



EDA

جمعية الإمارات للغوص
Emirates Diving Association

EDITION 6 Vol. I
NOVEMBER 2005

DIVERS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

**LOVING PHUKET,
REVIVING ANDAMAN
PART II**



**GSA
MIDDLE EAST**



CLEAN UP ARABIA 2005

THIS YEARS CLEAN UP ARABIA WAS THE BIGGEST SUCCESS YET!



Plus! Reef Monitoring Committee, Diving for Cavemen,
Feeling a Bit Fatigued, Bored of Diving, Malaysia's Jewel...

EDA TO HOST

THE UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (UNEP)
7th GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM (7th GCSF) IN DUBAI (5-6 FEBRUARY 2006)



Dear Members,

We are very pleased to announce that EDA has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNEP to organize the 7th GCSF next year in Dubai.

The 7th GCSF will be held in Dubai, 5-6 February 2006, and prior to the 9th Special Session of the Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum (Session/Forum) 7-9 February 2006. Chemicals management, tourism and energy are key policy issues to be considered by the Plenary Ministerial Consultations of the Session/Forum and are, therefore, central subjects for the 7th GCSF and its associated preparatory regional meetings. More than 100 participants from approximately 60 countries are expected to attend the 7th GCSF.

As EDA is an accredited civil society organization, we will be invited to attend/organize the regional preparatory meeting in West Asia, the 7th GCSF and the Session/Forum.

Please note that the process lead by UNEP on chemicals management is known as the Strategic International Approach to Chemicals Management (SIACM). It will culminate in the International Conference on Chemicals Management (ICCM) in Dubai next year. Information on SIACM, contact persons and possibilities of participation are available at:

www.chem.unep.ch/siacm

THE REGIONAL PREPARATORY MEETINGS

The regional meetings are the first step leading to the 7th GCSF. In the meetings, regional Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) discuss their various views and agree on regional statements around environment key issues. These regional statements, together with the Global Civil Society Statement, will be incorporated in the formal documentation process of the Session/Forum. The statements will be translated into the six UN languages and distributed by UNEP to Governments.

At the regional meetings, CSOs are also expected to select two representatives to participate in the drafting of the Global Civil Society Statement on 21st November in Bahrain, and to also select four representatives to participate in the 7th GCSF.

It is an honour and privilege that EDA will be hosting the 7th GCSF, this will help for more collaboration and engagement between UNEP and EDA. We look forward to the support of our members to volunteer and help in hosting the 7th Global Civil Society Forum. Please contact us if you want to help or for more details, you can also visit:

www.unep.org/dpdl/civil_society/gcsf7

Eco Regards,

Ibrahim N. Al-Zu'bi

West Asia Coordinator,
UNEP YouthXchange Project

Director of Environment Dept.
Emirates Diving Association



CONTENTS

EDA DIRECTOR	2
BORED OF DIVING	5
CLEAN UP ARABIA 2005 AUH	6
WELCOME GSA MIDDLE EAST	8
DIVING FOR CAVEMEN	10
FEELING A BIT FATIGUED	11
CLEAN UP ARABIA 2005	12
WE TAKE YOU HOME, BABY	16
MALAYSIA'S JEWEL	18
ROCK YOU LIKE A HURRICANE	20
REEF MONITORING COMMITTEE	21
UPCOMING EVENTS	23

DIVERS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Please note that EDA's newsletter, "Divers for the Environment" includes articles written by individuals whose opinions, whilst valid, may or may not represent that of EDA. It is hoped that the newsletter can become a platform for individuals to voice their opinion on marine and diving related issues. You are welcome to submit an article for the next edition of "Divers for the Environment" released in January 2006. Send all articles/comments to Head Office edadiver@emirates.net.ae

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BORED OF DIVING By Jason Sockett

A lot of times in my job I hear punters say, "I am bored of diving", "the viz is pants" or "we always dive the same dive sites". If you at any one time have said that, then read on. This is not another Dive Instructor's sales pitch, in fact quite the opposite.

