PHILIPPINES
MONTHLY PROJECT UPDATE
MARCH | 2020
As the global population are affected by COVID-19, we couldn't start this MPU without an update from our team in the Philippines. The team may be quarantined on site but we have been blessed with a very understanding group. As a precaution our teams are following all local advisories: socialising with those within the house only and remaining within the site perimeter (which luckily includes our house reef), where they are fed, comfortable and cared for.

Due to travel restrictions (and thus evacuation restrictions) they aren't diving but our staff team have been hard at work to adapt the Skills Development Programme to snorkelling instead. With the skills they are learning the team have been assisting us with a taxonomy project which we will be using to produce a catalogue of the fish and coral of our house reef, Napantao - a huge help for our future teams.

To all of our readers, volunteers, staff, scholars, project partners and the entire CCC family, we hope you are all safe, look after each other and remain positive.
Swimming with Whale Sharks in Sok-Ok, Pintuyan

At the start of the month, a group of 6 travelled to Son-ok, Pintuyan. We hired 3 boats, 4 spotters and a guide, through the community based cooperative KASAKA, who run the Whale Shark interaction centre in Pintuyan. After cruising around the bay for a while the spotters suddenly started to circle around a certain area and waved their hands - A whale shark was spotted! Our tour guide told us to get ready, and as we jumped into the water we were greeted by the largest fish in the Ocean!

Directly in front of us, a majestic animal was hanging head up in the water, feeding on plankton. Suddenly a second, smaller whale shark appeared! We swam around with the two of them for a little while, keeping a safe and esponible distance, taking photos, duck diving and trying to match their pace. Even though their movement looks minimal they are actually very fast! We continued to swim with them until they decided to dive down and disappear from our sight.

If you want join Whale Sharks in their natural habitat, it is important you choose an ethical, sustainable and responsible programme - we've provided a link to a best practice guide at the end of the MPU.

To finish off volunteer Rob’s PADI Rescue Diver Course, the whole team got involved with a practice rescue scenario. Scuba instructor Viki pretended to be our unresponsive diver, and Rob had to delegate tasks to each of us before getting in the water to remove Viki’s scuba equipment whilst giving rescue breaths - a challenging task for anyone!

Field based manager, Lea, assessed our team work skills during the scenario and provided us with feedback, which was a valuable experience for all involved! A Rescue Diver qualification is not essential our volunteers and staff to take part in surveys, but all will agree, that the skills you build during the course are critical for all types of diving, from recreational to scientific!
Presentation Tuesdays...
We have started “Presentation Tuesdays”, where someone will give
the rest of the group a talk about any
topic they wish. Volunteer Nikhe
started off by teaching us all about
the fascinating field of palaeontology
and re-creating what various
dinosaurs might have looked like.
The following week volunteer Rob
shared his training from the
combined cadet force on how to do
weapons drills, using brooms as our
pretend rifles.

This week volunteer Gill introduced
us all to the wonderful world of plant
breeding and biofortification, how
plants can be selected for certain
traits that might make them more
nutritious or resilient against
disease. It has been an interesting
addition to our usual schedule on site
and we have all learnt something
new in the process!

Environmental Day at Santa
Paz Norte High School
As part of CCC’s Seastars Educational
Awareness Scheme (SEAS), after
completing the silver level and forming a
student led environmental committee,
students are then tasked with organising
their own environmental action day. CCC
were invited along to Santa Paz Norte
National High School’s first environmental
action day on the 5th of March.

To start the event off, one student
sang a doxology, or a prayer in the form of a
song, we then all stood and attempted to
follow the Philippines national anthem. The
principal spoke to the school and thanked
us for coming to their first ever
environmental action day, she talked about
the importance of protecting the
environment and said she hoped to see the
students organise one every year.

The first activity was zumba, with a group
of students and members of the
environmental committee on stage leading
the moves and everyone else trying their
best to follow. Afterwards, grade 7
students performed a song about
protecting the environment. Two different
groups from grade 8 then performed dance
routines that they had prepared, again
to music that talked about protecting
planet earth.
After the initial activities, it was time for the main event, a competition of making something out of eco-bricks. Students were split into 6 teams, and were provided with around 20 eco-bricks that had been made in the school. The students discussed how upcycling plastic waste into something useful was a good way to reduce the amount of rubbish entering landfill and prevent it from polluting the environment.

