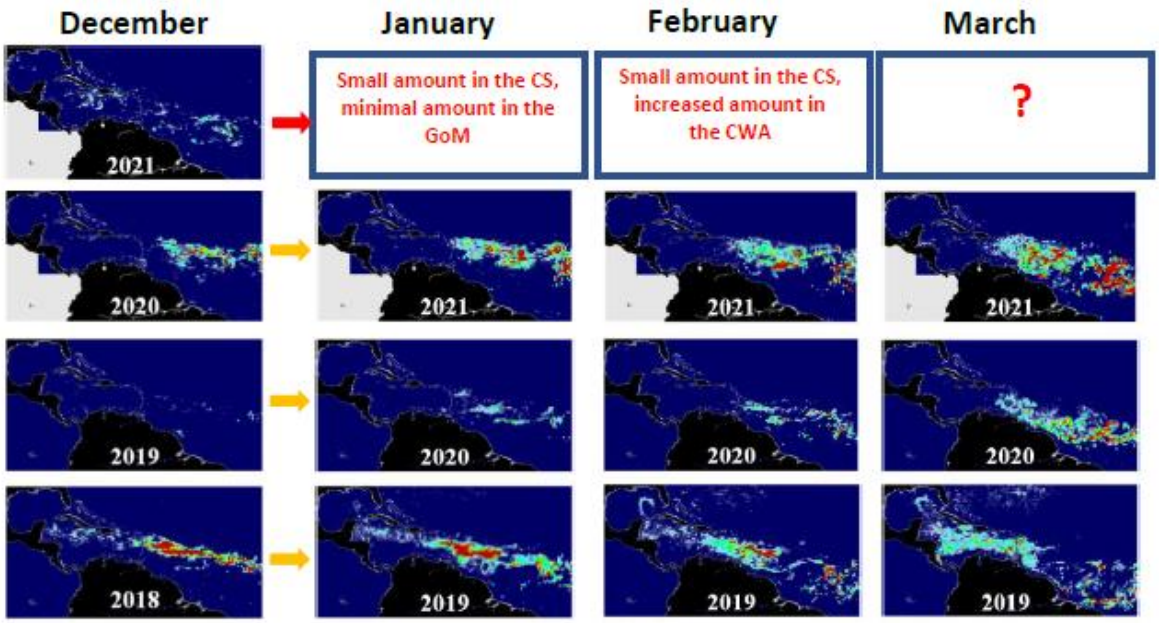
ANTIGUA & BARBUDA
NATIONAL PARK
Environment Unit

January 2021:
Happy New Year!

Sargassum quantities have remained relatively stable over the month of December in comparison to the month of November. The University of South Florida Optical Oceanography Lab has been examining satellite images to track the sargassum blooms over the years, and states: "Similar to last month, moderate amounts of sargassum were observed in the Northeastern Caribbean Sea and the Central West Atlantic. The total amount (1.7 M tons) is lower than in 2020 and 2017 (3.0 M tons) but much higher than in 2019 and 2016." The maps below, with warm colours representing high abundance, displays the years 2018 to 2021.



Map 1: Comparison of Sargassum blooms between 2018 and 2021. Sargassum Watch System, University of South Florida

Map 2: December 2021

Happy New Year. 2021 has been a real banger, not only for the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic, but also due to the large quantities of Sargassum recorded throughout the Atlantic. We are in the lull of the "Sargassum season" and will hopefully be in this lull till at least February 2021. Although there is minimal amounts of Sargassum in the Atlantic region at this moment, we will continue to see small beaching events, particulalry if the prevailing weather conditions are from the South.

I will caution by saying that the trend that we are seeing has been observed over the last few years. Sargassum amounts are minimal between October and February, then begin to increase drastically once more. However, Sargassum is versatile, its drivers are still not yet fully understood, and stakeholders are advised to continue to be vigilant and take all efforts to reduce the impact of a the Sargassum where possible. We will continue to monitor the satllite reports and track *Sargassum* movement across the Atlantic to the best of our abilities.

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The Islands of the Caribbean, inclusive of Antigua, Barbuda and Redonda, have been affected by Sargassum Seaweed (*Sargassum sp.*) since 2011. Sargassum blooms appear to originate off the coast of South America and have been affecting the Caribbean island chain with varying ecological and anthropogenic/economic effects. Sargassum seaweed grow on the ocean surface and provide ecosystem services such as habitat for juvenile marine organisms (e.g. fish, turtles) and foraging areas while on the sea, but biologically degrade upon contact with the shoreline, leading to negative impacts.

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**Maps and Data Source: https://optics.marine.usf.edu/projects/saws.html*