

**CORAL CAY
CONSERVATION**



ExpeditionsTM

**MONTHLY
PROJECT
UPDATE**

LEYTE REEF CONSERVATION PROJECT

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PROJECT AIM

The Southern Leyte Coral Reef Conservation Project (SLCRCP) is a collaborative project to protect the coral reefs of Sogod Bay. The programme provides training and conservation education opportunities for local Filipinos, as part of an integrated programme to develop local capacity and 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 Provincial Government of Southern Leyte and the Philippine Reef & Rainforest Conservation Foundation Inc. (PRRCFI).

Coral Cay Conservation provides the resources to help sustain livelihoods and alleviate poverty through the protection, restoration and management of coral reefs and tropical forests.



CCC's Education Officer is guest speaker for Pintuyan National Vocational High School's Recognition Day

The 25th of March marked the 38th Recognition Day for Pintuyan National Vocational High School and an opportunity for Coral Cay's Education Officer, Tracy MacKeracher to put aside her usual expedition attire and don a dress for her role as guest speaker!

A flurry of students with bright white ironed shirts, neatly laced shoes and pristinely fashioned hair greeted us as our bus arrived in town. Final preparations were underway at our venue, the Pintuyan covered court. The students lined up to open the ceremony with a parade march and the national anthem and dancers and singers showed off their talent before it was Tracy's time to shine.

Over the last 3 months Tracy has taught the students about marine conservation and has helped them establish an environmental committee to empower the students to direct their own conservation

practice. Her work at the school has clearly been greatly appreciated, as demonstrated by her invitation to be guest speaker at this event. Her speech was inspirational, emphasising that no matter what your origins, a good education is key to creating opportunities in life.



Tracy MacKeracher (CCC's Education Officer) during her speech to Pintuyan National Vocational High School

After Tracy's speech it was time to celebrate the achievements of all the students over the last school year with special recognition for those who have excelled in their field of study. For these exceptional students, ribbons were awarded by both parent and teacher. The parents were then asked to come on stage and receive their ribbon, as recognition for supporting their child in their studies.

The day confirmed the remarkable impact that passionate teaching and structured education alliances with schools can have on spreading the message of marine conservation to the leaders of tomorrow.

STORY OF THE MONTH

Whale Sharks Spotted on House Reef

There has been a flurry of excitement this week as whale sharks have been spotted on Napantao House Reef! The excitement began Saturday 21st when a visiting dive boat could be heard shouting WHALE SHARK WHALE SHARK! All volunteers and staff rapidly entered the water for a mammoth sprint to south wall. Unfortunately our efforts were fruitless. The whale shark had moved on by the time we reached the wall. Excitement rose again on Monday 23rd when our Scuba Instructor (Nicole Pelletier) and Medical Officer (Erica Morris) saw a whale shark whilst on a science dive! This is the first shark to be seen in the water at

Napantao by CCC volunteers and staff since 2013 and it's a great sign for Sogod Bay. The same evening the team sat on our sea wall watching the shark leisurely swim around our reef whilst the sun was setting behind him! On

Tuesday the team went in for an early morning snorkel in

the hope of catching a sighting and low and behold another whale shark was spotted on the reef!!! We will be keeping our eyes peeled and hope to have more sightings here in the coming days.



One of the beautiful TIKI TIKI we have been swimming with over the last month

The presence of whalesharks in Sogod Bay and on our very own house reef is an excellent sign for the MPAs in the area. Recent figures from LaMaVe suggest that Sogod Bay holds the largest aggregation of Whale Sharks throughout Southeast Asia. The sharks were almost entirely absent last year (only one



