

Saltponds of the Virgin Islands

The saltponds ("ponds") in the Virgin Islands were bays that, over time, have been closed in by reef or mangrove growth across the bay's mouth. The barrier separating the pond from the sea is created by storms which accumulate coral rubble and sand. This barrier is called the berm.

The water in the pond is seawater that remained inside the newly made berm. Additional saltwater can still seep into the pond at high tide or it can wash over the berm during high seas produced by storms.

Fresh water enters the pond from the surrounding hillsides. The fresh water dilutes the seawater, thus lowering the salinity of the pond. Changes in salinity can be very large (heavy rainfall) and can occur very rapidly.

During the dry season, water in the pond evaporates, thus increasing the salinity. Sometimes the pond will dry up completely, leaving crystallized salt on the parched surface. This salt can be harvested and used in cooking.

Saltponds act as sediment traps when runoff from the land flows into them, preventing sediment and pollution from reaching sensitive coral reefs and seagrass beds. Protection and preservation of saltponds is of great importance in protecting these habitats.

The strong odor which ponds often produce are the result of high concentrations of decaying organic matter. This is a natural process that produces nutrients used in the food chain.

Despite the drastic fluctuations in salinity due to influxes of fresh and salt water, saltponds provide an important habitat for many different creatures. Many crabs, insect larvae and some halophilic (salt-loving) plants can be found living in ponds. The various colors (brownish-pink, orange, green or red) seen at some ponds are the result of brine shrimp and algae in the water.

Wading birds (herons, stilts, sandpipers and sometimes, flamingos) and waterfowl (ducks, teal, coots) feed on organisms in the ponds. Other birds (kingbirds, martins, and swallows) feed on insects that fly over the ponds, and many nest or roost in the surrounding vegetation safe from predators. In the evening, insect and fish-eating bats can be observed. Our endangered Bahama Pintail duck lives and breeds around saltponds.

Sometimes a storm can break the berm allowing fish to enter the pond. Species such as sennet, barracuda, tarpon, mojarra, mullet and snook are found in saltponds and are fed upon by birds such as kingfishers, herons, and ospreys.

The complex ecology of a saltpond is only partly understood. We do know that a saltpond is a dynamic system with constant changes in the natural community in response to continuous changes in salinity, temperature, turbidity and levels of oxygen and hydrogen sulfide (from decaying matter) in the pond.

