Southern Leyte Coral Reef Conservation Project (SLCRCP)

Monthly Project Update

November 2015

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

Research Scientist: Joshua Milne (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

Coral Cay welcomes two new staff members

This month we are happy to welcome Joel Brown to our base at Napantao as our new Science Officer, and have Joshua Milne as a new Research scientist.

Joel grew up on the coast of Devon, England, spending much of his childhood rock pooling, which began his interest in marine biology. He first became acquainted with Coral Cay during his 4 month Philippines expedition in 2011 where he completed his Divemaster and secured his interest in tropical marine ecology. Joel went on to study Marine Biology at Swansea University where he helped to initiate, and became 2015 president of, the Swansea University Marine Biology Society. He also aided SEACAMS with sea grass research in north Wales, and gained further skills in tropical research during a field course to Puerto Rico which helped him to improve his knowledge and experience of tropical ecosystems. After assisting in training with the Swansea dive club Joel is keen to return to the Philippines for some warm water diving, and looking forward to working for Coral Cay.
Joshua Milne is actually a long term volunteer here at Coral Cay, joining us earlier this year in July. From The gold Coast, Australia, Josh has recently completed his Bachelor of Science majoring in Marine and Wildlife Biology. Josh joined CCC with a fellow Australian for 4 months to increase his knowledge of the marine environment and conservation methods, and to complete his dive master. Josh has become a big part of base already assisting in the teaching of SDP and PADI courses. Keen to continue the work CCC does within the Philippines he has applied to stay on with us and is now our new Research Scientist and temporary Project scientist.

Our new Research Scientist Joshua Milne

Stories of the Month

CNN Comes to Film CCC!!!

Coral Cay was recently approached by CNN regarding a documentary they are filming in the Philippines. This will be a series of short features covering a variety of topics including singing, female airline pilots and the evolution of the jeepney! With the incredible diversity that the underwater world of the Philippines has to offer, they knew that they had to include a feature on coral reef conservation. After speaking to CCC HQ in Surrey about our project here, their interest was particularly piqued by our scholarship programme and the opportunities that CCC offers to local people in the Philippines!

The CNN crew arrived at base at 8:30am and were greeted by staff and volunteers as everyone introduced themselves. The morning proceeded with Paul, the camera man, setting up his gear and getting some great footage of the bay from the sea wall, and of volunteers in a lecture in the science room. The rest of the CNN crew sat down with some of the long term volunteers and discussed reasons for coming to CCC and how they were enjoying their time so far.

Most of the morning was spent getting to know all there was to know about CCC, what we do here in Southern Leyte, our methodology, our part in the wider community and our scholarship program. They took the time to talk to almost all volunteers and staff on base and became truly interested in the work we do here. The other half of the morning was spent filming
our divers, getting footage of kitting up, walking out to the sea and doing practice surveys, coral watch and Divemaster training.

After lunch it was interview time! Olly, our field base manager, was up first discussing the goals of CCC in the Philippines with Andrew, the presenter, and the work we do for the local government in Southern Leyte. Next up was a former scholar, Grace, who came back to base to discuss her time here with CCC and her current goals with her NGO, Ocean Action Resource Centre (ORC). Finally Dexter stepped up to be interviewed as one of our current scholars on base, talking about why he decided to join CCC, his opinions on what we do for the marine environment and what his plans are for the future.

Finally, Andrew went for a dive with Olly for a tour of Napantao house reef while Paul, the camera man, filmed from above. CNN greatly enjoyed their time with us here at Coral Cay, and we loved having them.

**CCC Is joined by St. Bernard Rescue Team**

On the 23rd of November we were joined at base by 3 members of the St. Bernard Rescue team; Jessrod, Perlos and Jamal. The rescue team had come to Coral Cay to learn how to scuba dive in case the worst happened and they needed to rescue a missing diver or someone else lost at sea. They stayed with us at base for a full week as they did the PADI open water and advance courses, instructed by our community liaison officer, Jesse, and assisted by our Dive Master in training. The team became very skilled divers and passed the courses and lessons with ease. By the end of the week they were fully qualified PADI advance divers ready to save lives. They greatly enjoyed their time here at CCC not just learning to dive but also spending time with the local staff and volunteers. They left with smiles on their faces saying that they can’t wait to return and bring more members of the St. Bernard Rescue team along, so that they too can learn the joys of diving.

