

Project Update: January 2017

Field Surveys:

In the first 2 months of the project, field surveys have been conducted at the proposed study sites. Field surveys were conducted through SCUBA diving and snorkelling activities. The presence of bumphead parrotfish was found at various sites in Ritchie's Archipelago and in South Andaman. A sleeping school was also found in one of the dive sites called- Johnny's Dive site near Havelock Island. Bumphead sightings were found out to be more in October than in November and December. In my opinion, this was due to three cyclones occurring between November and December. Interestingly, in many of the sites, I have recorded the bite marks of the species with help from local divers. The coral species the fish feeds on is mostly *Porites* sp.

Social Interviews:

Social interviews with 20 interviewees till now, I have found out that the fish is very commonly identified by them owing to its size and characteristic bump on its head. The fish is also a big attraction for tourists who come to the islands for diving experiences. Social interviews with sport fishing people have helped me to draw the conclusion that bumphead parrotfish are not caught during their gaming activities. I have appointed two field assistants, one in Ritchie's Archipelago and one in the South Andaman to record additional sightings in a pair of log sheets made by me. Additionally, the log sheets have been circulated too few of the dive schools in Ritchie's Archipelago and South Andaman to record relevant details regarding bumphead sightings.

Some of the unforeseen difficulties that arose during the project so far:

- 1) Dives had to call off and certain dive sites became inaccessible in the event of torrential rain and cyclones.
- 2) Some dive sites have been closed down because of public transport traffic – these sites have been covered by snorkelling.
- 3) Fluctuations in visibility made taking photos and spotting fishes challenging- dives would have to be scheduled depending upon tidal charts to avoid tidal changing periods as much as possible.

Three most important outcomes of my project so far:

- 1) Certain sites in the Ritchie's Archipelago especially Havelock Island has more sightings of the fish than South Andaman study sites. Additionally, a sleeping aggregation was found at a dive site near Havelock Island.
- 2) Through socio-economic surveys, it was found that bumphead parrotfish is not a fishery-targeted species in the Andaman Islands. It is an easily identified fish by the divers and fishermen population. 10 out of 15 people interviewed so far have said that they have seen individuals belonging to the species making huge sounds eating chunks of corals and leaving bite marks everywhere. One interviewee stated bumphead parrotfish to be a coral destroyer.
- 3) So far juvenile bumpheads have not been sighted in any of the sites.



School of Bumphead parrotfish at Johnny's dive site (30m), Havelock Island (taken on 25/10/2016)



School of Bumphead Parrotfish at Minnerva's Ledge (15metres), Havelock Island (taken on 03/11/2016)