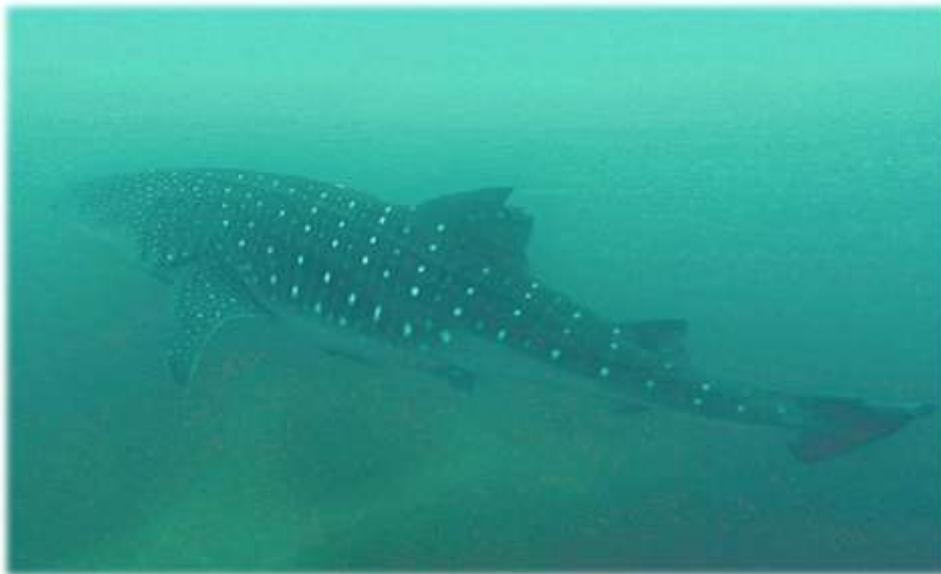
Hand sewn mini Tiki Tiki from the local woman's organisation

was spotted in the whole bay!) so seeing them back, and so far up the bay is a great sign! We have been travelling to Son-ok throughout the month to join Kasaka, the people's organisation who run Whale Shark Safaris up and down the coast. Although it tends to be the local fishermen who take us out on boats the women also get involved by making adorable mini whale sharks for sale! Their presence of is really helping to build sustainable

STORY OF THE MONTH

livelihoods and beseech the importance of keeping their reefs and surrounding waters healthy and safe for creatures such as these.

Unfortunately on a couple of sightings we have seen sharks whose caudal and dorsal fins have been badly damaged by boat propellers. The evidence of boat impacts is a concern. Unlike marine mammals when these animals are killed through boat collisions they sink to the bottom of the ocean so it is not clear how many are being killed in this way. LaMaVe, the Provincial Government and CCC recognise the huge potential to section off Sogod Bay making it a large marine reserve, networked with no-take zones, and areas restricting boat speed or type. The sharks tend to feed very close to the shore, so restricting the type of boats allowed within a certain proximity to the coast, reducing speed limits so collisions can be avoided and enforcing use of propeller cages to minimise impacts are realistic targets. Lets strive towards these together!



This shark has very clear signs of propeller damage on his dorsal and caudal fins, it is not known how many sharks are killed by boat impacts but many sharks are seen with this kind of damage

EDUCATION & COMMUNITY PROJECTS

The School year finishes and Tracy MacKeracher (Education Officer) reflects on teaching over 2,500 school kids throughout Southern Leyte

CCC's Education Officer (Tracy MacKeracher) arrived in January knowing that with the school year ending in March, she would have a narrow window of teaching time. Wanting to make the most of the time that was available, she was out teaching in the schools right away. With the school year now at an end, Tracy is happy to announce that during the past 2 months, she has had the pleasure of teaching over 2500 students at 16 elementary schools and 6 high schools in 4 districts: Pintuyan, San Francisco, Liloan and Sogod. During this time she was also involved in creating a student eco-committee in Pintuyan, hosting Reef Rangers for 2 schools and contributing to the success of an Environmental Day



at Liloan National Technical Vocational High School. Along the way she has even managed to learn a little bit of Visayan!

Reflecting over the last two months, Tracy has had a truly amazing experience teaching in this part of Southern Leyte.

Wherever she taught she felt very welcome, and was touched by the level of generosity and hospitality shown by all the teachers and school heads. The students were an absolute joy to teach – their attentiveness, responsiveness, and enthusiasm was great to see.

Through her experience teaching at many different schools, it is clear that students are aware of the issues faced by both marine and terrestrial environments. It is our hope that, by continuing to encourage environmentally conscious behaviours starting from a young age, these students will grow up to become

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stewards of the environment. As teachers, parents, and role models, let us set a good example for the next generation. After all, we do not inherit our environment from our ancestors, but instead borrow it from our children. So, let us think carefully about how we treat this wonderful world we live in – and how we will leave it for future generations.

