

Project Update: August 2017

Ten sites were surveyed covering the whole island of Rodrigues. Dive surveys were conducted with the help of the local community, Shoals Rodrigues, dive centres, South East Marine Protected Area and the Rodrigues Regional Assembly. Before conducting the surveys, the divers were trained in the proper assessment of biodiversity using quadrats. Sites targeted for this survey were the main passes and channels around the island – including those going through established MPAs. At each site, we conducted an hour dive covering 15 quadrats. All sponges inside quadrats were recorded and a 1cm³ tissue sample was collected from each sponge for spicule identification and DNA analysis. A total of 80 sponges were collected. Currently DNA analyses are being carried out at the University of Stellenbosch under the supervision of Prof Sophie von der Heyden. Spicule identification will be done at the Naturalis biodiversity center with the help of Dr Nicole de Voogd.