There is a lot more out there that a large majority of you have not yet dived. In a 4 hour radius of Dubai there are over 100 dive sites. Look in your log book and count how many different dive sites you have actually dived. I think you will be surprised how you have only touched, 'the tip of the iceberg'. Some might think a 4 hour radius is a lot, but that's putting Muscat in the equation and with cruise control and ipods its not that long, about 20 plays of Guns N Roses, 'November Rain' (the full version for you experts and I am only guessing).

My tip for you is plan ahead. Call any Dive Centre and tell them that you want to dive a certain wreck or reef and unless its a totally outrageous idea such as distance, I don't think any centre would say no. A way to guarantee it, is to phone some of your friends so when you call the centre you already have a number of people booked on to the boat and their your mates so you don't get the buddy from hell.

The Dubai Coast has been affected by construction I will not lie, but not sites such as Lion City and Dhara MV. There are a lot more sites than the Cement Barge. The East Coast has wrecks and reefs, not just Martini Rock, however a top dive site.

The Musandam, look in your log book and count how many sites you have actually dived. I know of 52 dive sites that I would class as internationally recognisable dive sites. With the liveboards you can now access the sites in the Straits in comfort and not rush around in speed boats to get 2 quick dives in before getting back, take the weekend. Here are a few dive sites to look up: Beardies Bay, Ras O'Shea, Domino Island, Landing Craft and Grandads.

Diving in Muscat not only has great diving, but it's a chance to take a break. The Damaniates and Fahal Island are always top dive sites. How many out there haven't yet dived in Oman? It's right on your door step.

A tip to get more out of your dives, is to buy a digital camera. Gone are the days when you needed strobes and a lens for this and a lens for that. Even my Mum could get a decent shot, ok maybe not, but they are easy.

CLEAN UP ARABIA 2005

AL SAMMALIA ISLAND, ABU DHABI

Written by Kathleen Russell

Al Masaoood Marine and Engineering and EDA Abu Dhabi Coordinator



This year's Clean Up Arabia in Abu Dhabi was a huge success. A special thank you goes to Emirates Heritage Club (EHC) headed by **His Highness Sheikh Sultan Bin Zayed Al Nahyan**, Deputy Prime Minister, Chairman of the Emirates Heritage Club for hosting the clean up on Al Sammalia Island and to EDA for being the main sponsors. Over fifty EDA members and volunteer divers were in full force on Thursday 15th September to participate in the global event. The volunteer divers were from EDA, ADMA Dive Club, ADSAC, Al Masaoood, GASCO and Frog Legs Dive Club. The clean up event was held at Al Sammalia Island, a very interesting location established and operated by the Emirates Heritage Club in Abu Dhabi. The approximately 27 square kilometer island plays host to many heritage activities, environmental awareness activities and has marine protected areas, mangroves and sea grass. Like any day at the end of summer in Abu Dhabi, the sun was beating on everyone and the humidity was still high. Intrepid divers still gathered by the Al Raha pier to load their dive gear onto the designated boats provided by EHC. Excited divers waited in anticipation to make their first visit to Al Sammalia.

As the boats approached the island, divers could see the mangroves and the beautifully landscaped greenery on the island. Meena Dooba was the central meeting point and from there, the divers were transported by bus to the EHC Halls. Ronald Loughland, head of the environmental studies and research division of EHC gave a very informative introduction about Al Sammalia Island and why it was important to preserve this natural wonderment. For example the island boost a large marine protected area of mangroves and sea grass and on occasion dugongs and hawksbill turtles have been spotted foraging in this habitat. Other activities included school visits to educate UAE Nationals on the cultural heritage and traditions of this country and promote national level sports activities.

