

WELCOME to the latest edition of the Reef Check Malaysia Newsletter for 2008.

This is a special edition to launch our new training programme, which kicks off in November in KL.

Also in this edition:

- New sponsors, new programmes
- New staff!

EcoDiver Training

Over the last few months, we have been reviewing how we have been delivering EcoDiver training. Two major problems have been identified:

- **Lack of time:** for many people, the three day, island-based course just isn't enough to get through all the material and training required; in particular we have not been able to spend sufficient time perfecting survey methodology skills, which has resulted in data collection being inaccurate in some cases



- **Lack of skills:** to be a good EcoDiver requires more than just good identification skills. In order to collect good quality, reliable data, EcoDivers need to have better than average dive skills, in particular buoyancy. We have often had to spend too much time helping trainees with their buoyancy when we should have been doing identification or methodology training.

New Approach - 2 part course

To address these problems, we have devised an alternative approach to the three day, islands-based training format we have been using to date. This is NOT intended to replace the existing format, which our partner dive centres are still free to offer. It is designed to be an addition to the three day course, and will make it easier to complete the whole EcoDiver certification in three days at one of our partner dive centres.



Plantation



We are including two new sessions in the EcoDiver course programme, which will be delivered in KL. The objectives of adding these two sessions are:

- Introduce a Performance Requirement for dive skills (see below for details): by assessing divers' skills early, we can advise divers whether they are likely to be able to complete the course easily, thereby saving a wasted trip to one of the islands for the main training programme; where necessary we will advise divers to get additional training or experience to improve their skills to the level necessary to be able to collect good data.
- Introduce methodology training: by conducting methodology training in the controlled conditions found in a pool, we will be able to focus the island-based training on identification skills and conducting a survey, rather than teaching people how to measure 2.5 m, and swim in an "s" shape, skills which can easily be taught in a pool.

Introducing two sessions in KL increases the total amount of time spent training without needing to increase the length of time spent on the island-based phase. We hope it will result in better training and therefore more reliable data collection.

The added advantage of doing the sessions in KL is that we can gather individuals (who have been finding it difficult to get on a training course, as our partner dive centres prefer to have 3-4 people at a time) into groups, and help them to arrange training on one of the islands.

Session 1 - Buoyancy and skills

This is a pass or fail session. Those that pass proceed to Session 2 and, hopefully, complete the EcoDiver certification at one of the island dive centres. Those who fail, we will advise on what action to take to improve skills to the point they can pass.

Performance Requirements:

To demonstrate adequate buoyancy skills for conducting Reef Check Surveys, EcoDiver candidates must be able to demonstrate the ability to:

1. Descend and Ascend using primarily their breathing to control descent/ascent rate and buoyancy.
2. Perform a fin pivot moving no more than 50 cm up or down (from a mid-point once a stable position is established) for a period of 30 seconds, using only breathing to control depth.
3. Hover in a horizontal position over a defined point moving no more than 50 cm up or down (from a mid-point once a stable position is established) for a period of 30 seconds, using only breathing and fins to control depth and body position.
4. Hover in an inverted position over a defined point moving no more than 50 cm up or down (from a mid-point once a stable position is established) for a period of 30 seconds, using only breathing and fins to control depth and body position, while copying a short script from a display panel onto an underwater writing slate.
5. Navigate a series of obstacles while demonstrating good buoyancy and fining control.

Session 2 - Theory and Methodology

This will include the EcoDiver presentations and a pool session, introducing the basics of the Reef Check survey methodology:

- how to measure 2.5 m underwater
- practicing writing underwater
- practice stopping every 5 m
- practice swimming the "s" shape, head down
- practice using plumb line, etc.

There will be NO ADDITIONAL COST for these sessions on top of the usual EcoDiver course fee.

If you attend session 1 and can't make the next session 2, you can skip and catch up in a later month. But you can't proceed to the island-based training until you have done both sessions.

There will be a maximum of TEN people per session. Places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.

Please note: our partner dive centres on the islands will still be free to offer EcoDiver courses to anyone who wishes to sign up direct. However, terms and conditions will vary from centre to centre.

Please contact us if you are interested in signing up for these courses: wecare@reefcheck.org.my

Priority

Our ONLY priority is to ensure that the data collected from surveys is reliable and our training needs to reflect this priority. We are NOT trying to exclude people, but we have to be realistic and acknowledge that not everyone has the dive skills necessary to be an EcoDiver. We hope that those who are unable to meet the performance requirements will respond positively, take the necessary steps to improve their skills, and join the programme later.

Dates

Training sessions will be held on the following dates:

November:

Saturday 8th November: Session 1
Saturday 22nd November: Session 2

December:

Saturday 6th December: Session 1
Saturday 20th December: Session 2

January:

Saturday 10th January: Session 1
Saturday 24th January: Session 2

February:

Saturday 7th February: Session 1
Saturday 21st February: Session 2

About Reef Check

Founded in 1996, Reef Check is the world's largest international coral reef monitoring programme involving volunteer recreational divers and marine scientists.

