

Musandam EDA/Biosphere Expeditions 2010

FOR THE SECOND TIME,

BIOSPHERE EXPEDITION together with EDA organized another Reef Check expedition in the stunning Musandam Peninsula, Oman. Between the 8th and the 23rd of October 16 team members, divided in two weeks, were trained to do Reef Check surveys. Nationalities on board varied between people from Switzerland, Germany, The Netherlands, Australia, UK, Finland, Norway, Portugal and Oman. After three days of intensive Reef Check training, nine surveys were done per week, including areas on both sides of Musandam, the Arabian Gulf and in the Gulf of Oman. Almost all sites covered in the 2009 expedition were again surveyed this year, and data will be analysed carefully to see if there are any major changes since then.

The Musandam Peninsula, also known as Ru'us al-Jibal, is an exclave of Oman separated from Oman by the United Arab Emirates. It is situated on the Arabian Peninsula in the Strait of Hormuz, the narrow passage that links the Arabian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.

Even though the Arabian Gulf's corals are unique and seem to endure extremely harsh conditions when compared to corals in other parts of the world, scientists are increasingly concerned that any additional stress, imposed by global climate change or regional coastal development may accelerate coral die-off. Reefs in the Arabian Gulf have been devastated by major coral bleaching events (in 1990, 1996, 1998 and 2002), cyclone Gonu in 2007, and recently by extensive coastal developments along the Arabian Peninsula. The impact extends beyond the shoreline, since turbidity and suspended sediments are dispersed from the dredge or reclamation sites. In addition, coastal currents are diverted by coastal engineering, altering the movement of sediments causing them to accumulate.

The coral reef losses from climate-related devastation and massive coastal development on the Arabian Peninsula have made this region amongst the most damaged in the world with the lowest predictions for recovery. According to recent estimates, 30% of the coral reefs are at a threatened-critical stage and up to 65% of the coral reefs may have been lost already due to

natural causes (fluctuation of temperatures, diseases), and anthropogenic stresses (oil pollution, unmanaged coastal development, unregulated commercial and recreational fishing and diving). Nevertheless, knowing that many of the world's best reefs have a hard coral coverage of 32% according to Hodgson & Liebler (2002), the 34% of hard coral coverage found by the Biosphere Expedition in 2009 is encouraging.

On this expedition Biosphere Expeditions is working with the local community, Sultan Qaboos University, the Oman Ministry for Environment and Climate Affairs, the Oman Tourism Board, as well as the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Conservation Monitoring Centre and the International Coral Reef Action Network (ICRAN). Further support comes from a Six Senses (Zighy Bay) environmental grant, as well as from HSBC, Land Rover and Swarovski Optik.

Comments written by team members on the last day of the expedition:

"While Ken and Rita are removing maps, working plans and information sheets in the 'training room' already, I have to realise it's really OVER! Two weeks of training, survey and pleasure dives have flown by! After having joined the Reef Check expedition in Honduras in 2006, I must have been one of the first to register for this one. Another Reef Check, and even better, being on a boat all the time! And I really have to say that the expedition lived up all my expectations! It was great to meet people from many different countries and with completely different backgrounds and to see how we all formed a team working well together after only a couple of days. And it was worth joining two slots; the two or three days 'in between' have been great and relaxing with time for reading, listening to music and, of course,

the pleasure dives with Georgie and Conny! Many thanks go to Rita, who was an excellent teacher, but also a person to have fun with and thank you for the lots of chocolate! Thanks to Ken, who was a perfect expedition leader and to the crew – I must have gained several pounds owing to the good food! And thanks to all the team members especially Georgie and Conny who I shared a great time with! See you on another expedition (hopefully!)"

Karin Thiele

*"Well, I learned how to suspend myself above a coral reef, to distinguish between hard coral and soft coral, to count fish in crazy numbers and to play 's**thead". What a week! Many thanks to all, especially to the ever patient Rita and committed enthusiastic Ken."*

Jane Calderbank

"My first Biosphere Expedition (but not my last!) and 4 years after last diving, I wasn't sure how this would go – but no need to worry! Rita is an amazing teacher so even the intensive Reef Check training was fun and the dives were great – my confidence growing each time. I even managed to invert and glide gracefully down a coral wall. Unfortunately Ken didn't get that on camera! What a great bunch of people and Rita & Ken have been awesome. Wonderful at running the expedition (and keeping us all in line!) and great fun to hang out with."

Helen Savill

"As we were greeted by dolphins at my arrival – heading towards the Musandam islands with MS Sinbad, they are giving us a heartily farewell while heading back to Khasab.

There is much left to say...

I will miss quite a lot of things when I'm back

EDA



in my office on Monday:

- No more fish counts;
- No more substrate data taken with the plumb line;
- No more pleasure dives with Georgie and Karin – will miss these two very much;
- No more “s**thead” game in the evening;
- No more sleeping on deck under the amazing stars in the night;
- No more delicious Polly food;
- No more helping hands of the always friendly crew;
- No more underwater laughs with Rita and Ken;
- ...

It has been a perfect expedition, thanks go especially to Rita, Ken and the crew, who all together let it become a really smooth expedition. And of course thanks to all team members.

See you hopefully on my next time.”
Cornelia Beisel

