



## REEF CHECK

OUR MISSION IS TO PROTECT AND  
REHABILITATE REEFS WORLDWIDE

### The Transect Line - November 2009

#### Biosphere Expeditions Teams Up With Reef Check For Musandam EcoExpedition



[Biosphere Expeditions](#) recently concluded its inaugural study of the Musandam peninsula's unique coral reefs in Oman. Biosphere Expeditions, a Reef Check partner since 2006, teamed up with Six Senses Zighy Bay, HSBC Oman, the Emirates Diving Association, and Sultan Qaboos University to examine reef health and the effects of human activity in the region. The results will be made available to the government for it to support sustainable eco-tourism and conservation policies.

The expedition included scientists and volunteers from three continents, including Oman, the United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Germany, and Brazil. The trip included a Reef Check EcoDiver training in which 23 divers were certified as Reef Check

EcoDivers.

Dr. Matthias Hammer, founder and managing director of Biosphere Expeditions, says of the reefs, "The Musandam peninsula is a place of international importance that deserves our attention. Our expedition has found that siltation (for example from construction) and coral bleaching are not a problem and that hard coral cover is slightly above the global average. This is good news. More worryingly, however, fish numbers and general biodiversity were low probably due to overfishing, the 2008/2009 red tide, and category 5 cyclones such as Gonu in June 2007 which added further stresses to the fragile reef ecosystem. Other stresses are coral damage due to boat anchors, as well as trash and fish nets. Despite these stresses, the reef life of Musandam is really quite amazing and definitely deserves further study and protection for future generations and local livelihoods."

"Because of the relatively low impact situation we find here, we have a unique chance to come in now and help preserve these reefs", says Rita Bento, the expedition's chief scientist and Reef Check coordinator for the United Arab Emirates. "There is an opportunity to prevent the decline that has happened elsewhere." "The reefs also show an ability to thrive in the harsh local conditions", she adds. "These corals are surviving in water temperature and salinity conditions which would kill corals elsewhere."

With the support of Six Senses Zighy Bay and HSBC Oman, the study also ran an outreach and education program aimed at local children and fishermen about the value of marine resources and how to protect them and local livelihoods. The expedition visited children and local fishermen in remote villages of the peninsula, distributed educational materials and held talks about the importance of the reefs for sustaining local livelihoods. The expedition also built relationships with the Ministry of Education of the Musandam peninsula and hundreds of educational books will now be distributed across the peninsula's schools. In addition, Zighy Bay and HSBC staff were also involved in the study itself, thereby building further capacity and involving people in conservation on a one-to-one level.

Biosphere Expeditions and Reef Check are now offering two more trips to Musandam in October 2010 as well as two trips to Honduras in March 2010. Please visit <http://reefcheck.org/involved/Expeditions.php> for more information.