First carried out on a large scale in 1997, it provided the first solid evidence that coral reefs have been damaged on a global scale. The survey raised the awareness of scientists, governments, politicians and the general public about the value of coral reefs, threats to their health and solutions to coral reef problems.

In August 2002, Reef Check released its five-year report, The Global Coral Reef Crisis – Trends and Solutions. Based on data collected in over 80 countries, the report was the first scientific documentation of the dramatic worldwide decline in coral reef health over the previous five years. The rate of decline and the global extent of the damage are alarming. There is virtually no reef in the world that remains untouched by human impacts, such as over fishing, pollution and climate change. Yet the success stories discussed in the report show that, with proper monitoring, management and protection, our coral reefs can recover. It is up to us.

Today, Reef Checks are conducted annually at sites around the world, in order to continually monitor the state of the world's reefs. Reef Check teams have been sponsored by a number of large corporations and have worked with many businesses in tourism, diving, surfing and the marine aquarium trade, to develop mutually beneficial solutions - including the creation of self-funding Marine Protected Areas.

A non-profit organization, Reef Check's mission is to:

- Educate the public and governments about the value of coral reefs and the crisis facing them;
- Create a global network of volunteer teams, trained and led by scientists, that regularly monitor and report on reef health using a standard method;
- Facilitate collaborative use of reef health information by community groups, governments, universities and businesses to design and implement ecologically sound and economically sustainable solutions;
- Stimulate local action to protect remaining pristine reefs and rehabilitate damaged reefs worldwide.

Reef Check is now active in over 82 countries and territories throughout the world.

Reef Check in Malaysia

Coral reefs are an economically important ecosystem in Malaysia, as the foundation of a significant percentage of the country's tourist industry. There are some 3,600 km of reef around the country, including fringing reefs and offshore islands. Over 350 species of hard coral have been identified in Malaysian waters. However, a lack of comprehensive management programmes is leading to degradation of this important economic resource. This situation is exacerbated by inadequate information on the status and location of the reefs, further hindering management efforts.

In 2001, Reef Check appointed a National Coordinator for Malaysia, to promote Reef Check and carry out training and surveys. Now registered as a non-profit company, Reef Check Malaysia's mission is to bring together stakeholders to collaborate on implementing coral reef monitoring and conservation programmes.



@ P. Tioman



@ P. Tenggol



@ P. Redang



@ P. Perhentian



@ Kuala Lumpur

Please contact any of the dive centres listed below if you are interested in EcoDiver training or if you want to participate in a Reef Check survey.

Watercolours	Perhentian	info@watercolours.com.my
Scuba Explorers	Tenggol	info@scubaexplorers.com.my
Tioman Dive Centre	Tioman	enquiries@tioman-dive-centre.com
ScubaZone	Kuala Lumpur	s-zone@streamyx.com
Redang Kalong	Redang	ddenmsia@tm.net.my



We have moved office!

We have moved into a bigger office in the same building. Our new address is:

Lot 5.19 - 5.22
Wisma Central, Jalan Ampang,
50450 Kuala Lumpur

New Sponsors, New Programmes

We are very happy to announce two major new sponsors of Reef Check Malaysia.

In May 2008, at its annual Climate Change Gala Dinner, YTL Group announced that part of the proceeds of its fund-raising efforts would be donated to Reef Check Malaysia to assist in our coral reef conservation activities.



With the agreement of YTL, we have developed a programme of activities over the next two years which will see the funding used to support:

- Reef Check training in Peninsular and East Malaysia
- Reef Check survey programmes in Peninsular Malaysia
- Community programme on the East coast islands



ALSTOM

French based power systems company, Alstom, has recently established a new Foundation, the objective of which is to support social and environmental projects proposed by its subsidiaries world wide. Reef Check Malaysia was invited to submit a project proposal, and the Foundation has subsequently agreed to finance our Schools Outreach programme for the next three years.

Covering schools on the islands off the East Coast, the "Rainforest to Reef" programme includes:

- 3-day "Coral Reef Camp", to introduce school children to the basics of ecology and coral reefs
- 2 follow-up activities, to provide additional learning opportunities and reinforce lessons learned.

Staff from Alstom will be involved in all parts of the programme. Reef Check Malaysia will be training selected staff to deliver the programme in the future, so that it becomes sustainable.



New Staff

We are expanding! Ummi Haslinda is joining us in October, to run the EcoAction programme and will be taking over the management of our training and survey programmes.

Previously with CIMB, Ummi decided it was time to get out of the office and spend more time in the water. A member of MUW, Ummi participated in the first Reef Check training programme run this year under the Sime Darby Sustainable Island Programme. Now an experienced Reef Check Survey diver, she will bring her skills and enthusiasm to the programme and help us to build a National scale survey programme. Welcome aboard, and good luck!

Supporters

Reef Check Malaysia is grateful to the following organisations for their support:



Without their help, we would not be able to continue our work to preserve Malaysia's marine resources.

And finally... to all our readers, supporters, contributors and sponsors, we would like to take this opportunity to wish you all SELAMAT HARI RAYA!