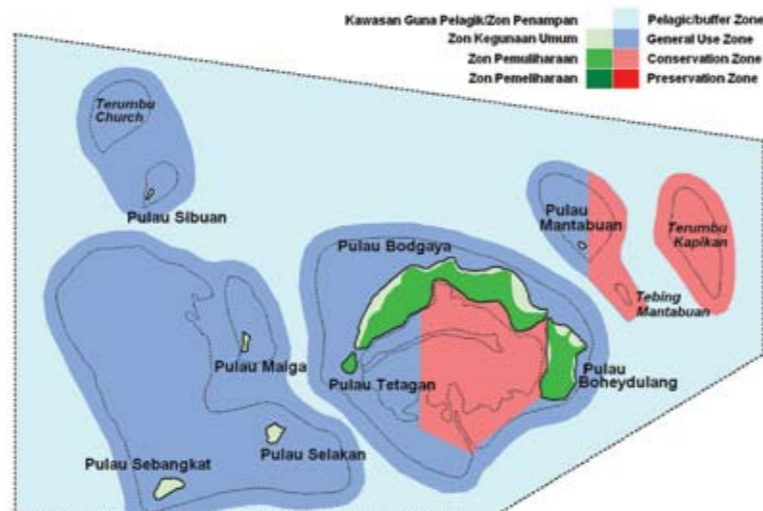


Progress on Park regulations

The Park regulations were discussed again in September, at a workshop in Semporna for local communities and a Stakeholder Meeting in Kota Kinabalu. Comments were invited and the feedback helped the SIDP team and Sabah Parks to produce the final draft of the regulations and Zoning Plan.

Revised Zoning Plan, showing the zones (in red) designated for immediate protection as no-take areas (i.e. no capture of fish, octopus, lobsters, shells or any other marine life).



Crown-of-thorns starfish clean-up

The crown-of-thorns starfish (COTS) is a large and ferocious predator on live coral that normally occurs only in small numbers on any particular stretch of reef, but sometimes turns up in huge numbers.

During recent surveys carried out by divers from the Marine Conservation Society and Sabah Parks in TSMP, several COTS plagues were discovered, the worst of which was on the northern tip of the Mantabuan Reef. This area had previously been noted for its rich coral, but now the coral was rapidly being destroyed.



E Wood MCS

Reefs may take decades to recover from a COTS attack, and most reef managers agree it is sensible to try and protect valuable areas by removing the starfish. A clean-up has started in TSMP, with divers from Sabah Parks extracting the starfish with metal tongs and taking them to the surface for measuring and disposal.



MRU Sabah Parks

To all fishermen and divers who use the reefs - please contact us immediately if you see large numbers of COTS, using any of the contact information below.



This project has been grant-aided by the Darwin Initiative through funding from the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and is managed by the Marine Conservation Society.

Thanks to the following groups and organisations that are providing additional support: North of England Zoological Society, Reef Conservation-UK, Wild Asia. International Coral Reef Action Network.

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SIDP News

Issue 4 January 2007

Community action for sustainable use and conservation of coral reefs

Hatchery News

Construction of the Hatchery at Boheydulang is now complete, and the breeding programme is scheduled to start in early 2007. This is being organised by the Marine Conservation Society and Sabah Parks, as part of SIDP, and the first trials will be on the giant clam *Tridacna gigas*.



The hatchery at Boheydulang.

When fully grown, the *gigas* clam can reach a length of 1.25 metres, weigh a quarter of a ton, and live to be over 100 years old. Not so long ago, this amazing giant was common in Sabah, but now it is very rare. So many have been hauled from the sea for their shell and meat that today only a handful remain.

There are just two adult specimens left in TSMP, which for the past 10 years or so have been carefully guarded by a local family. Now the owners have added to their conservation credentials by loaning the clams for the breeding programme.

The loaned clams will provide a regular source of eggs and sperm, and after fertilisation has occurred, the embryos will be cared for under controlled conditions in the hatchery as they progress from larvae to juveniles. Then as soon as the juveniles are sturdy enough, they will be moved to 'ocean nurseries' and looked after by members of the local village communities.

We already know from trials started in 2004 that *gigas* clams are highly suitable for this type of 'sea ranching' in TSMP. The clams were only about 9cm long when they were passed to local communities for ranching, but now many of them are over 30cm. The aim of the trials was not only to replenish the reefs, but also to give local fishermen the opportunity to diversify and develop alternative livelihoods.