Each team had 30 minutes, some metal wire and wire cutters! CCC volunteers and staff were asked to be the judges of the final creations, scoring each design on creativity, strength and team work. The winning team produced a creative design of a stool with a back rest, made from firmly packed ecobricks - we all tested it out to be sure!

After the ecobrick competition, we went to plant 15 trees along the path from the main road leading down towards the school. The school was officially awarded the gold SEAS award, meaning Santa Paz Norte has completed our educational school programme that aims to increase the awareness of coral reefs and conservation.

**SURVEYS**

*the return to Tabugon, Liloan*

At the start of the month we revisited Barangay Tabugon’s Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the municipality of Liloan, to complete a full biophysical survey both inside and outside the reserve. The MPA was established in 1993, and covers 19 hectares of reef, although most of this is at shallow depths of less than 5m. We completed 7 transects in total, 4 outside the MPA and 3 inside, recording data on the fish, invertebrate and coral reef communities. Our collected data will be analysed and used to write a report, providing a snapshot of the MPA’s performance.

Whilst surveying, volunteers were lucky enough to spot many pipefish, and even a shortpouch pygmy pipehorse, as well as headshield slugs. The palm tree covered hills and crystal blue water made for a postcard worthy backdrop for our surface intervals!
We welcomed a new scholar, Helbert, in February

This month we welcomed scholar Easter Fulache to our Napantao base to learn all about the underwater world, scuba diving and marine conservation. Easter completed her PADI Open water and Advanced Open Water Diver courses, managing to overcome the initial fears she had. She quickly became fascinated with marine life, learning to identify fish, coral and invertebrates during SDP, and then also learnt to freedive, looking like a natural holding her breath and diving to 5 meters. It has been a pleasure to have Easter on site with us, and we wish her all the best in her future.

“My whole Coral Cay experience has been one big trip with people from different corners of the world, together for the same goals. Before coming, I was afraid of doing things outside of my comfort zone but after having met Viki, Coral Cay’s scuba instructor, I just went out of my way and did the tasks I was tasked to do. Being involved in the little community Coral Cay has created, I have learned that routines are not boring. In fact, they help you and keep you going. They may be hard at first but you will eventually get the hang of it. And once you do you will thank yourself for never stopping in the middle. Because you can do and learn so much when you do not give up halfway through. In Coral Cay, I have just been learning and I will keep on learning. And I cannot be more thankful for having given this beautiful opportunity. Thank you CCC.”

Easter Fulache
March | 2020
CREATURE OF THE MONTH

Triton’s Trumpet
Charonia tritonis

On a snorkel looking for uncommon Butterflyfish species, volunteers and staff got extremely lucky spotting a Triton’s Trumpet (Charonia tritonis)! It is named after Triton, the son of the Greek god of the Sea (Poseidon), and because its shell can be used as a trumpet. They’re found in Indo-Pacific reefs generally between 5-20m deep. Being one of the largest carnivorous gastropods in reef ecosystems, they are the arch nemesis and one of the only natural predators of the coral devouring Crown of Thorns Seastar (Acanthaster planci, or COTs).

The are known for their active, aggressive hunting at high speeds (for a snail), outpacing COTs that are located using their acute sense of smell. The scent of a COTs is extremely enticing for Triton’s Trumpet, and the presence of a Triton’s Trumpet on a reef is enough to disperse aggregations of COTs which will move away to try and avoid predation.

Their populations have historically been overexploited, being targeted for their shells which are used as decorative items, putting them at risk of regional extinction. Their ornate shells can grow up to 60cm in length, and their bodies have a sharp file-like radula that they use to tear through the spine covered exterior of a COTs. Since they only eat around 1 COTs per week, they do not offer the solution to COTs outbreaks that are in the hundreds or thousands, but they do play a very important role in keeping their population levels in check.

Triton’s Trumpet are on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red list of threatened species, highlighting their vulnerability. This was the first recorded sighting a Triton’s Trumpet on Napantao reefs for over 2 years!

A 30cm Triton’s Trumpet spotted in the south of the Napantao MPA, our House Reef, as well as a close up of it’s operculum.

Photo - Jalah Morris