral fellow at the University of Florida), Phil Karp (Lionfish Jewelry Expert and independent Citizen Scientist) and Kaj Assales (Lionfish Jewelry Artist and founder and CEO of [Kaj Expressions](#)).

The Lionfish Derby Project would like to thank the many community members for making this Festival possible, including the Ministry of Tourism and the Honorable Minister Max Fernandez, the Mill Reef Club as a platinum sponsor and Elite Island Resorts as a silver sponsor as well as the many other island stakeholders who are pitching in including: National Parks Authority, Fisheries, Coast Guard, media, dive shops, fishermen, and others.

For further information, please contact: marthawatkinsgilkes@gmail.com