The loaned giant clam being placed on the reef near the hatchery.



Ranched *gigas* clams being taken to restock one of the over-exploited reefs in the Park.

SIDP gives threatened fish a helping hand

The Napoleon or humphead wrasse is a hugely popular fish and one of the most expensive on the 'live fish' menu throughout South-East Asia. Its popularity has put a huge strain on wild populations.



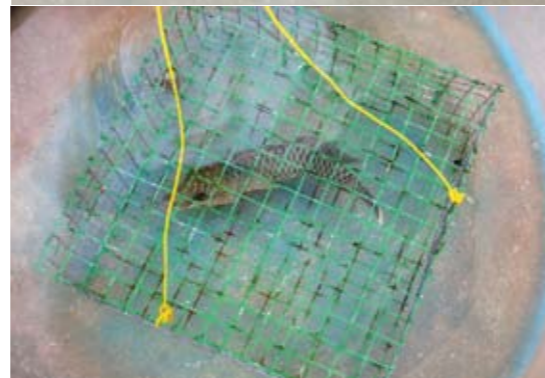
In Sabah, as elsewhere, large breeding individuals are extremely rare except in protected areas. There used to be a group in the lagoon adjacent to Boheydulang, but a few years ago these were caught too. Local fishermen agree with the results of surveys carried out by biologists from MCS that there appear to be no big ones left in the 350 sq km Park.

E Wood MCS

Luckily there are still larval stages of this fish floating into the Park from outside, so the species has not disappeared altogether. However, the Napoleon larvae that survive to grow into juveniles are then heavily targeted by fishermen because 'dinner-plate' sized juveniles fetch the best price. The market price is RM100/kg for a live 1-2kg fish, so it is not surprising that they are avidly hunted. The result of this constant pressure is that juveniles don't have a chance to make it through to the adult, breeding condition. This is a recipe for disaster that could lead to local extinction of this species.

Fairly soon, regulations will be in place in TSMP that give complete protection to this species, but in the meantime immediate steps are being taken to try and build up a population of breeding adults. Recently, SIDP purchased 25 juveniles that had already been caught by local fishermen and were being held in cages until they reached a good market size. The fish were measured and then quickly and carefully transported to the only protected reef in the Park, where they were released one by one using a specially designed individual cage. Great care was taken to ensure that they were not stressed during this operation, and judging by the way they swam without hesitation to the reef, this approach seems to have worked.

During a dive carried out the next day, several of the new recruits were seen moving around on the reef, apparently in excellent health. At this size they are still several years away from breeding, but at least they have been given a flying start. Regular checks will be made at the release site to see how the fish are doing, and we just have to hope they will be happy in their new surroundings and will not migrate elsewhere - and be caught!



Reefs in the Park suffer at the hands of fish bombers

There is bad news as well as good for TSMP. Reefs in the area have been subjected to blast fishing for decades and have been significantly degraded as a result. Unfortunately, despite being in a 'protected area', blast fishing is still going on.



Eric Madeja www.treasure-images.com

There is an urgent need for increased surveillance, but catching fish bombers 'in the act' is extremely difficult because they are always on the alert for anyone in authority and can often make their escape or dispose of the evidence.

Most of the people living in the Park are keen to help stamp out fish blasting, as are the divers who are increasingly visiting the area. We appeal to everyone to tell SIDP or Sabah Parks what they know about the fish blasters and to report incidents immediately. People who live in or visit the Park are the 'eyes and ears' that could help to stamp out fish blasting for good.



Large coral blocks shattered by the force of a powerful fish bomb.



An angelfish (*Pomacanthus sextriatus*) killed by the blast and left behind on the broken reef.

Divers regularly hear bombs going off and see at first hand the destruction that is caused. Fish blasting smashes coral that has taken decades or hundreds of years to grow, and kills marine life indiscriminately. Recovery is notoriously slow, and many of the damaged reefs may never fully regain their diversity and habitat complexity. Currently, fish blasting is the most serious threat to the long-term health and value of the reefs in the Park, and unless it can be completely halted the future prospects for TSMP are gloomy.

Help look after the Park by immediately reporting anyone engaged in fish blasting. Call any of these numbers Tel: 089-782014/782039/782013; 089-786832 (Boheydulang)