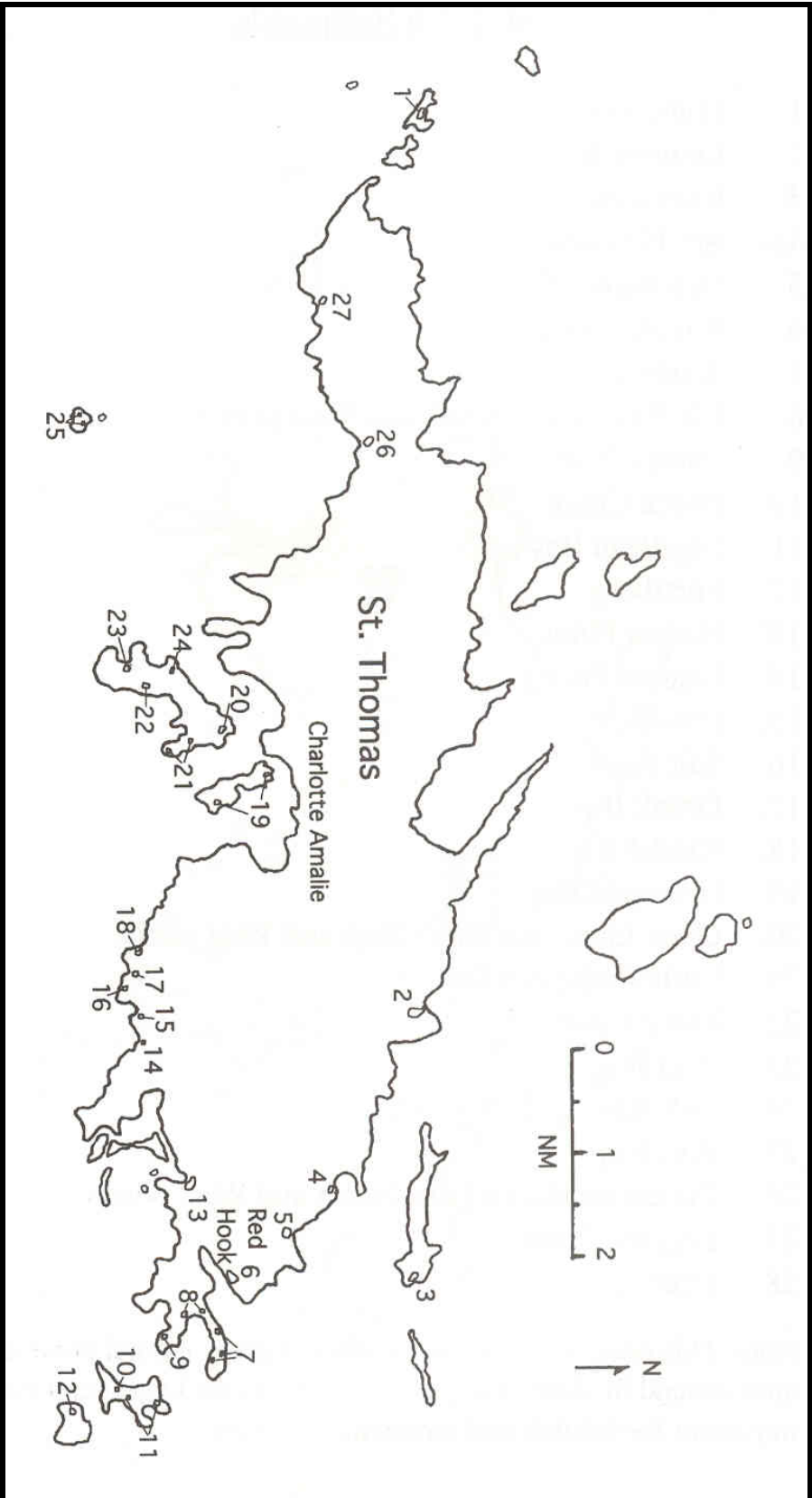
Saltponds serve a number of very useful purposes that benefit man and the rest of the marine environment. They help keep our coastal waters clean. They are the first line of defense in protection of our seagrass beds and coral reefs. And they provide homes and food for many species of wildlife.

St. Thomas Saltponds

1. Salt Cay
2. Mandahl Bay
3. Thatch Cay
4. Footer Point
5. Smith Bay Pond
6. Red Hook Pond
7. Cabrita Point - North, South and West ponds
8. Great Bay - North and South (Ritz Carlton) ponds
9. Water Point
10. Great St. James - Christmas Cove
11. Great St. James - East and North ponds
12. Little St. James
13. Benner Bay Pond
14. Bovoni Bay
15. Bolongo Bay

16. Coculus Bay
17. Little Coculus Bay
18. Frenchman Bay
19. Hassel Island - East and West ponds
20. Water Island - East Gregerie pond
21. Water Island - Sprat Point North and South ponds
22. Water Island - Limestone Bay
23. Water Island - Flamingo Bay
24. Water Island - Providence Point
25. Saba Island - East and West ponds
26. Perseverance Bay
27. Fortuna Bay

