Southern Leyte Coral Reef Conservation Project (SLCRCP)

Monthly Project Update

February 2016

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

Project Scientist: Marie Seraphim

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

CCC sets up new marker buoys for Napantao MPA

This month armed with our boat, a GPS and scuba diving gear we secured new surface marker buoys for Napantao MPA. Napantao MPA is a very special place for CCC as it is where we conduct all our dive training and Science Development Program. Each year we take advantage of the beautiful reef to teach our volunteers all about the fish, substrates and invertebrates that can be found here. We were therefore thrilled to participate in its protection by putting new markers and by raising awareness about marine conservation.
Story of the Month

CCC visits Barangay Himayangan to present survey results

In September 2015, CCC completed a full survey of the waters of Barangay Himayangan in the Municipality of Liloan. The purpose of this survey was to find the best location of a new MPA. Our survey found that the coral reefs in the Northern part of Himayangan would greatly benefit from protection and that there is certainly potential for a thriving ecosystem.

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 who they will impact the most. So, on Monday 8th of February Project Scientist Marie, Community Liaison Officer Jesse and Research Scientist Joshua travelled to Himayangan to meet with Barangay Captain Eugene and members of the local fishing community.

After a warm welcome in the Official Barangay Hall, CCC staff presented the results of the Himayangan survey. The group paid close attention and discussed enthusiastically about our findings on substrates, invertebrates, fish and coral health. Everyone was fascinated to see pictures of life on the reef and whole heartedly agreed that an MPA would be a great addition to the Barangay of Himayangan.

In the coming months, a new MPA and Marine Reserve will be established in Himayangan. Our results have been presented and recommended boundary coordinates sent to the Municipality of Liloan and the Provincial Environmental and Natural Resource Management Office (PENRMO) for the preparation of an official ordinance. When the time comes, CCC will assist in the installation of marker buoys for the final step in establishing the Marine Sanctuary. We are very proud to be involved in this endeavour!

Our Project Scientist, Marie presenting the results of our survey to community members

Group picture after a very successful event at Himayangan Barangay Hall
Education and Community Projects

Barangay Himayangan joins CCC for a Community Day

CCC’s base opened its doors again to community members from Barangay Himayangan for a training day on the 2nd of February. The activities and the learning experience sure made up for the rainy weather on that day.

Participants grouped for morning lectures on reef ecology, coral lifeforms, target fish families, and invertebrates presented by Project Scientist Marie, Community Liaison Officer Jesse and volunteers Mark and Tine. Before lunch CCC snorkelling guides take the group to explore the beautiful Napantao MPA. After meeting the marine creatures of Napantao, everyone smiles for a group photo, tired but happy with the morning’s events.

After a well-deserved lunch, CCC volunteers inform the trainees of the more serious topics of reef threats and their impacts, and how these can possibly be reversed. This raises a lot of interest from the participants and leads to an interesting discussion on the effects of climate change and MPA benefits. The possibility of setting up an MPA in their Barangay waters will soon be discussed in an assembly meeting. The day ends with the screening of a BBC video on coral reefs. Everyone then leaves CCC inspired and enlightened from the new learning they gained—a sign of more good things to come.
Survey Monthly 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, Marie Seraphim.

At the request of Sir Servando Tio Jr. (Bandoy) of the Municipal Government of San Francisco, Coral Cay have begun to survey the waters of Barangay Anisalong to determine its suitability for a Marine Protected Area. From what we have observed, the reef is beautiful in that area of the bay. You can find a stunning patch reef until 8 meters followed by a gentle sloping wall. CCC staff were especially amazed by the diversity of soft coral found in the area. We will soon be completing our 6th and final transect in Anisalong.

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

Some of the beautiful features that Anisalong has to offer below
**Southern Leyte Coral Reef Conservation Project**  
Philippines, February 2016

**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 saddened to say goodbye to two excellent scholars Precious (Pre) Gaurana and Dionn Hubag. Pre is a Bachelor of Science in Fisheries student at the University of the Philippines Visayas and the president of the organization UPV Mountaineers. Dionn is a Community Empowerment Facilitator from Iloilo and outdoor enthusiast. It has been wonderful to have these two contribute to CCC’s conservation work.

*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/](http://www.coralcay.org/volunteer/scholarship-opportunities/)

"During my stay here in CCC, I have witnessed how people work so hard and stay up late to accomplish their duties and of course, pass the exam. I have seen Professor Brown as he was running towards the water, eager to take a photo of a whale shark. I have been brought an extra oxygen tank by a 56-year old retired Marine just for the mere reason that it is easier and more comfortable for him to carry two tanks at a time. I have made these people leche flan, deep-fried banana, random smoothies and other foodstuff, and I have seen the mixture of gratitude and delight in their eyes with their every bite. I have realized that happiness is found in the simple things and is best when shared with the right people."

- Pre

"My experience in CCC was very memorable, because not only I celebrated my birthday during my stay but I enjoyed the company of the wonderful people at the base and the locals as well. I also wished that I could stay longer or maybe have another chance to go back there because I fell in love with marine conservation despite of not having a big background in marine biology. For the future scholars, it’s not too late, you don’t really have to be a marine biologist to know about marine conservation, just be open to yourself and learn new things and have the dedication for it."

- Dionn
CCC’s creature of the month for February is the whitetip reef shark (*Triaenodon obesus*). The whitetip reef shark is a small shark usually not exceeding 1.6 m in length, this species is easily recognizable by its slender body and white-tipped dorsal and caudal fins. One of the most common sharks found on Indo-Pacific coral reefs, the whitetip reef shark occurs as far west as South Africa and as far east as Central America. It is typically found on or near the bottom in clear water.

During the day, whitetip reef sharks spend much of their time resting inside caves. Unlike other requiem sharks, which must constantly swim to breathe, this shark can pump water over its gills and lie still on the bottom. At night, whitetip reef sharks emerge to hunt bony fishes, crustaceans, and octopus in groups, their elongate bodies allowing them to force their way into crevices and holes to extract hidden prey. Individuals may stay within a particular area of the reef for months to years, time and again returning to the same shelter.

Whitetip reef sharks are rarely aggressive towards humans, though they may investigate swimmers closely. The IUCN has assessed the whitetip reef shark as Near Threatened, noting its numbers are dwindling due to increasing levels of unregulated fishing activity across its range. The slow reproductive rate and limited habitat preferences of this species renders its populations vulnerable to overfishing. The below photo was taken at South Wall in Napantao MPA where we regularly spot two whitetip reef sharks resting in caves at 10 meters depth!

*Photo credit: Joel Brown, CCC Science Officer*

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.