

Cambodia Reef Conservation Project (CRCP)



Monthly Project Update

March 2014

Location:

Prek Svey Village, Koh Rong, Sihanoukville, Cambodia

Project Scientist: Rónán Mag Aoidh



CRCP Project Aim

The Cambodia Reef Conservation Project (CRCP) is a collaborative project surveying the coral reefs of Koh Rong and Koh Rong Sanloem Islands in the Municipality of Sihanoukville. The programme provides training and conservation education opportunities for local Cambodians as part of an integrated programme to develop local capacity, and to ensure the long-term protection and sustainable use of marine resources throughout the region. Coral Cay Conservation (CCC) is working at the invitation of, and in partnership with, the Fisheries Administration of the Royal Government of Cambodia.

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Latest News

March has been a busy month for the staff and volunteers at our base in Cambodia. The volunteers who arrived in February played an active role in the surveying and it was impressive to see the progress they made from new divers to competent surveyors.

We were also happy to welcome Medical Officer, Sue-Ling Armour to the expedition base. Sue-Ling started diving in the UK during her gap year before volunteering in Brunei. She started medical school in 2004 in Brighton, UK and dived throughout her time there serving as a committee member and assistant instructor of the university club. She has dived in SE Asia, Egypt, New Zealand and Australia but still loves UK diving. She wants to be involved in expedition medicine long term and is due to do a Tropical Medicine Diploma when she gets back from Cambodia. Sue-Ling joined CCC as she saw an opportunity to be both a diver and a doctor and not have to wear thick socks to bed!



*CCC's new Medical Officer,
Sue-Ling Armour*

A new group of volunteers have just arrived to our base in Prek Svey and the next few weeks will involve getting them dive and science trained. The plan for the coming month is to finish surveying around Koh Rong Sanloem in time for the Khmer New Year celebrations, which take place from 14-17th April.

Story of the Month

Project Scientist, Rónán Mag Aoidh, recently took part in a day long workshop for the completion of the METT (MPA Effectiveness Tracking Tool) scorecard. It was held in the Fisheries Administration (FiA) in Phnom Penh. This workshop was attended by senior members of FiA, including Mr Ouk Vibol (Director of the Department of Fisheries Conservation), and representatives from Fauna and Flora International, including Mr Tuy Sereivathana (Country Director).

MPA designation is an important step in ensuring the protection and continuation of rare or endangered species, as well as providing the legislation for the sustainable use of important resources. However, biodiversity conservation will only be achieved if they are managed effectively. It is therefore important to assess the effectiveness of the management of protected areas.

The METT Scorecard to Assess Progress in Achieving Management Effectiveness Goals for Marine Protected Areas was developed by The World Bank and WWF. It involves a range of questions and potential answers. The various answers to each question range in value. Once these values are added we can work out a score to see how well the MPA is being managed. As well as giving a score for the current year, a score for the future (two years in advance) is also predicted. This is the target for where we would like to be in the future. The questions are simple to answer and have proven to be effective in providing a summary of how well the MPA is being managed.

Community and Education Projects

Education work has continued apace this month, with CCC's Community Liaison Officer, Volux, really taking things forward. At the beginning of February we started with 27 students, and now we have more than 80 students in three classes of three levels. The lessons incorporate both English language skills and environmental awareness. The aim of the programme is to equip students from Prek Svey village with the skills and knowledge they need to protect their natural resources, as well as open opportunities for future alternative livelihoods.



Teaching classes in Prek Svey school

Survey Update

Survey background: Our baseline-surveying programme is designed to gather data about the biological and morphological standing of Koh Rong and Koh Rong Sanloem Islands. This data is combined with information on human and natural impacts on the reefs, along with oceanographic data, to ultimately produce a Geographical Information System 'map' of the various habitats of the islands. It is like a 'stock-take' of the current marine resources. This will provide policymakers and concerned institutions with information necessary to effectively manage those resources. We are also monitoring the reefs for signs of bleaching, following the mass bleaching event in 2010.

March has been a productive month for surveying. CCC staff and volunteers went on three camping trips to Koh Rong Sanloem, the smaller island just south of Koh Rong. We say 'camping' but in fact we were afforded the use of a building on Koh Rong Sanloem by 'Cambodian Diving Group' and 'Save Cambodian Marine Life'. This certainly made our trips to the island much more luxurious than we had anticipated and is greatly appreciated.

The days were spent surveying and collecting data, which is so important to the work we are doing here. The efforts of CCC's staff and volunteers will provide an important contribution to the establishment of Cambodia's first large-scale Marine Protected Area, helping managers to develop a zonation plan, monitoring scheme and biodiversity goals for the area.

Altogether our team completed 32 surveys in the month of March, which is a very impressive feat by any standards.