Once the safety briefing finished, divers took to their boats and grabbed their collection bags, gloves and coolers of water and juice to prevent dehydration. Safety was also a priority. The Civil Defence ambulance was on stand-by that day and GASCO Dive Club also brought along their own ambulance and nurse from

the New Medical Centre. All boats were given a location map, divers list, emergency assistance plan and an appointed dive leader. After one and a half hours, the boats came back filled with marine debris. This was the interesting moment to find what types of marine debris were collected. In general, Al Raha pier on the mainland had considerably more debris collected then the entire island of Al Sammalia. The final count included mainly debris from shoreline and recreational activities like bags, straws, and pull-tabs. Over 159 cups, forks, knives and spoons and 39 pieces of food wrappers and containers and over 100 plastic and glass beverage bottles were counted. Debris from recreational and commercial fishing and boat activities included 4 buoys, 2 tires, plenty of abandoned fishing lines and lures, 3 ropes and several large plastic sheet covers. Surprisingly, over 250 cigarette butts and filters and 34 pieces of building materials and survey equipment and car parts were counted and labeled under debris from dumping activities. Between ADSAC and ADMA divers, the most interesting finds included 3 plastic chairs and a street lamppost and several lampshades. Divers and staff of EHC had to be extremely careful while they were handling the marine debris, which sometimes had sharp edges and rusty points. The final summary will be sent to The Ocean Conservancy and included in the global tally of the 20th Anniversary International Coastal Clean Up Campaign.

After the counting and the very commendable effort by everyone, EHC hosted a sumptuous traditional lunch back at the hall with a slide show of the clean up event. It was a very successful and pleasant gathering by all. EDA wishes to express special thanks to all the divers, Emirates Heritage Club, GASCO, Al Masaoood Marine and Engineering, ADCO Dive Club, ADSAC, Frog Legs Dive Club, Civil Defense services and media groups for their effort in Clean Up Arabia 2005. EDA looks forward to announcing the next environmental event. Remember to recycle, reuse and reduce.







Global Sports Alliance



WELCOME GSA MIDDLE EAST

Emirates Diving Association (EDA), Environmental Director, Ibrahim Al-Zu'bi, dropped in for a meeting at Global Sports Alliance GSA head office in Tokyo.

EDA was flying the Ecoflag earlier this year when we got involved in restoring Thailand's dive sites affected by last year's tsunami and in this year's Clean up Arabia Campaign. After discussions with GSA Executive Director, Tatsuo Okada, Ibrahim has agreed to act as captain for a new GSA Team, the first in the Middle East.

NPO Global Sports Alliance (GSA) is working to unite over one billion sports enthusiasts in solving global environmental problems through the creation of a sustainable society.

Sports are universally enjoyed and sports enthusiasts know the importance that the environment and its basic elements, such as clean air and water have on their health and performance. For this reason GSA is working through sports to develop this new kind of society.

Using the formula 'Power for change = People × Awareness × Action', GSA has initiated the Ecoflag Movement - a global drive by sports enthusiasts to secure a healthy eco-system for all future generations. As part of the Ecoflag Movement, an environmental flag and slogan are promoted at sports events from school sports days to world championships to increase awareness and action among spectators and athletes.

For details see:
www.ecoflag.com

The flag is flown in conjunction with environmental action to reduce the impact of the event on the environment. These measures can involve reducing and separating garbage, saving energy, water or natural resources, or reducing emissions by encouraging car-pooling and the use of public transport.

Information on environmental action being used at sports events around the world can be found on the GSA's "G-ForSE website". G-ForSE (Global Forum for Sports and Environment) provides a database of environmental action taking place at sport facilities, sport events and in the sporting goods industry. Organizations involved in sports that want to promote



Eco flag in Dubai



Eco flag in Thailand

THE SUCCESS OF THE SYMPOSIUM IS THE FIRST OF ITS KIND

environmental awareness and action can access the database and learn what other organizations are doing, as well as promote their own activities.

G-ForSE also organizes a Global Forum every two years that brings together the representatives of international sporting federations to discuss roles and consolidate action for the environment.

For details see:
www.g-forse.com

In addition to this, the Ecoflag movement is involved in the 'reduction, reuse and recycling' of sports equipment through the Sports-Eco.Net Project. The program includes sharing equipment with developing countries as well as turning unwanted sports equipment into art through the RECYCL'art project.



