

Project Update: April 2002

The active phase of the project has now started. I travelled to the Philippines on the 1 April, and the training for the monitoring team started in earnest on the 3rd April.

The training started with a revision day, since all trainees already had a basic knowledge in identification of marine organisms from previous workshops. The trainees had to identify the corals and benthic life forms marked by permanent buoyant floats along a snorkelling trail, and assign the life form that had been introduced in the morning lecture. In the afternoon, fish families and species were revised. After a lecture and slide show, the trainees conducted a dive where myself and local experienced surveyors pointed out fish. Most of the trainees are fishermen or come from a fishing family, so this exercise did not pose a problem to them. As some trainees had not been diving for a while, this dive also doubled as a check out dive, and basic diving skills were refreshed. In the afternoon we also refreshed the use of the Marinox unit. This is a safety device delivering 100% Oxygen to a casualty of a dive accident.

On the following days, we practised the survey monitoring used for monitoring around Danjungan Island Marine Reserve and Sanctuaries. This involves three main "jobs": fish, benthic cover and invertebrates.

All participants learned to estimate fish length, which is an important prerequisite for calculating biomass. The exercise was prepared by submerging fish cut from blue plastic foam. They were numbered, and all trainees estimated the size class of each fish. After the dive, the results were compared. Usually each participant tends to consistently either under- or overestimate, so feedback could be given on how to adjust the estimation. This test was repeated several times, both on SCUBA and on snorkel.

For benthic life forms, two trainees swam along a transect line and recorded the life forms. After the dive they compared their results. The trainees encountered problems with this exercise, because they are still beginner divers and good buoyancy is required to avoid floating away from the transect.

Invertebrate training consisted in going through the target invertebrate list in the books, and showing examples under water. The target invertebrates were well known to all participants.

This was followed by two days of survey practise. All trainees were assembled in teams and conducted a survey. Initially, they had buoyancy problems and rapid air consumption shortened the survey time. After two day they had improved considerably, and can now complete two transects of 50m in one dive.

Three days ago we started surveying. We formed two survey teams, conducting the monitoring at 15m and 5m depth. Concurrently, I also noted all fish species encountered. At the moment, I recorded 275 species of fish.