The team and all supplies loaded onto the boat, heading away on a camping trip

Cambodia Reef Conservation Project March 2014

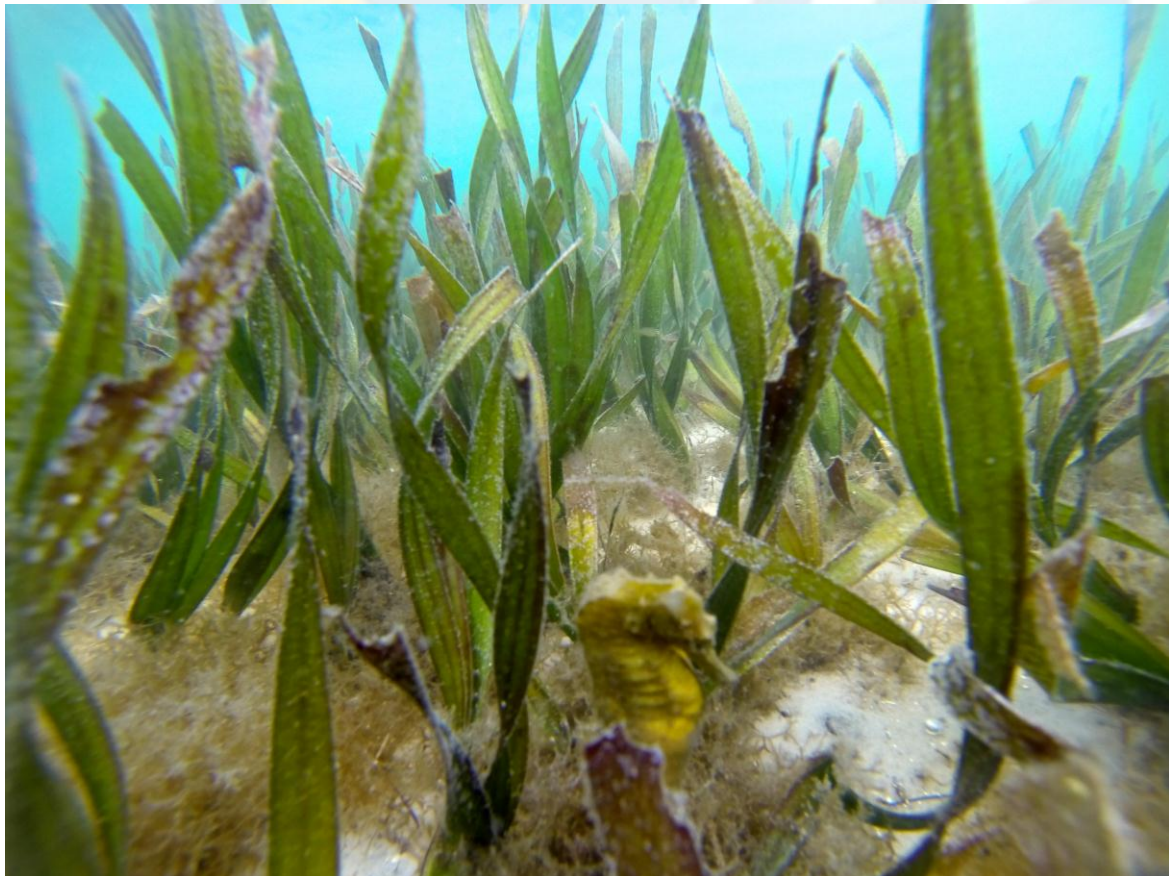


Seagrass Surveys, Koh Rong

Project Scientist, Rónán Mag Aoidh, also took part in some seagrass surveys around Koh Rong this month. This was a joint initiative by the Fisheries Administration (FiA) and Fauna and Flora International (FFI) but was led by CCC scholar Phalla Leng.

Phalla, who works as a Project Officer for FFI, recently spent four weeks on CCC's base in Prek Svey, completing the Reef Conservation SCUBA Award Scheme. This programme is an intensive course incorporating dive training and scientific surveying of coral reef ecosystems. Participants are trained in the identification of over 300 marine species and in methods for ecological surveying. She used her recently achieved diving skills, having qualified as a PADI Advanced Open Water Diver, to plan and lead the seagrass surveys.

In the proposed Koh Rong Archipelago MPA, protection will be afforded to various important habitat types including mangroves, seagrass and coral reefs. It is therefore essential to document the extent and diversity of these different habitat types. Seagrass habitats provide a home to some interesting creatures, especially the seahorse, as photographed by Kylie Gavard, (Conservation Cambodia) during the surveying.



Marine Creature of the Month!

Barrel Sponge: *Xestospongia* sp.



Behold the mighty Barrel Sponge, or *Xestospongia* sp., a very simple but effective filter feeding animal. It has changed little since Devonian times - approximately 450 million years ago - when sponges were the dominant form of life in the seas. Reaching a height of over a metre, and capable of pumping 5 times its own volume every minute through its body, they host an array of organisms that enjoy access to the plankton rich currents that they generate. This impressive example of a barrel sponge was spotted at the northern tip of Koh Rong (site KR46 at 8metres) by our Science Officer Jerry Slater.

Learn More!

To learn more about the CCC Cambodia project, to join the expedition, or to find out about local marine Scholarships, visit www.coralcay.org.