

Corals of Sogod Bay, Southern Leyte, Philippines

July 2007 Study for Coral Cay Conservation

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A brief visit to the Ampo base of Coral Cay Conservation at Sogod Bay, Leyte, was made by the author in July, 2007. A total of 12 dives were made, and corals recorded on 11 of these. Most were at Ampo, but some were at Sta. Sofia on the other side of the small peninsula or the nearby Limasawa Island.

A total of 226 coral species were found in this brief study. Eight species were found only in Mabini, Batangas, Luzon, leaving 218 found in Sogod Bay, Leyte. A total of six of these species were species not reported earlier from Sogod Bay by the author on two previous studies in 2003 and 2005. They are listed in Table 1. All of these species are known from the Philippines. One species that is rarely reported, *Pocillopora danae*, was recognized for the first time reliably for the author here in 2005, and this time it was clear that on the reef slope, that is the dominant species of *Pocillopora* (which is not a common genus on this reef.)

Notable was the lush soft coral community in shallow water at Sta. Sofia, including many large colonies. Large soft coral colonies are reported to be quite old. Most soft coral colonies were killed at Danjungan and Apo Island during the mass bleaching around 1998. These large colonies at Sta. Sofia may well be on the order of 50 years old or a few might even be 100, so they clearly survived the mass bleaching of 1998. This may be an important community to protect. The corals, both hard and soft, by and large appeared in good health. A study of those soft corals might be good in the future.

The reef at Ampo does not appear noticeably different in 2007 from the way it appeared in 2005. The corals on the slope remain lush with high cover and high diversity. The author assisted Dr. Greta Aeby searching for coral diseases, with some interesting findings, in particular we found a fair amount of "black band" disease. The author is quite familiar with black band disease from the Caribbean, but has never seen it in the Indo-Pacific on perhaps a thousand dives spread over many areas in many countries. It was not especially rare at Ampo, though it is infrequent enough to not presently appear to pose a threat. It has not been reported to be responsible for major destruction in the Caribbean or Indo-Pacific. The author saw it at Ampo in wide bands on *Pachyseris*, and in narrow bands on *Goniopora*. He did not see it at Sta. Sofia, but these were only casual observations. Dr. Aeby's report will provide much more information on this topic. The present casual notes should not be relied on; Dr. Aeby's report will be much more quantitative and systematic, though still preliminary.

Live hard coral cover in the Caribbean has decreased from about 55% in the late 70's to less than 10% today. This was primarily caused by coral diseases. Until recently, coral diseases have not appeared to be a threat in the Indo-Pacific. Coral diseases have increased in some parts of the Indo-Pacific in recent years, such as the Great Barrier Reef

and the NW Hawaiian Islands. It is important to get a baseline of coral disease in as many locations in the Indo-Pacific as possible now, before there are any major outbreaks, and to monitor diseases to make sure that diseases do not kill much of the coral community before we even know that coral diseases are a problem, as happened in the Caribbean.

Table 1: Species not previously recorded by the author from Sogod Bay, Southern Leyte, at CCC sites.

1. *Acropora clathrata*
2. *Acropora spicifera*
3. *Montipora caliculata*
4. *Montipora cebuensis*
5. *Montipora samarensis*
6. *Montipora turgescens*