

Project Update: August 2012

An intense semester

Since January 2012, we had several surveys happening, always with successful data collections and interesting observations: we had days with playful spinner dolphins (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X72XCnG1Gbl>), we started observing the first obvious pregnancies and recorded the subsequent newborns, met a group of Indo-pacific bottlenose dolphins (*Tursiops aduncus*) in the lagoon and once we had a tuna with an “identity crisis” following the spinners in the waters of Samadai.

Our students have finished their experience in the field, they have learnt that the work “behind the scenes” is really tough, demanding, sometimes repetitive, and fastidiousness is a must. They evaluated individual dolphins’ site fidelity, analysed possible effects of environmental covariates and drew conclusions about the managed area perception from the answers given by dive guides and captains to our questionnaire. The first two Bachelor thesis ever done in Egypt on this case study have been presented at the end of June 2012 in Port Said University! Results from the questionnaire are being handed over to HEPCA hoping that they will inspire new ideas to further enhance the fruition of the managed area.

One of the point surfaced was the request from guides and operators to be provided with education and interpretation materials: this has already been tackled. A workshop entitled “LET’S TALK SAMADAI” has been organised and carried out on the 26th May 2012. Dive and snorkeling guides working in Marsa Alam, specifically in Samadai, were invited to attend the event and about 40 of them eventually joined. The agenda included a few presentation done by HEPCA staff about value and importance of protected areas, marine mammals ecology, spinner dolphins characteristics and an overview on the scientific results obtained in Samadai, as well as the distribution of materials prepared *ad hoc*: a booklet entitled “A guide to Samadai” to summarise all information given during the talks (and much more) and a series of eight slides with pictures and images that we reckon a needed visual tool to support briefings to visitors were handed over. Also, our idea of designing a “Samadai Label” to certify guides and propose a standard services that operators should provide visitors with (including gizmos, presentations and audio-video materials, for example) has been thrown on the table during this meeting. Learning by doing, some minor elements will be adjusted next time, but we consider this a successful evening that we definitely plan to repeat.

More surveys and more educational efforts are planned in the next months. The work in Samadai continues, the managed area is still a work in progress and hopefully new ideas coming from frequent confrontation with the community will enhance the Samadai experience for visitors and operators while ensuring dolphins a safe place for their daily rest.

