

What is the Great Marine Project all about?

The Great Marine Project is heavily involved in turtle and coral reef conservation in Malaysia working in partnerships with local resorts, various government departments, University Malaysia Terengganu, Reef Check Malaysia and the local villages. The GMP works as a facilitator to conservation and engages all parties for a strong collaborative approach. We have two main projects, in the Perhentian Islands we help a local resort with managing the turtles that nest on their beach, we also give talks to the tourists and get involved with the local school teaching them on our “rainforest to reef” education program. Volunteers come along and take a dive course and manage the tourists while they watch the turtles nesting. We use an infra camera so the turtles are not disturbed by our presence and all can be seen in a peaceful quiet natural setting. During the day we survey the local coral reefs, teach tourists how to snorkel responsibly and teach tourists how to behave in an environmental manner. In Tioman Island we work closely with Reef check Malaysia and conduct reef check surveys with them which will help with conservation in the coming years.

How is The Great Marine Project making a difference to the environment and animals?

The GMP believes it is only through collaborative efforts are we going to make a difference. We work with all parties and bring them all together to work on conservation. It is humans that have caused the problems we are seeing in our oceans today and we can only start to change this if the root cause is addressed – humans. There is no point in big projects if the people are still pouring sewerage direct into the seas, holding onto turtles or standing on corals. We are using education to change things! We are attacking education from three angles – primary school children, tourists and a turtle education game. In 2009 our educational theme is ‘Rainforest to reefs’ where we teach children and tourists how the forests and reefs are connected and how their actions on the land may indirectly kill the reefs – we are holding nightly talks at the resorts we work in and run a monthly after-school program with the schools on the islands. In 2008 our volunteers helped to create a turtle educational board game which gets the kids involved, some of the tasks include making songs about turtles, drawing pictures of turtles and spinning around in a circle and then making your way to eggs resembling turtles going back to the beaches they were born on. In 2009 we are giving the games away to local children who otherwise would not be able to buy the game – these are the children we want to educate!

We are also working with local communities regards to creating new jobs and sustainable methods of fishing. It is so important to work with people if we are to start changing things.

We are working with local and international universities to advance research in the marine parks we are working with. In 2008 Reef Check Malaysia started their first regular reef checks via the SIP in Perhentian and this is vital to monitor the reefs and see where needs protection. Once the baseline data has been collected we can address the problems suitably.

What is the Rainforest to reef after school program?

In 2008 we ran an after-school club with a local school on Tioman Island. We ran monthly programs at the school with our volunteers who devise their own educational activities. Our local facilitator conducts a short presentation with quizzes which creates an element of competition increasing the children’s attention during the presentation. The volunteers then helped with fun educational activities with the children. After our 2nd visit we started to hear children telling people off discarding fishing line off the jetty as it kills turtles. From this we decided to expand our program in 2009 to another school. We are focusing on educating the children how activities on the land can

affect the reef for instance cutting down trees increases soil run off into the rivers which increases turbidity in the sea killing the coral reefs. This is the basis behind the rainforest to reef program.

You have mentioned volunteers, what do they do?

Volunteers can join our projects for either 2 or 4 weeks. All programs include a PADI scuba dive course with either open water, advanced or rescue.

In Perhentian the volunteers work with us on turtle beach management this has been a great success and in three years the egg poaching has totally stopped and no tourists disturb the nesting turtles because of the work done by the volunteers. Without the volunteers the tourists have been known to scare the turtles accidentally who then go back to the sea aborting their nests. The volunteers also help run the rainforest to reef school education program and the nightly environmental talks to the guests.

In Tioman the volunteers conduct scientific coral reef surveys which will be used by Reef Check Malaysia and GMP to suggest suitable conservation measures to the local governments.

The volunteers are vital to the GMP and without them and their continual new and novel ideas the conservation conducted by the GMP would not be able to continue.

What are the plans for the future?

The GMP will be focusing on the State of Terengganu in Malaysia and most of our efforts will be to help recover the reefs and turtle populations in this area. In 2010 we will be expanding our educational after-school programs to include more schools which will help to create a marine army of young children so in 30 years time the hatchlings we release will come back to a better environment. In 2009 we also hope to trial Biorock(R) which is a new type of artificial reef which allows coral to grow and survive when normal reefs are dieing. Therefore during the next 20-30 years as stresses on corals increase the coral will have a better chance of survival on the biorock reefs. Then when the more environmentally aware generation (our marine army) are adults they still have something to protect. Major cultural change takes along time and in the current situation, the coral reefs will be lucky to survive another 30 years of global warming and continual pollution the Biorock reefs will give the coral chance to survive.

We are continually working with the local community and who are keen on working with the Biorock® and would fish on the reefs designed specifically for increasing fishing yields.

Where can we find out more information?

Our website is at www.greatmarineproject.com

And we have groups on

Facebook, Bebo and Myspace - so join these to get up to date information about our projects and find out what we are up to!