Tatsuo Okada and Ibrahim Al-Zu'bi

GUIDELINE FOR TAKING PART IN THE ECOFLAG MOVEMENT

Organizations and individuals wishing to form partnerships with GSA can cooperate on a number of projects.

1. FLY THE ECOFLAG

Fly the Ecoflag at sporting events to increase environmental awareness among athletes and spectators. Include information about the Ecoflag in official programs or through announcements so that those involved know the meaning of the flag and will learn about the importance of protecting our global environment. Encourage those present to start taking simple actions in their everyday lives, such as those suggested on the Ecoflag card.

For details see:
www.ecoflag.com

2. TAKE ACTION

Introduce environmentally friendly practices at sporting events or in your organization's offices and facilities. Measures can include:

- Look at ways to save energy, especially with lighting, heating and ventilation.
- Reduce garbage and maximize use of re-usable utensils and equipment.
- Separate garbage and recycle whenever possible.
- Encourage cycling, car-pooling and the use of public transport.
- Encourage facility users to "save water".
- Encourage athletes to use equipment wisely. Re-use and share equipment whenever possible. If equipment is useable but unwanted, consider donating that equipment to developing countries.

3. FORM A GSA TEAM

Individuals and organizations that are regularly involved in sporting events can form a GSA Team that promotes environmental awareness and action through local events while being part of a global network.

For details contact:
info@gsa.or.jp

4. SIGN THE JOINT DECLARATION ON SPORTS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

One of the events marking the UN designated International Year of Sports and Physical Education 2005 was the Sports Summit for the Environment (SSE) 2005 on 30-31 July at the World Exposition in Aichi, with the signing of a joint declaration on sports and the environment.

Organizations signing the declaration include UNEP, UNESCO, IOC, FIFA, IAAF, World Federation for the Sporting Goods Industry, Japan Olympic Committee, Greek Tennis Federation, Torino Winter Olympics 2006, 10th World Athletic Championships Helsinki 2005, Japan Association for the 2005 World Exposition.

Sporting organizations worldwide are encouraged to add their name to the declaration.

For details contact:
info@gsa.or.jp

NPO Global Sports Alliance (GSA)
Tel: 81-3-6419-2900 Fax: 81-3-6419-2877
<http://www.gsa.or.jp>

DIVING FOR CAVEMEN

By Kent Madsen



Kent Madsen

I was really looking forward to my trip to the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico - diving in the Caribbean (which most divers know from the PADI Open Water Course videos) would be awesome. Crystal clear water and fish everywhere!!!

Well, after a couple of days diving off Isla Mujeres and Playa del Carmen my enthusiasm was somewhat dampened... the viz was great, but I was a little bit disappointed with the amount of marine life on the dive sites... ok, on one dive we did see about 15 big turtles which was great, but the sharks and big rays were not out on that day.

Later that night, I bumped into Stephan, a German diving instructor, who had been working in the Yucatan area for almost 8 years. I voiced my complaints about the lack of marine life on the dives in the area, whereafter he looked at me and said: Forget diving the Ocean, the "Cenotes" is the place to dive!!!

The Cenotes is the general name for a huge system of caves and underground rivers that runs underneath the whole of the Yucatan Peninsula. Thousands of kilometers of caves and tunnels, some even connected directly to the open sea. The biggest connected system, according to Stephan, covers almost 200 km of caves and tunnels.

I had to give that a go and met up at Yucatek Dive Centre in Playa del Carmen the next morning. The first message of the day from Stephan was, *"I don't care how much experience you have doing open water dives or what level you are. Here, you do as I say or you don't dive... got it? Divers die in these caves every year, mostly because they do something they should not have done. Don't become a statistic."*

Stephan did not mince his words and of course everybody agreed, especially after talking to him about his experience as a cave diver. The divers geared up in normal dive gear with torches, whereas Stephan was in full cave diving gear, twin tanks, spare air, lights, back up lights etc. Just in case somebody got lost and a search had to be conducted.

