

Welcome to Reef Check Malaysia's
4th quarter and final newsletter of 2020.



REEF CHECK MALAYSIA'S NEWSLETTER (4TH QUARTER 2020)

As we draw closer to the end of 2020, we'd like to share with you some highlights of what has been happening with our work in the last three months (July - September 2020).

Although we were not severely affected by the pandemic, a lot of our work had to be put on hold due to travel restrictions. But our team got back on track and successfully carried out all our programmes, some of which are highlighted below.

REEF CHECK ANNUAL SURVEYS

Once the MCO was announced in July, our team was back in the field again, conducting surveys first around Johor Islands. These surveys were done in collaboration with Marine Parks officers from the Department of Fisheries. Preliminary survey results show that our reefs continues to decline, with a 47.8% average coral cover in Johor (a drop from 50.9% in 2019). This is partly due to the coral bleaching event in 2019 and this year during the MCO period. The surveys in Johor is also supported by MISC Berhad, under its Heart of the Ocean corporate initiative.

Meanwhile the surveys in Terengganu was sponsored by KOSE Malaysia under their SEKKISEI SAVE the BLUE campaign. Results indicate some signs of recovery with a slight increase in coral cover from 38.1% (2019) to 41.6%. This varied pattern in our preliminary analysis suggests that despite the reduced human activities (during MCO), reefs generally need more time to recover from many years of impacts.

By September, our team successfully completed the surveys in Peninsular Malaysia and in Sabah. The sites in Sabah were: Tunku Abdul Rahman Marine Park (Kota Kinabalu), Pulau Tiga Park (Kuala Penyu), Turtle Islands park (Sandakan), Tun Sakaran Marine Park (Semporna), Sipadan Island Park (Semporna) and Darvel Bay (Lahad Datu). These surveys were led by our colleagues Jamie and Nadhirah, assisted by Sabah Parks divers.



Group photos from our recently completed Reef Check surveys

CINTAI TIOMAN

Our team recently deployed sea temperature monitoring devices at a few areas around Tioman. The average pH and temperature is monitored on a daily basis, which will allow us to have more accurate information to predict the possibility of a coral bleaching episode.

In the last couple of months, we also carried our Manta Tow surveys around the island, to roughly gauge the percentage of live coral cover, coral damage and possible coral bleaching sites. Our efforts in removing Crown of Thorns (CoTs) from Tioman reefs continues, and so does the removal of ghost/ drift nets. In the last 3 years itself, the Tioman Marine Conservation Group (TMCG), together with the Marine Parks Division and dive centres have successfully removed 6 tonnes of nets from within the Marine Park boundaries.



The team with the removed ghost nets



Injection of CoTs to reduce damage to reefs

In conjunction with the "International Coastal Clean Up (ICC) Day 2020", Tioman Cabana organised 'Pulau Kita Day'. Beach clean-ups, stand-up paddle competition, Discovery Scuba Diving and telematches were some the activities that were prepared for everyone who attended. A total of 400kg of trash was collected for the entire Tioman Island.

CINTAI MANTANANI

Our team on Mantanani Island has been spending their time rolling out the Mantanani Economic Recovery Programme. The goal of this programme that currently involves 21 local islanders is to promote economic recovery on the island by creating employment opportunities in new economic activities. The three new alternative economic activities include virgin coconut oil production, mariculture (abalone rearing) and agriculture (kebun komuniti). It is hoped that this entire programme will benefit more than 124 number of household members and all islanders.

The villagers were severely affected during the recent MCO, as many of them depended on the tourism sector on the island as their main source of income. RCM, with the support and funding from Yayasan Hasanah, decided on introducing alternative sources of income to reduce the community's dependency on tourism. It is our hope that the community will be able to recover from their losses during the MCO and continue investing their time in sustainable activities such as the ones recently introduced.



Virgin coconut oil (VCO) production



Abalone mariculture efforts

MERSING ISLAND PROGRAMME

Reef Management

In July, Reef Check Malaysia (RCM) and Department of Fisheries (DoF) had conducted the annual Reef Check surveys at Mersing Islands namely, Pulau Aur, Pulau Pemanggil, Pulau Sibul and Pulau Tinggi. We've also established six new Reef Check survey sites around Pulau Besar in September, with the aid of certified EcoDivers from the Tengah Island Conservation (TIC) team. Another effort which began in September was the coral

rehabilitation project, in collaboration with DoF and TIC. Over 200 nubbins were planted at the chosen site, Northern Reef, Pulau Tengah. We used two methods: cement blocks and metal frame structures. Monitoring will be done every month to assess the condition and survivorship of the nubbins.



The team involved in the Reef Check surveys



Planting coral nubbins at the rehabilitation site

Stakeholder Engagement

In July, RCM joined the launch of Think City located in KakakTua Guesthouse, Mersing. The event gathered many stakeholders, including YB Puan Hajah Alwiyah (ADUN Endau) and YDP En. Norazmi (YDP Majlis Daerah Mersing). Think City is part of the project by the Johor State Government in mapping Mersing town, to increase the wellbeing of its communities towards the establishment of a sustainable town.

The 'Sustainable Travel Mersing Destination Coordination Group' (STMDCG), of which RCM is a part of, conducted a town hall session at Bayu Lestari Resort, Pulau Besar in September. The purpose of the event was to engage with the island communities including resort operators, to understand the concerns and issues faced by the locals. A community survey was conducted after the consultation session to obtain more information and feedback from the local community. This conservation project is supported by MISC Berhad, under its Heart of the Ocean corporate initiative.



Launch of 'Think City Mersing'



Planting coral nubbins at the rehabilitation site

Awareness Session with MISC Staff

Although MISC volunteering programme had to be postponed due to the unprecedented pandemic, a virtual engagement session with employees of MISC themed “A Date with The Reefs 2” was held in September. The session aimed at raising the awareness on the importance of reefs and to keep employees updated on the conservation work that is happening on the Mersing Islands. For the e-forum, Julian Hyde, General Manager of RCM was invited as the guest speaker to share with the staff on the threats to coral reefs on the islands, conservation efforts and way forward. Approximately 180 employees joined the session, gaining awareness and useful information on coral reefs conservation efforts.

2020 INTERNATIONAL COASTAL CLEANUP (ICC) DAY, MALAYSIA

On Saturday, 19th September 2020, Reef Check Malaysia (RCM) coordinated a nationwide cleanup effort, along with a host of partners, in conjunction with the 34th International Coastal Cleanup Day (ICC). We were joined by 3,424 volunteers who organised and participated in the clean-up which took place in 70 locations across 11 states in Malaysia. This year, the ICC effort in Malaysia was supported by Garnier Malaysia (platinum sponsor) and Flextronics Technology (gold sponsor).

In the past, RCM has organised beach clean-ups in conjunction with ICC, on a nationwide scale. However, due to COVID-19, we had a smaller number of volunteers this year, who gathered in smaller groups and had to comply to a set of SOPs. This did not deter their good spirits and motivation to play their part in keeping our environment clean.

This year, 11,276kg of trash was collected and removed from these beaches. The top 5 items found were plastic beverage bottles, cigarette butts, plastic pieces, food wrappers and plastic bottle caps. Some unusual items found included a carpet, a fibreglass boat and a liquid gas cylinder. One new category was added this year: masks and gloves, which reminds us that while we may be battling a pandemic, we must not forget to protect our environment. A detailed report on this year's ICC findings is available at <https://tinyurl.com/ICCReport2020>.

For more information on what we do, visit our website at : www.reefcheck.org.my
Alternatively, drop us an email at: wecare@reefcheck.org.my

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