**Education and Community Projects**

**SEAS in Napantao Elementary School**

Seastars Environmental Awards Scheme (SEAS) is an education program that we teach in local schools across Southern Leyte. It is designed to teach children about the importance of Coral reefs, their biology and the threats that they face. The program consists of three tiers; bronze, silver and gold each consisting of different lessons about the marine ecosystems. This month Napantao Elementary school received the second lesson in the course given by our Education Officer, Jason.

When we arrived at the school on the 6th of November we received a warm welcome from the pupils and teachers, Ms. Mae Agbayani and Mr. Glenn who is currently teaching Grades 4-6. Before starting lesson 2 titled, ‘Threats to Coral
Reefs’, Jason briefly asked the pupils about what they learned from Lesson 1. All the pupils actively participated in the discussion and were able to answer all the questions posed to them. Finally, Jason introduced the lesson proper. The pupils thoroughly enjoyed learning all about what can damage and threaten reefs and all promised to think more about how to protect the resources in Napantao. We would like to say a big thank you to the students and staff at Napantao elementary for such a great day.

Philippine Organization of Science and Technology Educators (POSTE) Regional Convention

Earlier this month Oliver McGuinness was asked to present a lecture on the topic of, “Increasing diversity: strategies for teaching Science (Marine Life Conservation)” at the Philippine Organization of Science and Technology Educators (POSTE) Regional Convention. His presentation started by explaining the different ways that people learn. These include Visual, Aural, Verbal, Physical and Logical. The participants then conducted an activity to see which way they find easiest to learn, and showed the differences between their learning styles to other participants in the room. Oliver then demonstrated the different techniques we use at CCC to teach SDP, and how we cover each different learning style, therefore increasing the diversity of the students that we can reach.

All participants really enjoyed the presentation with several people requesting a copy of the slides at the end.

Climate Change Event – San Francisco

As a Part of Climate Change month, Sir Servando Tio Jr. SB secretary of San Francisco organised a day of activities with 4 schools to talk about Climate Change. CCC was asked to facilitate the event and so we compiled three presentations; one on an introduction to Climate Change, another on Climate Change and Coral Reefs, and finally “what we in the Philippines can do about Climate Change”. After the presentations, 3 interactive activities were used to engage the students. One was a dry run of Coral Watch, using the Coral Watch cards and a painted reef system. Another activity was a game of musical chairs, but as the chairs were taken away the facilitator would indicate that it was a habitat destroyed by climate change. The last table displayed a weather station.

To complete the day, several short videos were shown on climate change. When the day was done all the school students had learned a lot and along with all the CCC members involved had had a really good time doing so.
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 Research Scientist, Joshua Milne.

Coral Cay Present results to Barangay council of Gudan

Back in July 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.

The community is at the heart of everything we do here at CCC and it is hugely important that before any action is taken, we discuss our findings with those in the local community, who will be impacted the most by any implemented protection of the reefs. So, on Monday 16th November RS Joshua and CLO Jesse travelled to Gudan to meet with Barangay Captain and members of the Barangay council to present our results and discuss the future of Gudan MPA!

When we arrived we were warmly welcomed by the member’s Barangay Council within the Official Barangay hall. We began by introducing ourselves and explaining to the council about CCC and our work here in the Philippines, before discussing the results of our survey. Everyone greatly enjoyed seeing the pictures of what was hidden beneath the waters of the Barangay. As the presentation came to a close we were joined by Ma’am Benita Dipay, Fisheries Officer for the Municipal Agricultural Office of Liloan. Our three parties then discussed the proposed MPA Scenarios for the Gudan Barangay. The local council seemed very keen to have an MPA established over the dive spot known as Olly’s wall.

