Southern Leyte Coral Reef Conservation Project (SLCRCP)

Monthly Project Update

October 2015

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

Project Scientist: Shannon Cameron (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, providing 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). CCC provides the resources to help sustain livelihoods and alleviate poverty through the protection, restoration and management of coral reefs and tropical forests.

Latest News

Rise of the Nudi Hunter!

It’s been a busy month at CCC as the team have been working hard to revamp our survey boat and get it back in the water for its next scientific voyage! The first step in this endeavour was getting the boat out of the water – not an easy feat! Coral Cay staff and volunteers were joined by a group of willing helpers from Napantao for the painstaking task of pushing and pulling the boat on to the beach and out of reach of any wave action. Since then it’s been all hands on deck as staff and volunteers have been working around the clock to bring the Nudi Hunter up to scratch with a good scrub, some engine maintenance and a new paint job. By the end of October we had her looking fabulous! It was back to manual labour as the whole team pushed the boat back in to the water to her rightful place moored up outside the Coral Cay Conservation base. We can’t wait to take her out for a survey dive!
Stories of the Month

October is Children’s Awareness Month!

Coral Cay were thrilled invited along to San Francisco to join in with the National Children’s Month Celebration day on Tuesday, October 20th. The event kicked off with a parade through the streets of San Francisco Poblacion. The Procession was led by the San Francisco Police Department accompanied by the local Drum and Bugle Corps, complete with twirlers, and finally followed by a stream of representatives from our local Barangays. Coral Cay was very proud to represent our home Barangay of Napantao! The parade ended at the municipal plaza, where CCC where Project Scientist Shannon and Community Liaison Officer Jesse were invited to take their seats alongside Barangay officials in centre court. Entertainment was provided by the San Fran Drum & Bugle Corps while everyone was seated. The main event of the day was an all singing, all dancing children’s talent show! This started with a number of solo singers aged between 4 and 7 – two of which gave excellent renditions of every parent’s favourite song: ‘Let it Go!’ This was followed by a dance contest between elementary school dance groups from all over San Francisco; the costumes alone were a wonderful sight to behold. Finally, children were invited on stage to read poetry. After lunch, it was time to award the winners! Regardless of who won which prizes, all of the children and their proud parents had a great time. CCC was grateful to be a part of such a fantastic and fun event.

CCC Attends MFARMC Meeting in Liloan

On October 13th CCC were invited to Liloan to join the Municipal Fisheries and Aquatic Resource Management Council (MFARMC) for a meeting. The council is composed of members of municipal government and coastal barangay officials. The meeting was held in the Department of Tourism within the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Liloan and began at 9am. Initial business was to review the minutes of the council’s previous meeting and discuss issues which were still outstanding. These issues largely centred on MPA establishment and maintenance, illegal fishing and enforcement; all very relevant to the work we do here at Coral Cay.

As requested by the Municipal Agricultural Office (MAO), PS Shannon then delivered a presentation of CCC’s results of our recent survey in Catig, ending with a discussion of the best possible location for a new MPA and Marine Reserve in the Barangay. The meeting was attended by a number of barangay officials from CCC’s other survey sites including Himayangan and Molopolo and they were also eager to discuss the potential for such a protected area in their own Barangay waters.

The Municipality of Liloan is a very good friend and partner of Coral Cay Conservation and we always enjoy working with members of the MAO.
Education and Community Projects

Back in July of 2015 CCC carried out a full biophysical survey of the reefs of Barangay Gudan, in the hopes of setting up a new Marine Protected Area (MPA). The site was full of life, with many rare organisms sited including the elusive Flamboyant Cuttlefish! The area is also home to ‘Olly’s Wall’, a very popular dive site in Sogod Bay and it did not disappoint. We are looking forward to the establishment of this new MPA in the coming months and, in preparation, invited Barangay Captain Albert Albarca and members of his community along to our base in Napantao for a day of coral reef-based education.

The morning started with a tour of base by our FBM, Olly and an introduction to Coral Cay in the Philippines by Project Scientist, Shannon. This was followed by a lesson on coral biology; the group were enthralled to learn that coral is an animal which uses tiny algae to produce food from sunlight! A few of our volunteers then gave excellent lectures on different species of corals, invertebrates and fish found on the reef. After learning about what coral reefs are and why they are so important, CLO Jesse explained how reefs are threatened across the globe, leading to a discussion on how we can work to protect them. Everyone was eager to learn about MPAs and the benefits they can bring for the community; talk quickly turned to ‘Olly’s Wall’ and how Gudan could work to protect it for future generations.

After an in-depth discussion it was time for lunch. As always, our resident chef, Tata cooked up a storm! There was just time for a quick group photo before Captain Albert had to dash off for an important meeting in his own community. Having learned a lot, the group kindly expressed their gratitude to CCC for the day and went off feeling very happy with full brains and full bellies.

Coral Cay joins the ‘One Man, One Tree’ initiative

Inspired by the example of the Honourable Governor Sir Roger. G. Mercado, our Community Liason Officer, Jesse has introduced a new programme to Coral Cay this month. Each new staff member or volunteer who arrives in Napantao will plant one tree and contribute to the forest of Southern Leyte.

