Southern Leyte Coral Reef Conservation Project (SLCRCP)

Monthly Project Update

October 2014

Location: Napantao Dive Resort, Napantao, San Francisco, Southern Leyte

Project Scientist: Charlie Wiseman (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.

Latest News

CCC buys a new boat!

CCC was extremely sad this month to say goodbye to its faithful boat, Banakun. After years of loyal service it was time to find a new vessel to assist us with our survey work. Thankfully, our Field Base Manager didn’t have to look too far to find a replacement and we are very pleased to announce Whale Shark IV as the new CCC survey boat. Our local team are currently working extremely hard to get the new boat up and running as quickly as possible so that CCC can re-commence surveying. With a new coat of paint, replacement engine (taken from Banakun) and new canopy we are hopeful it will be in the water by mid-November.

CCC’s new boat preparing for its first voyage!
Southern Leyte Coral Reef Conservation Project
Philippines, October 2014

Story of the Month

CCC welcomes new staff

CCC is excited to welcome its new Science Officer, Jerry Slater, back to the Philippines. Jerry first joined CCC in Southern Leyte as a volunteer in 2013 and then worked as Science Officer at CCC’s Cambodia site in the early months of 2014. Over the years he has been lucky enough to dive in over 20 countries; including Honduras, Fiji and even his slightly colder home country of Scotland! During Edinburgh’s sunnier months Jerry remains at home to work as a communications manager in Scotland’s corporate industry but his true passion lies in exploring the oceans of the tropics. He is very happy to return to the Philippines to continue to explore new underwater worlds and teach local and international volunteers about coral reef biology. He looks forward to continuing CCC’s survey efforts and helping with the establishment of new MPAs in Sogod Bay.

Education and Community Projects

CCC runs an MPA Community Awareness Day in Nueva Estrella Norte, Pintuyan

On the 30th October Charlie Wiseman (Project Scientist) and Amy Gosney (Science Officer) ran a Community Awareness Day in barangay Nueva Estrella Norte, Pintuyan. Throughout the morning, the assistance of Sir Nario Dumaran (Pintuyan’s Municipal Agriculturist) and Tom Sanborn (US Peace Corp Volunteer) was invaluable.

The morning started with introductions to the Barangay Council and the community by Cebauno speakers Sir Nario and Tom. Charlie then presented the preliminary results of CCC’s surveys of the reefs of Nueva Estrella Norte. The area had high amounts of healthy hard coral cover but low abundances of large fish and commercially important fish species. This indicates that the area is being unsustainably fished. With the implementation of adequate protection, however, the reef should be able to recover. If a well-managed Marine Protected
Area (MPA) is installed on the reef, the high abundance of juvenile fish observed will be allowed to grow to larger sizes and produce offspring of their own. The MPA would then start to function as a “fish factory” for surrounding waters and support local fishery stocks.

The barangay council and the community seemed very supportive of the idea of installing an MPA in Nueva Estrella Norte. Sir Nario and Tom were a great help, translating CCC’s results into Cebuano and answering questions from the community. Their involvement with discussions of MPA’s and the importance of healthy coral reefs really engaged the barangay council and the community.

After the presentation Charlie, Amy and Tom took the children and members of the Barangay Council out to snorkel the reefs of Nueva Estrella Norte. They assisted the children with their first ever snorkel and showed the Barangay Council members the area of the reef CCC would recommend for an MPA. Both adults and children were very excited to see the healthy status of the hard coral cover of their reefs and a very animated green turtle! CCC are looking forward to assisting Nueva Estrella Norte Local Government Unit (LGU) and Pintuyan Municipal Agriculture Office (MAO), wherever possible, to start the MPA implementation process.

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 Head of Science, Alex Ferguson.

Due to the change of CCC’s dive boat, surveys this month have been conducted on Napantao house reef. Staff and volunteers have been conducting Crown of Thorn Seastars (COTS) population assessments at multiple depths along the reef to evaluate whether Napantao is at risk of an outbreak. COTS prey upon live hard coral, meaning that high populations of these creatures can be extremely damaging to the health of a coral reef. A similar assessment, implemented at Napantao in the beginning of the year, revealed extremely high populations of COTS. After this survey CCC staff and volunteers conducted several COTS exterminations. They used a special tool to inject individual COTS with a combination of saltwater and vinegar. When this liquid was injected several times directly into the main body of a COTS, the animals perished within hours. Fortunately, due to these efforts earlier in the year, preliminary survey results now indicate that COTS at Napantao reef are low in abundance and not causing excessive damage.

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 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.

CCC is happy to introduce its three new scholars for the month of October, James Asuncion, Mela Cabayan and Mary Jane Coquia. James is currently studying Biology at Silliman University in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental. He spent his summer volunteering with the Large Marine Vertebrates Project (LAMAVE) in Pintuyan to gain marine biology knowledge and survey experience. Once he has completed his Bachelor’s degree in Biology he hopes to pursue a Master’s degree in Marine Biology. He is excited to further his marine experience with CCC, focussing on coral reef biology and ecology.

Mela obtained a Bachelor’s degree in Science with a major in Business Administration from the University of the Philippines, Diliman, in 2006. She has since been working as a financial analyst for a private equity, which invests in companies helping to alleviate climate change. She is eager to learn more about how climate change is affecting our oceans and hopes to use the CCC scholarship programme to learn what she can do to help protect the coral reefs of the Philippines. Mary Jane graduated from Visayas State University, Tacloban, in 2005 with a degree in Environmental Science. She has since been working abroad with children but is very keen to return to the Visayas to pursue a career in marine conservation. She hopes to use the knowledge and survey experience that she will gain on CCC’s scholarship programme to help protect the reefs of her beloved home.

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/

James Asuncion, one of CCC’s new scholars, getting into the water

CCC’s new scholars, Mela Cabayan (left) and Mary-Jane Coquia (right) preparing for a dive
CCC would like to name the spiny devilfish (*Inimicus didactylus*) as its “Creature of the Month”. The spiny devilfish is a venomous fish, closely related to the stonefish family (*Synanceia*). They have an extremely well camouflaged appearance and can reach up to 25cm in length. They are known as “ambush predators” because they do not hunt or stalk their prey but hide themselves in the seabed, waiting for prey to approach. When prey is close enough, the spiny devilfish will launch itself up from beneath the sand and engulf its prey. Spiny devilfish are nocturnal so it is unusual to see an individual active during the day. If SCUBA divers are lucky enough to see one above the substrate instead of buried underneath it, they will notice the fish does not swim like a typical fish but will use its pectoral fins like legs to walk along the substrate.

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