



PROJECT REPORT
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Coral Cay Conservation Expedition
- Danjungan Island (Negros Occidental), Philippines

On arrival in the Philippines on the 12th August 1998, I was informed by the project manager that the Danjungan Island project was drawing to a close. Instead, our expedition took place at Coral Cays' new site at Campomanes Bay. The site is located on the west coast of Negros Occidental, south of Danjungan Island. The aims at this site were to work as a continuation of the study done around Danjungan, surveying the marine ecosystem with an objective to provide data to enable a sustainable management plan to be proposed.

I have learnt a tremendous amount from this expedition, completing all of my personal aims. I undertook a week of intensive scientific study and gained a certificate after learning all of the species of fish, coral and invertebrates found in the area. Furthermore, I now have a far greater knowledge of marine ecology and the increasing pressures tropical reefs are facing.

Not only did I observe evidence of dynamite fishing techniques, sedimentation and other human related impacts, but, unfortunately, there was an alarming increase in the percentage of bleaching, a stressed effect on coral as an effect of global warming. I participated in a number of marine surveys and as a consequence have a clear understanding of the types of very simple, yet very effective techniques one can apply to such marine based studies.

During the expedition I was able to meet and work with a number of interesting people and staff, one of whom was a marine biology graduate undertaking study in the area for her Masters degree. I helped her in data collection and gained enormously from her experiences. When she left the project, and for the last week of my time at Campomanes, I was appointed 'Assistant Science Officer' in her place. At that time I was very fortunate that my visit coincided with the 'Reef Check '98' surveys due to be conducted in the area. 'Reef Check' is an international program, established in 1997 by professor Robert Ginsberg of the university of Miami, as a consequence of the 1993 colloquium on Global Aspects of Coral Reefs. I worked alongside the Science Officer in planning, organising and conducting the surveys. It was a lot of responsibility and a fantastic experience. At the end of the expedition at Campomanes, I was highly commended by both the expedition leader and the science officer in their reports to the head office in London. As a consequence I have since been told that there is a possibility I may be welcomed back for a position as science officer once I graduate!

The final four days of my time with the Coral Cay project were spent on Danjungan Island. Enough data had been collected and a management plan had subsequently been drawn up. In the time I was in the Philippines the plan was approved and started to take effect among the local fishermen. During my period on the Island I was able to help collect data for bleaching surveys, commenced just a few days before my arrival, which were a consequence of the rapidly increasing damage to the corals due to increased water temperature (34-35 degrees Celcius).

I experienced both the wonders of tropical reefs and the work involved in scientific study in the tropics. With an average air temperature of 35 degrees Celcius, water temperature of 31 degrees celcius, tropical storms, including typhoon 'Gadings', it was a unique experience I will treasure.