To get in the water, we had to climb down a little path cut out in the rocks and finally let yourself fall flat on your back into a little stretch of water... it looks tiny but when looking under water, you could see a huge cave opening up underneath us.

We did two caves that day and the dives were awesome. The visibility was at least 100m, except for times, when we were swimming in the area where the salt water started. That's right, the caves are mostly fresh water, but at a certain depth you hit salt water and when salt and fresh water mix everything gets blurred around you. It does not make buoyancy control easy either.

There were a few little fish in the caves, but the most interesting thing was the rock formations and the stalactites that had grown out of the cave ceilings over thousands of years... amazing formations.

At one point, we surfaced in an underground cave, where we took off our masks and regs to breathe the slightly muggy air inside the cave... it was possible, but the tree roots coming through the ceiling made the smell inside the cave a little "unpleasant".

Diving the caves was a truly amazing dive experience and I would recommend a dive or two in the "Cenotes" to any diver heading that way. Unfortunately, my programme did not allow me to do any further cave dives, but I hope to make up for that next time my travels take me to the Yucatan (which I hope will be very soon).

I dived with **Yucatek Divers: www.yucatek-divers.com** and **Dive Mike: www.divemike.com** who also arranges trips, but there is a host of operators in Cancun and Playa del Carmen that can arrange cave diving.



Cenotes



FEELING A BIT FATIGUED

By Paul Sant

ALL DOOM AND GLOOM, IS IT THE END?

That is what I say after each dive on Anemone Gardens or Coral Gardens, two off the main dive sites here at Divers Down.

Now I am not on about myself, I wish I was, I am talking about how fatigued the coral is looking. Am I being hopeful? Is the coral just unwell? Or are we losing the most beautiful coral on our diving sites?

We can point the finger directly at the cause of the coral's demise, it stretches out across the once beautiful Shark Island Bay like the riders of the apocalypse. The once well dived and snorkelled site is now a mere shadow of what it was with around 25% of the hard coral now under the rocks of the breakwater.

All Doom & Gloom, is it the end?

Well we have seen our first Black Tip on the point and we hope more will arrive, so by January we will be stopping at the point to snorkel with these elegant sharks. The Sea Horses are still hidden at the bottom of the Black Coral, there are around 4 pairs on Anemone and 2 on Coral, and the rest have moved to Martini for a break from the construction!

The Green Turtle's have been upset the most as their favourite patch of coral is now rock, but they too have moved around the corner and can be found in the shallows at the point eating algae off the rocks.

All in all, I feel that this will not be another West Coast nightmare. The Ocean has healed itself ever since man threw the first net in it. The currents have changed around the island and now we have Teddy Bear Coral on the back of the island making this a great dive site. The predators like Barracuda and Trevallies are hunting in the narrow channels between the breakwater and island.

In the big picture, yes the coral is dying. I hope this is short term and it will recover once the project is finished and we can all be thankful that Shark Island was not removed as planned, as long as the port is kept clean the whole environment will pick itself up and dust itself off.



Healthy Coral



Dying Coral



Martin's new resident

CLEAN UP ARABIA 2005

IT IS OUR PLEASURE TO ANNOUNCE THAT THIS YEARS CLEAN UP ARABIA (THE 10TH CLEAN UP ORGANIZED BY EDA) WAS THE BIGGEST SUCCESS YET!



Clean Up Arabia Registration

THURSDAY 15th SEPTEMBER: 2 CLEAN UPS TOOK PLACE

- Local school children from the East Coast participated in the beach clean up. They raced along the edges of Dibba Port-Fujairah, enthusiastically driven by their teachers. This day was hosted by EDA & The Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries.
- More than 60 divers joined EDA Abu Dhabi Committee to clean Emirates Heritage Club's Al Sammalia Island.

FRIDAY 16th SEPTEMBER:

At the Meridien Al Aqah Hotel in Fujairah, with the presence of Dr. Habib N. El-Habr; Acting Director and Regional Representative United Nations Environment Programme/Regional Office of West Asia.