Forests are one of our greatest tools in the fight against global warming as ‘storehouses’ for the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide. Despite this, deforestation continues at an alarming rate. Governor Mercado’s slogan “One Man, One Tree, Can make a Forest” encourages each person in Southern Leyte to plant one tree with the hope that, by working together, we can make a man-made forest and help to offset the destructive effects of deforestation. So far the Coral Cay team has planted a total of eleven ‘Talisay’ trees around base and on the nearby beach!
Survey Monthly Update

Survey background: Since January 2013, survey efforts have been focused on assessing potential and existing Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) in and around 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, Shannon Cameron.

Work begins on our Bi-annual survey of Napantao MPA

It’s that time again when our survey team dives on house reef to collect data from our house reef! Every year in April and October we survey the same six transects for substrates, invertebrates and fish and use the data to find out what effect a Marine Protected Area is having on the coral reefs on our front doorstep. So far, three out of the six permanent transects have been completed and we are expected to finish the site very soon. Our Project Scientist, Shannon will analyse the data and write a full report on the progress of Napantao MPA in the coming weeks.

In other news, in light of the El Niño Southern Oscillation phenomenon currently in effect in the Indo Pacific, Coral Cay have partially turned their efforts to monitoring corals on house reef for the early signs of bleaching. We do this using Coral Watch, a programme which uses a ‘coral health chart’ that standardises coral colour change to quantify reef health. This standardised data contributes towards the Coral Watch database and can be used to monitor bleaching on coral reefs around the globe!

Incredible views of Napantao MPA from above and below the surface.

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. In recent months this programme has increased in popularity and we are now accepting applications for 2016!

Between September 16th and October 14th Coral Cay welcomed two new scholars to the team, Alvin Valderosa and Janvie Lumakang, both from right here in Southern Leyte!

Alvin is 23, from Padre Burgos and studied for a BSc in Marine Biology at Southern Leyte State University (SLSU) Bontoc Campus. Having graduated in 2015, Alvin has already had some success in his career and currently works for the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR) in Maasin City. Within his University, Coral Cay Conservation has already delivered scholarships to a large number of students so it is no surprise that Alvin repeatedly heard of this opportunity through his classmates. He was inspired to apply himself as gaining a PADI qualification and scholarship from CCC would be greatly beneficial to his work for BFAR, and an experience he can share with his LGU and local community.

Janvie is 23 and from Malitbog, Southern Leyte. A classmate of Alvin, he also studied for a BSc in Marine Biology from SLSU. Janvie applied for our scholarship programme in order to learn even more about the marine environment and to use this training in the conservation of marine biodiversity in the Philippines. Both scholars did a fantastic job here, gaining PADI Advanced Open Water qualifications and passing all elements of our skills development programme. They are both now certified Reef Check divers and we hope that they will use this skill to protect the marine environment in the years to come.

“For a month of CCC, I learned knew ideas about our marine life as well as I gained a lot of experience away from my comfort zone. The atmosphere in the site is very relaxing and the people are approachable and friendly. They took care of us and gave us a nice accommodation that made me feel that I am not away from home. They gave us the best knowledge that we can use in our present and future career. Hope that your program will still continue sharing knowledge and opportunity to Filipino people especially to the marine biologist who have passion in protecting and conserving our marine resources, keep inspiring the mind of the young once and to the future scholar good luck and may we help one another in one nation in saving our nature.”  

- Alvin Valderosa

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/
Southern Leyte Coral Reef Conservation Project
Philippines, October 2015

Marine Creature of the Month!

Peacock Mantis Shrimp *Odontodactylus scyllarus*

Every evening at Coral Cay Conservation our volunteers make nominations for ‘Marine Creature of the Day’. This is an opportunity for everyone to discuss what cool, new marine life they saw during that day of diving. At the end of the week we take a vote on ‘Marine Creature of the Week’ and then again at the end of the month. This October we have selected the Peacock Mantis Shrimp *Odontodactylus scyllarus* as Marine Creature of the Month!

This large species of shrimp is native to the Indo-Pacific and can be found hiding in U-shaped burrows in the loose substrates around coral reefs. The Peacock Mantis feeds on hard-shelled gastropods, crustaceans and bivalves and is often referred to as a smasher – it uses blunt raptoral appendages to ‘punch’ its prey at speeds of up to 50 miles per hour to gain access to the soft tissues within.

As one of the larger, more colourful mantis shrimp species it has attracted a lot of attention from the aquarium trade in the past with collectors attempting keep them in captivity. However the Peacock Mantis has other ideas; they are known to be ravenous predators, eating other valuable members of their tank and making them a pest to tropical fish tank keepers. In some instances larger individuals can even break the aquarium glass by punching it.

In Napantao we have a number of Peacock Mantis Shrimp living out on our house reef. They are great for a photo opportunity but our divers have to be careful to keep their hands clear of their ‘smashing’ appendages! The shrimp below was photographed by ex-scholar and friend of Coral Cay, Jerome Napala.

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.