On behalf of CCC, Tracy would like to thank all of the wonderful teachers and school heads she has been lucky enough to work with. To all the students we wish you good luck in your future!



SURVEY UPDATE

Survey background: Since January 2013, survey efforts have been focused on assessing potential and existing Marine Protected Areas in Sogod Bay to provide appropriate management recommendations. To do this CCC uses an expanded version of the Reef Check protocol, which has been customised to perfectly fit our work in Sogod Bay. Prior to this a baseline appraisal of marine resources in Sogod Bay was carried out. If you would like more information about our surveying please contact our Project Scientist, Alix Green

This month CCC Project Scientist, Alix Green, and local Scuba Instructor (Jesse Tinapay) visited 50 households throughout Napantao to conduct community questionnaires. The interviews hoped to uncover any changes to fish catch among fishermen; if fish size, weight, and variety has changed since MPA establishment, and whether there has been a change in the amount of fish individual households consume since MPA establishment. They also gauged community opinion on how the fines and fees collected by the Barangay from scuba divers, snorkellers and violations of the protected area are spent. We hope the survey will shed some light on how we can improve enforcement of the MPAs, and how to ensure that the community are realising short term direct benefits from their protected area. We are still in the process of analysing the data and a report will be written and presented to the provincial and municipal governments soon. However, early analysis shows that 97% of people interviewed are in favour of their MPA and everybody would like to see an increase in tourism in the area. That being said there is certainly some area for improvement as many feel that the direct benefits to them, and their Barangay, have not been fully afforded.

Scientific reports from all of CCC's sites around the world are available on our website at <http://www.coralcay.org/science-research/scientific-reports>

MARINE SCHOLARSHIP NEWS

Each month CCC offers Filipino nationals who display an ambition to study and protect the vital marine ecosystems of the Philippines an opportunity to take part in our Marine Conservation Scholarship. The programme lasts for one month and involves training the student in SCUBA diving to the level of PADI Advanced Open Water. They then take part in an intensive Skills Development Programme giving them the knowledge and expertise to conduct sub-marine surveys of the coastline.



This month CCC welcomed Aprille Nazaret onto our Scholarship programme. Aprille joins us from Manila where she is completing a master thesis in Urban Regional Planning that is looking at water transportation damages in selected hot zones in the coral triangle. She is interested in how community-based management is balancing the economic and environmental costs of water transportation. Aprille graduates in June, following which she will be travelling to Europe to undertake the Erasmus Mundus programme where she will be focusing her studies on Marine Spatial Planning.

Aprille is aware that land use planning gets a higher prioritisation compared to sea use planning because the land is viewed as a more valuable or limited resource compared to the sea, which is still considered limitless. She hopes that what she learns when she is abroad will help her be successful in her future aim of start an NGO, initiative, network or social movement. The focus will be on the coordination of all Coral Triangle member states to empower the local capacity to look after their dwindling resources.

“My experience at CCC is certainly invaluable and I highly commend the organisation and the people behind it and all those that are currently part of it”

If you would like to apply for the CCC Marine Conservation Scholarship programme or read more about it, please visit: <http://www.coralcay.org/volunteer/scholarship-opportunities/>

MARINE CREATURE OF THE MONTH

CCC's "Marine Creature of the Month" is the illusive Whitetip Reef Shark (*Triaenodon obesus*), who was spotted last week by our Project Scientist (Alix Green) and Science Officer (Nick Luz) at 10m on South Wall. White Tip Reef Sharks are listed as Near Threatened on the IUCN Redlist. They are commonly found between 10-40m and are frequently seen resting in caves during the day. Prior to the widespread expansion in fishing over the last 20 years these sharks would have been abundant over coral reefs throughout much of the world. The species are slow to mature and have low fecundity meaning they are highly sensitive to increased pressures. Although not listed as threatened yet there are concerns that the continued rise in fishing pressure will push these sharks, along with many other shark species, to dangerous limits.

Finding a Whitetip Reef Shark on house reef is a great sign for the MPA. In the past two weeks we have also spotted Whale Sharks and Devil Rays within the MPA and we will be keeping our eyes peeled for any other rare megafauna that might come our way!



LEARN MORE!

To learn more about the this project, to join the expedition, or to find out about local marine Scholarships, visit

www.coralcay.org



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