The weekend gave people a chance to be proactive in environmental activities, in addition to providing a fun day out.

The debris items gathered were categorised and counted by volunteers. This information provides an indication to the sources of the marine debris, which can then be targeted for education and pollution prevention campaigns.

- 21% of the debris were plastic bottles
- 13.49% was cigarette related
- 10.23% were food containers, caps and lids

Shoreline & Recreational Activities, Smoking-Related Activities & Dumping Activities seem to have left the most debris.



UNEP and EDA

CLEAN UP ARABIA COORDINATORS:

Mrs. Kathleen Russell
EDA Abu Dhabi Committee

Mr. Moh'd Bitar
EDA Projects Coordinator

Many many thanks to all of you who volunteered your time and effort to the event.

We couldn't have done it without you!

The event was supported by over 500 volunteers, who helped rid the beaches, dive sites and a marine reserve (in Abu Dhabi, Dibba & Fujairah) of unsightly & dangerous debris.

The results indicate plastic bottles, cigarettes, and bags constituted the majority of marine debris.

<http://www.emiratesdiving.com/cleanuparabia2005.htm>

Clean Up Arabia 2005 Beach Volleyball Tournament was organized and for the 3rd year in a row Dubai Duty Free Team are the champions of the CUA 2005 Beach Volleyball Tournament. Congratulations Dubai Duty Free!

% ITEMS OF DEBRIS COLLECTED

21.00	Beverage Bottles (plastic) 2 litres or less
13.49	Cigarettes/Cigarette Filters
4.25	Bags
10.24	Caps, Lids
0.70	Cups, Plates, Forks, Knives, Spoons
6.59	Beverage Cans
6.80	Rope
10.23	Food Wrappers/Containers
3.02	Beverage Bottles (glass)
2.63	Plastic Sheeting/Tarps
3.48	Tires
0.00	Cigar Tips
6.40	Oil/Lubes Bottles
1.40	Tobacco Packaging/Wrappers
2.37	Building Materials
0.97	Straws, Stirrers
0.90	Fishing Line
0.70	Buoys/Floats
0.00	Strapping Bands
0.61	Cars/Car Parts
0.54	Clothing, Shoes
0.00	Appliances (refrigerators, washers, etc.)
0.47	Balloons
0.03	Crab/Lobster/Fish Traps
0.00	Shotgun Shells/Wadding
0.20	Steel Rope
0.40	Plastic Pipes
0.32	Pull Tabs
0.32	Fishing Nets
0.00	Fishing Lures/Light Sticks
1.18	55-Gal. Drums
0.11	Bait Containers/Packaging
0.11	Pallets
0.11	Cigarettes Lighters
0.07	Toys
0.07	Bleach/Cleaners Bottles
0.00	Batteries
0.07	Diapers
0.00	Syringes
0.00	Sponge (Foam Pieces)
0.00	Hangers
0.00	6-Pack Holders
0.00	Crates
0.00	Light Bulbs/Tubes
0.00	Condoms
0.00	Scooter
0.00	Coconut
0.00	Mop
0.00	Broom Head
0.04	Metal Waste Paper Bin
0.04	Cable
0.04	Steel Crates
0.00	Tampons/Tampon Applicators
0.00	Iron Rods

100 Total



EDA Volunteers



Coming back with trash



Duty Free staff helped this year too



EDA Volunteers



Unloading the rubbish



EDA Volunteers at the Meridien Al Aqah Hotel in Fujairah



Rubbish pulled out from under the sea



All the rubbish collected



EDA Volunteers bringing back bags of rubbish



EDA Volunteers of all ages



“WE TAKE YOU HOME, BABY!”

Yes, we took them all home where they belong. EDA's "Loving Phuket, Reviving Andaman Part II" was a huge success as always due to our members support & enthusiasm. THAI Airways offered divers an opportunity to join the Baby Turtle Rehabilitation Project, "We take you there Baby", Andaman Recovery Project II in Phuket, Thailand on the 4th of Nov'05 with special exclusive diving packages (Similan Island).

