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LOCAL REEF CHECK GROUPS ESTABLISHED IN MALDIVES AND OMAN

BY BIOSPHERE EXPEDITIONS



Euro Divers and Reef Check Oman.



Community divers in action on a reef near Muscat.



Jenan



Rafil



Maldives

Maldivians are now establishing a local NGO Reef Check Maldives, giving their reefs the science-based care they desperately need. Since 2010 award-winning, international conservation organization Biosphere Expeditions, together with the Marine Conservation Society, Reef Check, LaMer, Carpe Diem Maldives and the Rufford Foundation, have been training Maldivians in reef survey techniques. This has already resulted in community-based surveys in Velassaru and Dhigurah, as well as community education efforts. But now Maldivians, spearheaded by Rafil Mohamed and Ibrahim Shameel, have taken the next step.

"I was trained by Biosphere Expeditions in 2012 and 2014 to Reef Check EcoDiver Trainer level and also hold a Masters in Marketing from the University of Sydney," reports Mohamed. "But my real passion is the sea, and especially our Maldivian reefs. We all know they are under threat from climate change and rampant development. And it often seems our reefs have no voice, despite being the basis of our country, culture and livelihood. We need more Maldivians speaking for our reefs and if I can do this, it will be an honour."

Dr. Matthias Hammer, Founder and Executive Director of Biosphere Expeditions, adds, "This is exactly what we need – local people surveying their own reefs and supporting government efforts so that the natural beauty of the Maldives can be better protected and passed down to the next generations, as well as safeguarding livelihoods and traditions, like those of fishermen."

Dr. Gregor Hodgson, Executive Director of Reef Check adds, "I am extremely pleased to see this collaboration lead to better marine education and conservation in the Maldives."

The group now plans to coordinate concerted, community-based survey efforts around the

archipelago and designate a full-time Maldivian Reef Check coordinator.

"The more Maldivians we can train and the more capacity we can build, the better," concludes Mohamed. "So we invite divers and businesses all across the Maldives to join us in our efforts. With their help we can create something big and positive for the country. Maldivian reefs are threatened, and with them the country's economy and well-being. Problems are overfishing, pollution and development without concern for the environment. The time to be aware of this and act accordingly is now, and if community-based surveys and the scientific data they provide can help the government to make the right decisions based on scientific facts, then everyone wins in the end."

The news is equally positive from Oman, where Omanis are setting up a local Reef Check Oman.

Since 2009, Biosphere Expeditions, with the support of Reef Check, the Marine Conservation Society and the Anglo-Omani Society, have been surveying Omani reefs and training Omanis in reef survey techniques, resulting in marine protected areas being established in Musandam and community-based surveys conducted near Muscat.

Jenan Alasfoor, who is spearheading the effort, says, "I am an avid diver and I was trained by Biosphere Expeditions to Reef Check EcoDiver Trainer level and recently became the Reef Check Coordinator for Oman. The ocean is my passion and reefs are under threat from climate change, pollution, development and other impacts. Reefs are a beautiful asset of our country, but it often seems they have no voice. We need more Omanis speaking up for our reefs and protecting them, not just because they are beautiful, but also because

they provide income through tourism, protection from storms and form the basis of fishermen's livelihoods around the coast."

Adds Hodgson, "This is another great initiative by Biosphere Expeditions working with local people. Only months after having been instrumental in the creation of Reef Check Maldives, I am extremely pleased to see this collaboration in Oman with Omanis and for Omani reefs, which leads to better marine education and conservation in the country, for the benefit of everyone."

In another positive development, both the Grand Hyatt Muscat, as well as Euro Divers Oman, have agreed to provide corporate support for Reef Check Oman's community-based survey efforts.

"The more support we receive for our efforts, the better, and we are grateful to Hyatt and Euro Divers for their assistance," says Alasfoor. "I know the economic climate in Oman is tough at the moment, but if there are any more companies out there who would like to become involved in community-based environmental protection, they should contact me so that we can work with their CSR departments and staff."

Beyond garnering support, Reef Check Oman plans to coordinate concerted, community-based survey efforts around the country and to work with the government and Biosphere Expeditions to provide science-based information and solutions for reef protection.

For more information or to get involved, visit the Reef Check Maldives and Reef Check Oman websites at:
www.reefcheckmaldives.org
www.reefcheckoman.org