

Southern Leyte Coral Reef Conservation Project (SLCRCP)



Monthly Project Update

April 2015

Location:

Napantao Dive Resort, Napantao, San Francisco, Southern Leyte

Project Scientist: Alix Green (lrcp@coralcay.org)



SLRCP 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.

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Latest News

CCC is thrilled to introduce our New Boat MBCA Arnel

CCC are pleased to announce the arrival of MBCA Arnel, our new research vessel who arrived onsite late this month. The boat completed her maiden voyage, journeying from Hilongos to Napantao and is now undergoing some work to ensure she is safe and fit for diving. Our local staff are working to upgrade some of her timber, ensure the deck is safe for hauling around heavy dive gear, and make sure all the necessary equipment is up-to-date before she will be ready to be used as a research diving vessel. We hope to take her on her first research trip in the next week or so, and are incredibly happy to have such a beautiful vessel sitting and waiting to be used to advance conservation in the waters of Southern Leyte.



MBCA Arnel sitting proudly outside CCC's base in Napantao

Story of the Month

CCC says goodbye to one Field Base Manager and welcomes another

This month we say goodbye to Rob King, our hardworking Field Base Manager, who concludes his eighth expedition with Coral Cay this month. Rob has spent 22 years in Her Majesties Corps of Royal Engineers and has vast experience making him a strong and productive Field Base Manager. He has lead a great team this year and, although we are sad to see him go, we wish him well on his upcoming diving adventures, through the Philippines and further afield, and hope he thoroughly enjoys his well-deserved break. We also said goodbye to Erica Morris (Medical Officer), Tracy MacKeracher (Education Officer) and Nicole Pelletier (Scuba Instructor) this month, and wish them all the best in their future adventures.

As we say goodbye to one, we are thrilled to welcome another. Olly McGuinness joined this month as Rob's replacement and has since taken over as CCC's Field Base Manager. Having worked for CCC in the Philippines as Scuba Instructor we are in no doubt that Olly will prove to be just as successful as Rob has been during his year with us. Olly has been active in the world of diving and conservation for nearly 10 years having worked for Turtle Research and Conservation projects in Guatemala, as well as other research expeditions in the Caribbean and Mexico. He is a PADI Master SCUBA Diver Trainer, a member of the Association of Scuba Service Engineers & Technicians (ASSET) and the Rebreather Association of International Divers (RAID), as well as a first aid instructor. He holds a diploma in Marine Biology and is in the final stages of completing a degree in Natural Sciences.



Olly McGuinness (Field Base Manager)



Also joining this month is Jack McGuinness (of no relation) who takes over as CCC's Scuba Instructor. Jack grew up in Lancashire, UK, where he learnt to dive 10 years ago in a dark and cold quarry! He has since dived in a dozen different countries, thankfully most of them much warmer than back home. Jack has spent most of his instructing career working in dive resorts in the Maldives and Fiji and is looking forward to taking part in some fantastic conservation work here in the Philippines.

Jack McGuinness (Scuba Instructor)

Education and Community Projects

CCC Runs a Seminar for SLSU's Eco Committee

CCC were honoured to be invited to lecture for the newly formed Environmentally Conscious Organisation AKA ECO-Club at SLSU Sogod. The ECO-Club aims to promote environmentally conscious behaviours to help protect the natural resources of Southern Leyte. Alix Green (Project Scientist) Tracy MacKeracher (Education Officer) and Erica Morris (Medical Officer), along with volunteers Clara Luckner and Claire Gilchrist all took part in the event. The seminar-workshop gave an introduction to coral reef ecology and an overview of the current status of coral reefs here in Southern Leyte. The students were enthralled with the presentations they received and learnt a lot about coral reefs. Many were surprised to learn that although coral reefs are used by an estimated 25% of marine species, they occupy less than 1% of the marine environment! After discussing some of the human impacts threatening coral reefs, the students learned about the importance and function of marine protected areas (MPAs), and were really interested to

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hear how these are working to protect their local waters here in Southern Leyte. With the newly acquired knowledge the students split into groups to begin the workshop session of the day.