The trip consisted of 22 members which consisted of 9 different nationalities, all of who were so excited about the trip and the good cause. EDA's Divers for the Environment Team was able to release 8 Turtles and 25 Giant Clams in the Andaman Sea toward the Similan Island where all the diving took place.

MOHAMMAD BITAR

Now to leave you with some write ups from the participants experiences:

It was a great and noble initiative from EDA to undertake such a task. It was work with pleasure (or should I say more pleasure than work). It was truly an unforgettable experience. Full kudos' to EDA and the organisers (Moe & Ibrahim) and the sponsors (Thai Airways) for making this trip a wholesome and memorable experience.

Thanks,

UNNI KURUP

This was the first EDA sponsored trip that I have had the privilege to support and although I was a little unsure at the start, all travelling arrangements were efficiently organised and the schedule of events turned out perfectly. It was a unique experience to be involved in such a noble cause and to top it off I made a lot of friends that I am sure I will keep contact with. Thanks to the EDA for providing more than just a diving trip!

Thanks again!

DIMITRI METAXAS

First of all, thank you for making the trip possible, it was certainly

a highlight of my diving career so far! Well organised and much appreciated. Having being to Thailand before, but not having dived there, I was very keen to get into what are renowned as some of the best diving spots in the world. The bonus of going on a liveaboard in the Similans was an even larger bonus. The accommodation provided by Thavorn Resort was top class to say the least, all aspects from food, lodgings and service was very good. I will certainly recommend them to anyone and the Gala Dinner held on the last evening was a success in all aspects. Being a part of the EDA goal of repatriating fauna into the region is only a small part of the conservation effort to restore the Similans to their former glory, but it is only a small 'drop in the ocean' with regards to the bigger plan; but it takes many drops to make a thunderstorm and EDA has shown its commitment through this gesture. The liveaboard was spectacular, the food, people and Dive Master team were all out of the top drawer and kudos to all of them for helping Khao Lak and Thailand return from the damage done by Tsunami 2004. As for the diving, it would suffice to say that my diving career has been damaged forever, I fear that I will never be able to meet the beauty, visibility and sheer diving pleasure experienced in the Similans...

Regards,

ANDREW LAMB

We really enjoyed the trip, minus the stomach bug that invaded our systems the last day there. The chance to give back both to the environment by releasing the sea turtles and clams as well as helping to project Phuket as a safe tourism destination was a rewarding and unforgettable experience. With signs of the devastation from the tsunami still a reminder wherever you went, it was both sobering and humbling. Prior to the EDAs trip, Libby and the American Business Council held numerous fundraisers for the victims of the tsunami. Being there reinforced our belief in assisting our fellow man when in need. Hopefully, we in our own little way helped the people of Phuket and the natural environment which they depend on for tourism. And, I will not forget the small donation we made to the Phuket Police Department!

Thanks,

DAN MOLESKY



MALAYSIA'S JEWEL OF UNDERWATER REEFS IS WORTH PROTECTING

Reported by Sarah Naarden, EDA's Asia Pacific Correspondent

An EDA Eco-Tourism initiative proudly supported by Tourism Malaysia



Pulau Sipadan

Pulau Sipadan, is a small island 36 km off the southeast coast of Sabah in Malaysia-Borneo. It takes 30 minutes to walk around its white sandy beaches. The real beauty is discovered underwater where a dramatic limestone cliff drops deeply into the sea bed. The journey begins in the shallow waters teeming with colourful parrot fish, bat fish and sea turtles. Divers make their way down the wall to discover deeper waters, home to schools of barracuda, tuna, and the occasional friendly hammerhead or whale shark. They return to the surface with knowledge of visiting one of the worlds top diving destinations.