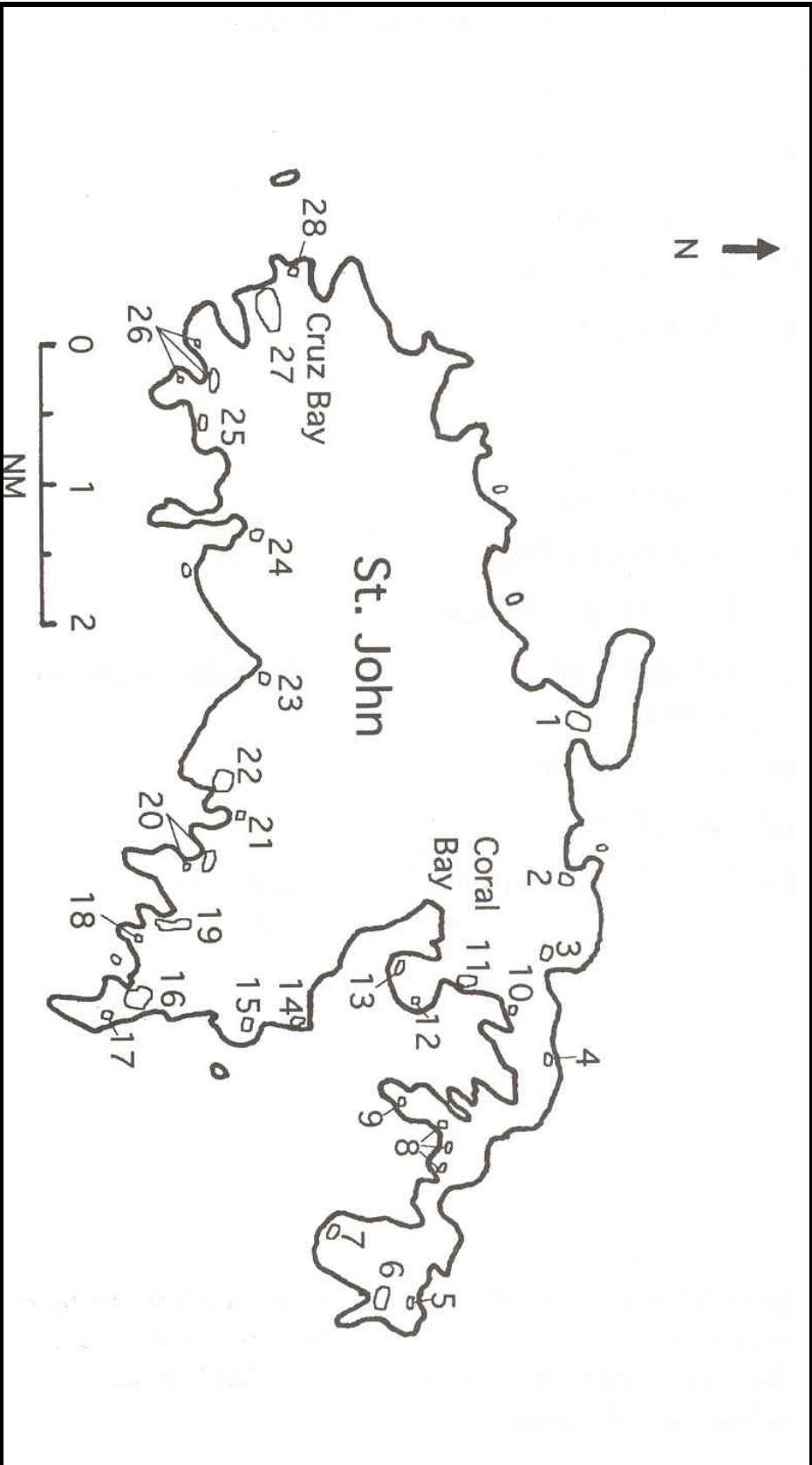
Note: This does not show the location of every natural ponded area around St. Thomas. The ponds shown are the largest and most important for wildlife and sediment reduction.



St. John Saltponds

1. Francis Bay
2. Leinster Bay
3. Brown Bay
4. Mt. Pleasant
5. Newfound Bay
6. Privateer Bay
7. Southside Pond
8. Elk Bay - East, South and West ponds
9. Turner Point
10. Borck Creek
11. Popilleau Bay
12. Fortsberg
13. Harbor Point
14. Lagoon Point
15. Friis Bay
16. Salt Pond
17. Drunk Bay
18. Kiddel Bay
19. Grootpan Bay
20. Great Lameshur Bay - East and West ponds
21. Little Lameshur Bay
22. Europa Bay
23. Reef Bay
24. Fish Bay
25. Hart Bay
26. Chocolate Hole - East, North and West ponds
27. Enighed Pond
28. Frank Bay

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St. Croix Saltponds

1. Rust-Op-twist
2. Altona Lagoon
3. Southgate Pond
4. Coakley Bay
5. Buck Island
6. Robin Bay
7. Great Pond
8. Half Penny Bay
9. Billy French Ponds
10. Krause Lagoon - Remnants of larger lagoonal system
11. Manning Bay
12. Long Point
13. West End Saltpond

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