The workshop involved looking at case studies of real MPAs in the Philippines to demonstrate the importance of effective MPA management. With the help of CCC staff and volunteers the groups were able to get some great discussions going, about the factors affecting success in the establishment and management of MPAs. The workshop was rounded off with some themed games that the ECO-Club will be able to use during their educational activities. After presenting CCC staff and volunteers with Certificates of Appreciation, the students surprised us with a cultural dance performance! The event was a huge success, and CCC looks forward to working with this amazing group of environmentally conscious, motivated young leaders again in the future.



A snapshot of the fantastic cultural dance show the ECO-club put on for CCC's staff and volunteers



Some members of the ECO-club with Eric Morris (former medical officer)

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

With the arrival of MBCA Arnel CCC are excited to get out and support Southern Leyte in its conservation effort by conducting surveys around the bay. We have four surveys lined up for the coming months, and a great team of trained volunteers to get the work underway. We have plans to survey the reefs around Gudán, Himayangan and Catig, in the Municipality of Liloan, and also Santa Paz Norte, in the Municipality of San Francisco. Project Scientist, Alix Green, has recently revised our survey methodology maintaining robustness but allowing for faster training which we hope will work to increase our survey output.

In support of prospective funding from PLAN International our Project Scientist (Alix Green) and Field Base Manager (Olly McGuinness) conducted a preliminary assessment of Catig,



Our survey teams are looking forward to getting out into the community and conducting some MPA surveys for Liloan and San Francisco

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Liloan, and were happy to recommend it as a good site for an MPA. The area has good coral cover but has a worryingly low abundance of fish. All the fish recorded were very small in size (less than 10cm) and a MPA is essential if they hope to rejuvenate the fish abundance in the area. We will be conducting a full survey once the funding is secured to provide a baseline for future assessments, and to ensure the MPA is designated in the most appropriate place, allowing for a full recovery.

Scientific reports from all of CCC's sites around the world are available here: <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 in SCUBA diving to the level of PADI Advanced Open Water. Scholars 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 we were joined by Kristine Daga who works as one of the project staff in SLSU's Marine Biodiversity Management Project in Sogod Bay. Kristine marks the final member of the SLSU biodiversity team to be trained in diving and survey methodology by CCC. She came to CCC in the hope to develop the skills she needs so she can call herself "a real marine biologist". Kristine has flown through our training and is now well equipped and excited to share the knowledge she has gained with her local community by running environmental activities and supporting Southern Leyte's strive for long term sustainability. We have a strong relationship with SLSU Bontoc and are proud to be able to support them in this way. We look forward to seeing Christine and her fellow biodiversity team under the water in the near future!

"AMAZING is the best word to describe my experience in CCC. It is not just a dream but a reality in where I gained my skills in diving and learned more about marine ecosystems where I'll be able to help protect and conserve marine resources. Thanks to the CCC staff for providing me with a month of enjoyable and right training and for embracing me warmly on site. Thanks a lot!" Kristine Daga

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/>



Kristine with local scuba instructor Jesse and former volunteer Jonas

Marine Creature of the Month!

This month CCC names the Frogfish (Histrio histrio) as its creature of the month. It seems to be the month of frogfishes for having only seen one since the beginning of the year we have spotted no less than six of these on house reef in the last few weeks. These little guys are cryptically camouflaged but don't tend to move too much once you have found them. The wonderful creature may look nice but he is a voracious ambush predator that is also a cannibal!

Like its cousin the deep-sea angler frogfish it dangles its esca (a fleshy lump on its upper lip) as a fishing lure to attract small fish, shrimp and other invertebrates. It is able to dart forward to grab its prey by expelling water forcibly through its gill openings. By feeding in this way it expands its mouth to many times its size and can suck prey larger than itself into its jaws. We have been lucky enough to see this guy yawn in the lazy afternoon, giving a good idea of how this might look in action!



Photo credit Nick Luz

Learn More!

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