In the coming months, continued discussion and meetings will take place with the people of Gudan, Ma’am Benie and Coral Cay. Hopefully, this will result in achieving the goal of a MPA set up in the waters of Gudan, which meets the needs of the people and the environment.

Some of the amazing wildlife found in Gudan, including the Flamboyant cuttlefish
Surveys begin inside and outside Punta MPA

This month we started surveying the MPA in Punta at the request of the Municipal government of San Francisco. A marine reserve was established in Punta in 1997 by the then Barangay captain Carlito Paug Sr. This was managed with an open and closed season for fishing. Sadly, in 2003 a devastating landslide occurred, which destroyed the Barangay of Punta and covered much of the MR with silt. Thus the reserve was abandoned and the village relocated.

Coral Cay assisted the government in setting up a 10.5ha MPA in the area in June of 2009 by doing a preliminary survey there. Since then we have return to monitor the site in 2011. Four years on we are surveying the area again in the hope of seeing a successful increase in the abundance and diversity within the MPA. Our survey consists of 4 transect inside the MPA and 4 transects outside to give us a comparison point.

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 October 14th and 11th Coral Cay welcomed two new scholars to the team, Achassi Biay and Dexter Fernandez.

Achassi is 20, from Rosa City and studied for a BSc in Biology University of the Philippines- Los Banyos. Having graduated in 2015, Achassi heard about Coral Cay Conservation through a friend and former scholar and his thrill for adventure compelled him to apply. He greatly enjoyed his time with us making many new friends and completing surveys. Through his time at base he learned new skills in diving, marine identification and improved his communication skill with different people. He hopes that he can use what he has learnt here to help him go onto becoming a marine life conservationist, a researcher, and a professor.

Dexter is 22 from Surigao City and still studying his BSc in marine biology at Silliman University. Inspired to learn about the status of the MPA’s of different places and being trained to be equipped with the right knowledge and the proper techniques to conduct during a survey, he applied to join us. Dexter is super passionate about conservation here in the Philippines and beyond and hopes to put what he learned here with Coral Cay to good use in all his future endeavours.

“I can say that being a scholar of Coral Cay is a big check on my bucket list. What I like about Coral Cay is that I am not just diving for recreation. I know that we are contributing something for the betterment of the environment, my country, and the world! I also had fun meeting new people who share the same interests as me. Truly, race is never a barrier! For future scholars all I can say is this: sign that form, pack your bags, dive, and make a difference.”
- Achassi Biay

“I could only say that being absent for the first 2 weeks of classes was totally worth it. I got so lucky to see some whale sharks during a survey, having an opportunity to be with some people from different parts of the world that taught me all this cool things and sharing all this cool knowledge about the marine life is enough for me. For the CCC staff thank you for being so cool and heart-warming to me. For the future scholars just sign up and you will never regret it I assure you that.”
- Dexter Fernandez
Marine Creature of the Month!

Whale Shark, *Rhincodon typus*

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 **Whale Shark, Rhincodon typus** as Marine Creature of the Month!

The Whale shark is the largest known existing fish species in the world. The Whale shark is found throughout the tropics in open waters feeding primarily on Plankton with its large filter feeding mouth. Individuals have been recorded up to 12m in length and weighing over 20 metric tons and other unconfirmed reports suggest them to be as large as 14m, weighing over 30 metric tons!

As the largest species of fish in the world, the whale shark has become a very popular species, drawing many tourists to regions throughout the tropics where they are known to come close to shore and feed. Normally, a very docile creature they pose no threat to humans and are often happy to allow divers and snorkelers to swim alongside them and take photos.

This month in Napantao we have had a number of shark sightings along South Wall and house reef, with small sightings on the surface resulting in everyone rushing to the ocean to have a chance to swim with these magnificent beasts. The whale shark below was photographed by Joshua Milne our Research scientist.

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