

Welcome to Reef Check Malaysia's third newsletter of the year!

Hello everyone and welcome to our third newsletter! The past 6 months have just flown by and it's been such a busy time. So much has been happening and we are excited to share with you what we have been up to, and our plans for the coming months.

In this edition of our newsletter, we will continue to focus on the issue of marine debris. We have highlighted this issue in the previous newsletter, but more has been done since and we would like to share these updates with you. As you now know, 2018 has been declared as the third International Year of the Reef (IYOR) and in conjunction with this, we have started our long battle against marine debris, especially plastic waste.

Marine Debris – so what's the problem?

Marine debris is not a new problem, it's been around for a while now, but only keeps getting worse. What makes it even more serious is the fact that plastic, which usually accounts for most of the marine debris, has been making its way into the food chain. Humans and our selfish actions are the cause of marine debris (80% of it originates from land), and we are eventually affected by it – we are literally shooting ourselves in the foot.



Marine debris strewn along a beach in Malaysia



Plastic bottles seen along a beach in Malaysia

Marine debris is not only an eyesore and a nuisance, it can also have detrimental effects to the marine environment and marine life. We've seen countless news reports on wildlife entanglement and ingestion which eventually leads to death, all because of marine debris. We also know that almost 80% of marine debris originates from land. RCM has been concerned about the issue of marine debris for a long time and we have some data from a previous beach clean-up in March, which has given us a glimpse of how serious this problem is in Malaysia. The data from that beach clean-up was published in our previous newsletter.

What can we do about it?

Conducting beach clean-ups does not completely solve the problem at hand, it merely helps address the problem. The rubbish and debris will always be there; more of it will be generated if we do not stop and change our actions. What we need is a change of mindset and attitude among Malaysians. We need to stop littering and disposing of trash

irresponsibly. Change our habits – stop using single-use plastics like disposable utensils and bottles. Bring your own recyclable bag and reusable bottles/ containers when you go out. Refuse plastic straws, get a reusable stainless steel one. Sort out your household waste and send the items for recycling. These are just some of the many ways we can play our part to help solve this problem.

We are planning a multi-stakeholders workshop to address marine litter in October this year. We are hoping to include relevant government ministries and departments, such as JPSPN, waste management companies, such as EPIC-Cenviro, environmental NGOs, Malaysian Plastics Manufacturers Association (MPMA), technological companies with innovative recycling solutions, such as reverse vending machines and plastic recycling machines, and some of the biggest FMCG producers in Malaysia. We will collaborate across various industries and expertise to come up with feasible solutions to reduce marine litter in our oceans.

We aim to use the data collected from a nationwide beach clean-up on 22 September to push for a change in our waste management and recycling systems at the workshop. If we can mobilize as many groups as possible to do a beach clean-up on that Saturday, we will have bigger numbers to make a larger impact.

International Coastal Clean-up Day (ICC) 2018

The International Coastal Clean-up (ICC) is the world's biggest annual volunteer effort to protect the ocean. Every year, millions of people around the world gather to collect trash along beaches in their country and record the data which helps give insights into other ways to tackle the ever growing problem of trash.

The ICC is an effort which has been around for 31 years, introduced by Ocean Conservancy. The main focus of this organisation is on solving some of the greatest threats facing the ocean today. They bring people, science and policy together, to champion innovative solutions and fight for a sustainable ocean. Data collected by volunteers who participate in the ICC can now be recorded on the 'Clean Swell' app. The data collected all around the world will be sent for analysis and compilation by Ocean Conservancy, which will assist them in tackling the issue of trash in our oceans.

RCM has conducted beach clean-ups in our project areas in conjunction with ICC every year. However, this year we are planning one on a bigger scale, to include more locations across Malaysia. We will be organizing this nationwide beach clean-up on 22nd September 2018 across Malaysia, with the help of partners and volunteers. This is in line with our commitment to highlight the issue of marine debris, specifically plastic waste, which represents a serious threat to marine ecosystems.



We are hoping to gather more participants to take part on 22nd September. If you are interested to take part in this nationwide effort and can commit to organizing a team of volunteers (friends, family, colleagues) for a few hours on that day, please email us (wecare@reefcheck.org.my) so that we can send you more information on how to organize a beach clean-up and collect data which will help us identify long-term solutions for trash-free seas. We recommend the use of the Clean Swell app (download from App Store or Google Play) to record the data of trash collected.

