Southern Leyte Coral Reef Conservation Project (SLCRCP)

Monthly Project Update

January 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.

Latest News

CCC welcomes three new members of staff!!

The beginning of the year brings with it three new members of staff to the CCC base in Napatao. Following an unfortunate break from having an onsite Project Scientist we are excited to introduce Alix Green who joins us this month from the UK. Having recently graduated in Aquatic Resource Management from King’s College, London Alix is driven to work towards the sustainable management of our global oceans and is determined to protect our waters and all those who depend on them. Having never visited the Philippines Alix is quickly getting to grips with the way things work, and trying to pick up some (very) basic Visayan! She is excited to get to know all of our stakeholders and looks forward to building strong working relationships with the Barangay, Municipal and Provincial government officials of Southern Leyte.
We are also thrilled to introduce Tracy MacKeracher who joins us as Education Officer. Tracy grew up in the landlocked Prairies but has been in love with the ocean all her life. She is a trained Scuba Instructor who is pursuing a career in environmental education. Tracy has been very busy since she arrived teaching in elementary and high schools across the region and getting to know the local kids. She feels truly privileged to be in a position where she can really get to know local communities and meet the future ocean guardians of Southern Leyte!

Finally, Nicole Pelletier joins us from the USA as Scuba Instructor for CCC. Nicole is a Biology graduate who takes great joy from sharing the amazing world under the sea to new dive trainees. She is thrilled that she gets to teach our local scholars how to dive, and share with them the beauty of the waters in Southern Leyte. Nicole has been diving for 10 years and has built up quite a relationship with the fish, she can occasionally be heard singing to them as she floats through their coral homes!

Stories of the Month

Alix Green (Project Scientist) and Tracy MacKeracher (Education Officer) were privileged to meet the Honourable Sir Roger and Ma’am Luz Mercado last week in Maasin. We were lucky enough to be introduced to many members of the board and were able to thank Sir Mercado for his continued support of CCC.

CCC was also paid a visit by SLSUs Marine Biodiversity Management in Sogod Bay Area research team. The team is led by Sir Homer Di Dios who is a good friend of CCC. We were excited to catch up with Marlon Manga, Stephen Larry Bainex, Perferio Timblaco Jr., Jerome Jack Napala, and Junil Cananes who are all ex-scholars and SLSU researchers. It was fantastic to see them all put their training to good use surveying the reef in Napatao. That all of those involved with the project are ex-scholars demonstrates the importance of the scholarship programme to the work we do here in the Southern Leyte. One of our current scholars, Rhea Luciano, also works with the team and is excited to be able to join them underwater when she completes her training. Alix (Project Scientist) followed up the visit by a trip to SLSU where she met another scholar, Jollibee Loou, who also works on the research team. Alix was invited to present to the current marine biology students and professionals in the field at the University next month and is looking forward to showcasing the excellent work of our scholars!
**Education and Community Projects**

CCC’s new Education Officer, Tracy MacKeracher, has been busy meeting the local kids in San Francisco, Liloan and Pintuyan this month.

Tracy has been working with Pintuyan National High school this month finishing off all their Sea Star lessons. Their next step is setting up an environmental committee so they can start making a difference in their community! Also going through the seastars training with Tracy are Pintuyan National Vocational High School and Liloan National Technical Vocational High School. In the last week alone Liloan Tech. Voc. grade eights have all received the first Sea Stars lesson and are well on their way to learning how to be stewards of the environment! But Tracy has not been ignoring the younger elementary students! She has been teaching in primary schools in Napantao, Tabugon, Magaupas, and Liloan Central School this past month and she is loving the time she gets to spend with the kids!

With Himayangan as our next survey site we have invited the High School there to come and join us next week for a Reef Rangers experience! They will get lessons and snorkel training from our Project Scientist and Education Officer and get to jump in the water with our current volunteers. We can’t wait to have them – more on this next month!

In addition to this our Project Scientist (Alix) has been out in San Francisco and Liloan Municipality doing beach cleans and tree planting with the municipal government officials! It is great to see that everyone has a part to play in keeping the environment of Southern Leyte healthy!
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.

Unfortunately our boat was damaged in Typhoon Ruby and so was unable to be used for surveying at the end of last year. Rob (Field Base Manager) and our local staff are working to get it fixed and up and running to survey as soon as possible. This month we have been focused on training eight volunteers and scholars in our survey methodology and skills development programme so that they are ready to get in the water to survey in February. Without a boat we will be focusing on conducting one of the two surveys we do per year on Napantao reef. Over the next few months our Project Scientist, Alix, will be looking at the data we have collected over the 8 years we have been surveying here to assess how the reef has developed with the presence of an MPA. Once our boat is fixed and ready to get back out on the water we plan to be surveying the reefs in Himayangan, Liloan.

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 coastal surveys.
CCC is happy to introduce its two new scholars for the month of January, Tara Abrina and Rhea Luciano. Tara is from Manila and although her education is in Economics she has been working for ocean conservation in the Philippines as a skin diver and student organiser for the past few years. Tara works for ISDA an environmental skin diving organisation that focuses on environmental awareness and education. Upon completion of her training with us Tara hopes to return to University to complete a Master of Science in Coastal Resource Management or Environmental Science. She also dreams of creating a Coral Reef Monitoring Programme for ISDAs graduates and with her determination and the knowledge gained during her time with CCC we are in no doubt that she will fulfil this dream!

Rhea is from Bontoc, Southern Leyte, and graduated from SLSU with a Bachelor of Marine Biology. Since then Rhea has been working on the Biodiversity Management Project run by SLSU as a Project Technical Staff. Rhea joined the scholarship scheme to continue her learning and to learn more about the coral reefs and fishes of Sogod Bay. With the knowledge she has gained she will continue to work towards the benefit of biodiversity in Southern Leyte. This continuity from training with us to working on locally run environmental programmes is really exciting to see. Now that Rhea is a trained diver she can assist her fellow colleagues in surveying the biodiversity of Sogod Bay and we hope to see her around, above and under the water!

We have loved having Tara and Rhea onsite with us and can’t wait to see how they use their training in the future!

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/
CCC would like to name the thorny seahorse (*Hippocampus histrix*) as its “Creature of the Month”. The thorny seahorse belongs to the family *Signathidae* (which also includes pipefishes and seadragons) and is a crypto-benthic creature meaning it has excellent camouflage capabilities. Seahorses have a unique biology whereby the male holds fertilised eggs in a brood pouch on the front of its body ‘giving birth’ to minute but fully formed seahorses. All seahorse species are listed on the IUCN (International Union for Conservation of Nature) Red List of globally threatened marine species. *Hippocampus histrix* is listed as vulnerable due to intense targeting for the curious, aquarium and Chinese medicine trade.

This little guy was spotted by the keen eyes of our Field Base Manager Rob at roughly 23m. They can grow to be 15cm tall and are found in sponges, hard and soft corals, weeds and gorgonians between the depths of 10 and 25m. This was the first seahorse to be spotted by CCC this side of Sogod bay! Seahorses are typically territorial so we hope to be seeing more of this guy in the weeks to come.

*Photo credit Rob King*

**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.