

Answering the call of the sea

...Marine biologist makes big strides

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TODAY is World Environment Day.

On its heels is World Ocean Day to be observed on June 8.

These two days encourage worldwide awareness and action to protect our environment and seas. The *Express* spoke to marine biologist, Dr Judith Gobin to share her thoughts.

Gobin recently attained her professorship and became the first woman to hold such a title in the Life Sciences Department at The University of the West Indies.

She has had an extensive marine research career which spans

Gobin's tremendous work and dedication to the field have resulted in notable academic contributions to the knowledge of Marine Biodiversity in our twin-island Republic and the Caribbean.

In 2010, Dr Gobin was the first and only Caribbean marine scientist to contribute to the global project – Census of Marine Life – a ten-year scientific initiative, which comprised of 2,700 scientists from 80 countries.

She also had the privilege to contribute to the United Nations' World Ocean Assessment 2015 report.

Speaking to the *Express* on Wednesday, Gobin shared some things she would like to do in her new role.

She said, "I wish to renew the call for conservation and protection of our oceans. In this respect, I intend to continue working to empower young stewards to pursue Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) – this is where our future lies. Scientific research can provide solutions to many environmental, social, and economic problems. I also wish to continue my deep-sea research and train many young scientists in this area; there is a yet undiscovered world here and we have only seen the tip of the iceberg! The deep-sea is the last frontier and one of the most exciting environments to work in!"

Gobin has published on several "new marine scientific records" and "new marine species" (approx. 298) – for Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean. Her research concentrations began in soft coastal marine sediments followed by rocky shores and more recently deep-sea areas.

In this respect, she successfully



EXTENSIVE CAREER: Dr Judith Gobin

launched with *Niherst* (a book and a five-part DVD) in 2018.

Q&A

Originally from Williamsville, Gobin moved to San Fernando and finally settled in Petit Valley where she currently resides with her husband, Dr Godfrey Araujo, and their two sons Graeme and Jeremy.

Hoping to give people a better understanding of her profession, and a deeper appreciation for the environment, Gobin sat with the *Express* for a Q and A.

1. What made you decide to study Marine Biology?

I was always fascinated by the sea and marine animals...spent long vacations at Mayaro every year.

2. What do you do as a marine biologist?

I research marine species, how they live and interact with other animals and how they are impacted by environmental conditions eg. pollution etc.

3. Is marine biology growing or declining in the Caribbean?

It is growing... UWI continues to teach Marine Biology/Ecology and students pursue MSc, MPhil and PhD degrees in Marine Sciences.

4. What qualities do you need to be a marine biologist?

You must love the sea, can swim, snorkel and/or dive, not be too seasick...and long hours in the laboratory.

5. How do you balance your career and family?

I do this by having a great support system. My husband is a true partner, and shares all the duties. I



PEACEFUL: A pelican is seen perched on a jetty at the San Fernando Yacht Club, yesterday. —Photo: DEXTER PHILIP

have sisters who share family responsibilities, and having them also live close by is a great domestic help.

6. What would you say has been your greatest achievement in your career?

On board the *EV Nautilus* in company of Prof Robert Ballard. (He discovered where the *Titanic* was located).

7. Name one person you admire, and why?

My husband Godfrey...he puts up with me...he is super patient...I'm a bit of a perfectionist.

8. If you were stuck on a deserted island, and you can only bring three things with you, what would it be?

Godfrey, coffee, and a swimsuit

9. What are some interesting facts about being a marine biologist?

You get to discover new species of organisms...and you get to name them!

10. What challenges do marine biologists face?

As with all other sciences...funding...money to do more exciting things...projects and make new discoveries.

11. Would you rather trade some intelligence for looks or looks for intelligence?

LOL...I quite like a bit of both!

12. What's the best advice

you've ever received?

Never pretend you know the answer if you don't.

13. What do you love the most about your job?

Dealing with young people.... young minds.

14. What is a typical day for you at work?

Teaching classes at UWI... maybe two or three lectures to undergraduates, meeting with my postgraduate student/s, responding to e-mails, peering down the microscope ...attempting to identify microscopic species....phone call to my home helper to prepare stuff for dinner...remind Graeme and Jeremy to do stuff...and as Head of Department – dealing with a number of administrative matters.

15. In light of World Environment Day and World Ocean Day, what can people do to help the planet?

This year's theme for World Environment Day is Biodiversity. I urge citizens to reverse the cycle of declining biodiversity. What are some of the simple solutions to begin with? Reduce the amount of plastics, proper solid, liquid and gaseous waste products that chokes the environment. Go out today and do something for Biodiversity – plant more trees, unclog drains and water courses, work with communities to stop forest fires and unmanaged clearing of land (especially in hillsides). In order to continue to enjoy "our" resource (terrestrial and marine

biodiversity) that has been "giving" for years.....let us begin to "give back" to the environment!

16. What's your favourite animal?

A "sea mouse" or Aphroditida – of the polychaete (marine worm) taxonomic group.

17. What's the weirdest thing that ever happened to you at your job?

An e-mail out of the blue in December 2002 (from a Dr Patricia Miloslavich of Simon Bolivar University, Venezuela whom I did not know before, but is now a colleague and dearest friend) catalysed my career in the direction which has resulted in this professorship.

18. If you could change anything about yourself what would it be?

Wish I knew more about a lot more things than I do.

19. What's your guilty pleasure?

Perfectly chilled Prosecco

20. If you could switch jobs with someone for a day, who would it be, and what would you do?

Television personality...my own show.

21. What advice would you give someone thinking of becoming a marine biologist?

You must enjoy it...there is so much yet undiscovered...research in the deep sea.