



Hi everyone, and welcome to Reef Check Malaysia's 1st newsletter of the year.

Last year was a tough year for everyone, to say the least. Many of our colleagues were not able to travel out for fieldwork, which caused some delays to some of our annual activities such as our surveys. However, with the determination of our colleagues and support from our volunteers and partners, we were able to complete all our planned programmes for 2020.

Here's a recap on what we've been up to in the last quarter.



Participants of the EcoDiver course



TMCG members who participated in the AOW Course

Tioman Island

In the last quarter of 2020, our team on Tioman Island received sponsorship from **Brevard Zoo** to conduct an EcoDiver Course and an Advanced Open Water (AOW) Dive Course for the local community of the island.

The **EcoDiver course** was conducted with 6 local villagers, during which they were taught how to identify species of fish, invertebrates and coral reefs in detail, besides learning about the importance of the marine ecosystem.

As for the **AOW Dive Course**, it was joined by 5 members of the TMCG who are active in all the programmes conducted by Reef Check Malaysia. The main aim of this course was to enable the participants to perform their tasks more efficiently, especially underwater ones such as collecting of ghost nets and those that take place in deeper waters.

Mersing Island

Once again in October, we headed to Pulau Tengah to conduct **monitoring and maintenance of the corals** which were replanted in September in collaboration with Tengah Island Conservation (TIC) and Department of Fisheries (DOF). Together with the partners, several types of data were collected including bleaching, mortality & coral health. The algae that grew around the cement blocks and coral plugs were brushed off to ensure that the coral nubbins are able to grow well on the substrate. As the monsoon season is fast approaching, this will be our last monitoring of the season and the activity will resume when the monsoon ends.



Monitoring and cleaning in progress



Some of the planted coral nubbins

We had conducted an **Eco-friendly Snorkel Guide** training in Mersing with a total of 20 participants joining us from various local snorkeling operators, guides and boat captains. This is our third training session in Mersing since 2019, and this time was conducted with the help of our partners from Sustainable Travel Mersing Destination Coordination Group (STMDCG). The objectives of this training was to impart knowledge on marine life and ecology, as well as to provide proper training on first aid response that will help add value to their businesses.



Snorkel guide training sessions



Visit from DQS for the preliminary assessment

In December, as part of our effort with the Sustainable Travel Mersing Destination Coordination Group (STMDCG) to promote Mersing as Sustainable Tourism destination, we invited DQS Certification (M) Sdn Bhd, a Malaysian ISO certification body to conduct a preliminary assessment of Mersing. This was done to assess if Mersing could be turned into a sustainable destination in accordance with the GSTC (Global Sustainable Tourism Council) criteria.

As a result of this preliminary assessment, it has been agreed that Pulau Besar will be the starting point of this project where case studies will be conducted to assess the feasibility of implementing sustainability initiatives in a small island destination with involvement of various stakeholder groups.

Despite the unprecedented pandemic, we are glad that we are still able to continue our work on the conservation of coral reefs in Mersing. We would like to thank **MISC Berhad** for the support in this conservation project, under its **Heart of the Ocean** flagship programme.

Mantanani Island

Through the **Economic Recovery programme** that was recently introduced for the local islanders, we've implemented 3 initiatives, with financial support from Yayasan Hasanah.

The **abalone mariculture** initiative has 5 islanders working on the rearing of more than 300 abalone in cages.

6 local islanders participated in the **Virgin Coconut Oil production**, and will continue to produce and market this local product. A total of 38 bottles have been sold so far, generating RM1500 income for the participants!

As for the third initiative called **Kebun Komuniti**, 10 islanders were working on planting vegetables and fruits but the project unfortunately came to a halt when all the crops were lost during recent flooding due to heavy rains in the west coast of Sabah. Gardening has been affected too, and will be stopped until the rain and floods subside. Fortunately, some vegetables and fruits were harvested just before the floods.



The VCO produced by the local community



The Kebun Komuniti

To expand on our community development training programme, we've begun the **community-based eco-tourism (CBET) initiative**, to strengthen the community-based eco-tourism activities on the island by working with homestays and the local community. This project, under the sponsorship from **GEF-SGP Malaysia**, also provides support to the **waste management effort** in Mantanani.

Activities that have been conducted include:

- Homestays ASEAN Standard assessment for 10 homestay operators on the island.
- Tourists experience and feedback assessment
- A meeting with the General Manager of Sabah Tourism Board to get their support

The assessment has helped us in understanding the current weaknesses of homestays or local tourism services, which will help us make the necessary improvements. In December 2020, we distributed a RM1000 grant to each of the local 10 homestays to be used to upgrade or repair their homestays.

The SEA Circular Project



This project is implemented by the UNEP Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific and COBSEA, with support from the Government of Sweden. SEA circular aims to **reduce and prevent plastic pollution and its impact in partnership with governments, businesses, civil society, academia, and international partners**. The initiative promotes market-based solutions and enabling policies to transform plastic value-chain management, strengthens the science base for informed decision making, creates outreach and awareness, and leverages COBSEA's regional mechanism to tackle the transboundary challenge of marine litter.

Reef Check Malaysia was officially appointed as the Working Group Leader for CEPA (Communications, Education, and Public Awareness) and will be collaborating with Malaysia Nature Society, Impactlution, and Yayasan Penyelidikan Antartika Sultan Mizan to promote the #CleanSeas campaign in Malaysia. For updates, please follow us on Facebook and Instagram: **@cleanseasmalaysia**

2020 International Coastal Cleanup



A huge thanks to Garnier
(Platinum Sponsor) and Flex
(Gold Sponsor) for
sponsoring our International
Coastal Cleanup 2020
event.



Looking Forward...

We don't know what this year is going to bring; when will movement restrictions end; how much we will be able to move around. But we are planning a full year of programmes, as we continue to work with all stakeholders to improve management of marine resources in Malaysia. We are looking forward to working with our many supporters, volunteers, sponsors and partners to reach our vision: sustainably managed coral reefs in Malaysia.