

OceansWatch Newsletter – Solomon Islands Update



September and October have been very busy months, with our yacht *Anna Rose* finally reaching the Solomon Islands after many trialling technical delays. In Lata, Santa Cruz, we met with local government, ran a workshop on marine threats such as crown-of-thorns, and weathered a serious thunderstorm. *Anna Rose* then sailed off from Lata towards the low-lying Reef Islands.

The crew received a tear-jerking welcome in Mola'a, complete with singing, local bamboo bands and traditional kastom dance. Family embracing family and an emotional show of gratitude from this small community proved once again the place of OceansWatch in the Temotu Province and in the hearts of its people. We introduced a new mechanical coconut press for the local virgin coconut oil co-operative, and held educational movie sessions on a decidedly faulty projector, tinting the films red in the moonlit night. The team then headed south leaving one of its members: Sophie Bone behind to run an English Literacy program in the local high school.

We introduced ourselves to the villages of Ngadeli and Otelo, before heading back to Santa Cruz to pick up more crew, and meet up with *Magic Roundabout* after its sail from Vanuatu. Strong in numbers, boats weighed down with gear and humans, OceansWatch returned to the village of Buma, Vanikoro, following a brief meeting of the community in 2013. The village had expressed interest in working with OceansWatch to develop a sustainable livelihoods program, climate change adaptations and marine resource management initiatives.

The rising cost of living



especially school and transport fees for children, coupled with depleted marine resources, including reef fish and beche-de-mer is creating a strong need for a sustainable alternative livelihood in Buma. Together, their families own over 3000 coconut trees which would allow for the sustainable use of this resource to complement their earnings towards school fees and basic needs. This close-looped process will hopefully produce high quality oil and allow the community to use all the waste for various uses, such as pig feed, charcoal production, fuel for cooking, and general body care.

CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

After thoroughly investigating the predictions for climate change impacts in the Temotu Province, the OceansWatch team worked to raise climate change awareness in Buma. The team facilitated the development of climate change adaptation plans with both women and men independently, allowing an equal and balanced voice for climate change solutions within the community.

Each group created a seasonal calendar, mapped the community and its key resources, and drafted a historical calendar which includes disasters experienced previously by the community. Both groups designated five concrete actions they have committed to take this year before OceansWatch returns in 2015. These include planting mangroves to protect the village from storms and to create more nursery habitat for fish they depend on, as well as planting the native ule plant on the beach to help protect the sand from eroding with the ever increasing tide. Each group agreed to planting more fruit trees in the gardens to help prevent landslides, erosion and siltation of the reef while providing food security in the face of increased salinization of the water table and soils.

MARINE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT



The waters of Vanikoro are known for their impressive population of saltwater crocodiles. After being greeted by Jackson upon arrival in the bay, survivor of a “bigfella” crocodile attack, with visible scars running along his mangled shoulder and collar bone, the OceansWatch team decided it would be wise to stay out of the water.

The team concentrated its efforts on community education sessions on coral reef biology and resilience, crown-of-thorns awareness and removal, and marine resource management. Locals were shocked to hear about the devastating effects of crown-of-thorns on reefs, and shared their surprise at seeing these creatures for the first time on their reef as young children. These sessions were attended by men, women and children alike and were followed by lively discussions sharing local solutions, story-telling and laughter as cultures and languages merged.

The OceansWatch team trained ten Reef Guardians to survey their own reef using both quantitative and qualitative methods, identifying target species of cultural importance as well as assessing overall reef health. The Reef Guardians were enthusiastic and eager to learn and share their knowledge. They were extremely proud of their responsibility in the village and ensuring the continuation of marine resources for the generations to come. OceansWatch facilitated the creation of a catch-per-unit effort program which will enable OceansWatch to determine the sustainability of existing fishing methods and assess health of fish stocks in Buma. Next year, this information could be used to develop appropriate and effective local fishery management regulations.

ENDANGERED SPECIES AND BIO SECURITY



Dr. Ray Pierce has spent most of his time on *Anna Rose* with his eyes to the sky and ears perked for songs. Armed with binoculars and an endless knowledge base, he is the source of all information concerning local birds and bats. When he is not surveying the endless blue sky, he is in the bush, looking for critically endangered animals such as the Vanikoro Flying Fox, or the Santa Cruz Ground Dove.

In Buma, he gladly stepped off the boat to spend the week camping in the community, hiking the dense lush jungle looking for birds and bats. Guided by two locals, he climbed to the summit by day, and lurked in the bushes by the pig pens at dusk, waiting. His efforts were rewarded when he identified and photographed the first Vanikoro Flying Fox since 1931 which is now listed as critically endangered in the IUCN Redlist! Ray is currently looking for more

endangered species around the forests of Santa Cruz, such as the Temotu Flying Fox, the Santa Cruz Shrikebill and the Santa Cruz Ground Dove.