We have also created a Facebook group to gather anyone interested in volunteering for the clean-up or even leading a beach clean-up in an area close to them. This group will be our main medium of communication on all matters related to the beach clean-up in September. Do join the group at (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/msiamarinedebris>) if you wish to participate and join us.

EcoDiver Training and Surveys

From April to June, we successfully completed our annual surveys in Semporna, Perhentian, Usukan Cove, Redang, Bidong and Yu. We'd like to thank all our volunteers as well as staff of DMPM for participating and helping out in these surveys. A special shout out to Bubbles Dive Centre for sponsoring this year's survey in Perhentian! We'd also like to thank Scuba Junkie Mabul for helping us out with the surveys in Semporna and Usukan Cove Lodge for their assistance with the Usukan Cove surveys.



Volunteers conducting a survey



Scuba Junkie and RCM staff (Semporna surveys)

5th International Marine Conservation Congress (IMCC5)

RCM attended the 5th IMCC 2018 held at Waterfront Hotel Kuching. Edmund Lau, RCM's Programme Manager presented on our project with DMPM regarding the mapping of coral reefs in Pulau Tioman entitled "Tracing Coral Reefs: A Citizen Science Approach in Mapping Coral Reefs to Enhance Marine Park Management Strategies". Edmund and Julian Hyde, RCM's General Manager, also lead a focus group discussion on "Bridging the gap of local scientific and management needs in marine biodiversity".

Tioman Island Programme – Cintai Tioman

Yayasan Sime Darby recently funded a glass crushing machine which is now placed in Kg Tekek in Tioman. This machine is a great addition to our recycling programme on the island. We have been trying to look for a solution for the issue of glass waste on the island since 2014, and we now have a machine which turns glass into sand, which can then be used for

construction. This machine is housed at and managed by Rumah Hijau Tioman.

RCM also recently received funding from The Entrepreneurs' Organisation of Malaysia (EO Malaysia) to sink an old wooden fishing boat off Renggis Island. The deployment of this wooden fishing boat is the first of many in what is planned as a long term programme. The main purpose of this deployment is to create a site to attract divers. Renggis Island is a very popular dive site and is visited by divers with varying levels of qualification. It is hoped that this new wreck will provide an alternative underwater attraction, reducing the pressure on natural reefs.



The fishing boat that was successfully sunk

Do follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/CintaiTioman> for regular updates on our programmes and activities on the island.

Mantanani Island Programme

We conducted two series of Eco-friendly Snorkelling Guide training with 29 local islanders. This three-day course aimed at teaching and exposing the participants on the basic snorkel-guiding skills as well as best practices to lessen its impact on the environment. Besides this training, we also had 17 participants for a two-series Basic English Language Training (BELT), which aimed to enhance English conversation skills among the community to help them in their daily business activities such as homestay services, guiding, working in resorts etc.

The BEFF SUARA Community Filmmaking conducted a Filmmaking Production Training, attended by 41 people, including 9 youths from the island. Community Filmmaking is a series of program by BEFF to equip the community with storytelling and videography training so they can use it to highlight cultural and social issues around their community. The participants also produced short videos on Mantanani and screened it at night to the community.



Eco-friendly Snorkel Guide training



Filmmaking Production Training

As for our recycling efforts on the island, approximately 13,600 plastic bottles were collected and transferred to collection centre in Kg Siring Bukit since April. A draft of waste management plan for Mantanani which will integrate the participation from all stakeholders especially community has been prepared and will be ready for circulation soon.

You can follow us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/cintaimantanani/> for updates on this community programme.

Pulau SibU Community Project

In the last few months, we conducted workshops with the local islanders on SibU and with government agencies in Mersing. The workshops, attended by 33 participants in total, were conducted to discuss the concept of co-management & determine the roles of these stakeholders in the management of SibU-Tinggi resources.

We also collaborated with USM to conduct a scoping study of the cultural significance of dugongs and their seagrass habitats. This work will be presented at the 5th International Marine Conservation Congress (IMCC5) under the title - Cultural significance of dugongs and their seagrass habitats to local communities and its relevance to conservation in Malaysia. In May, we collaborated with Rimba Conservation Crew to conduct a “Turtle and Reef Camp” for the students of SK Pulau SibU. Activities included snorkelling, gameplay to learn about turtle lifecycle and threats to turtles and reefs.



Workshop with local islanders of SibU Island



“Turtle and Reef” Camp with students of SK SibU