In the past, divers have played an important role in the preservation of Sipadan. As recently as 1982, local fisherman were still using blast fishing techniques that would kill hundreds of fish at one time and effectively destroy the ecological wonder that these waters provide. Dive operators, the international dive community along with local NGO's lobbied hard to protect the site. Governments and business promoted tourism as a primary income for the local communities, making fishing secondary with great success. Over the last two decades, the increasing popularity of the dive site has meant that restrictions have needed to be put in place to manage the influx of tourism. In 2004, Sipadan's five dive operators were mandated by the WWF Malaysia with the local government support to restore the island as a wildlife sanctuary and recommended that a limit be placed on dive visits of no more than twenty people a day. All man made structures that once housed overnight stays and day trips with temporary waste and sewerage management will be removed. The new dive operations facilities are proposed to be relocated on other neighbouring islands or in Semporna, a village on the mainland of Sabah 45 minutes away by boat. The dive operators and accommodation industry here can provide employment for those living on the mainland and the management of hotel accommodation could be more sustainable.

In other areas of Sabah there are some international award winning eco tourist lodges which set fine models for the future sustainable development and can be adopted for diving spots close to Sipadan. Sukau Rainforest Lodge is located near the Kinabatangan River and wildlife sanctuary about 350 km North of Sipadan. It is home to unique proboscis monkeys, orangutans and a myriad of bird species. The lodge conducts tours through the sanctuary by river in small locally crafted wooden boats using 'silent' electric motors, thus minimizing the negative impact of toxic fumes and noise pollution on both wildlife and passengers. Built in a traditional Malaysian architecture style, the small 20 room lodge is integrated into its surroundings, by using renewable local hardwood timber species. Electricity is supplied by solar batteries charged by panels/generators, and hot water by solar heaters. Lighting is also provided by oil lamps and recycled palm oil. The operators contribute a portion of the guest room rates to an extensive tree planting program whereby the local community is paid for the seedlings they harvest. Guests are also encouraged to research and become active in projects that promote the protection of ecology in the area and contribute to sustaining future visits.

The region of North East Malaysia Borneo once had the largest rainforest area following the Amazon. However, since the 1960's, forests have been cut down for lumber exports and oil palm plantations made in the clearings have sustained the economy in Sabah. In 1996, the Malaysian government made a 15 year 'master plan' for tourism development in Sabah. It is proposed that tourism in the future will become the economic foundation of the community in lieu of forestry. According to recent statistics, the number of annual foreign visitors to Sabah is about 400,000 a year. Less than 15% of those visitors are interested in eco tourism and most were from Europe and Japan. In the coming years the Environment Department of Emirates Diving Association hope to support the Malaysian Government efforts by promoting eco tourist participation from the Middle East and let divers know that they too can become active in conservation projects.

In Malaysian sea's, like most global climate changing patterns, 10% of the coral reefs have been degraded from pollution and coral bleaching with the rise of sea temperatures. Another 30% are predicted to collapse within the next 10 to 20 years if interventions are not made. With these facts in mind, Palau Mabul, neighbouring island near Sipadan has provided leadership in promoting coral conservation projects with its Marine Awareness Day. Since 1998 the local community and international dive community have spent a day each year transplanting corals from abundant healthy areas to damaged areas known as the 'Adopt a coral' program. Implemented by Sipadan Water Village Resort in cooperation with WWF Malaysia and local governments the, transplanted corals are

then monitored, their growth rates recorded and the data sent to the adopter to encourage them to be involved in and care for their transplanted corals. Other activities include beach cleaning and cultural activities involving more than 400 villagers which is similar to the Clean up Arabia Day held by Emirates Diving Association in the Emirates.

Local Semporan fisherman occasionally spot the endangered species of Dugong in their waters. Regions of Sabah were once abundant in sea grasses which provide food for the creatures also known as sea cows. The large weighty marine mammals have a pig-like snout covered with whiskers and they communicate by birdlike whistles and chirps. A dolphin-like tail provides propulsion for top speeds of 25km/hr that can be sustained. The usual cruising speed is 10km/hr and the dugong may travel for hundreds of kilometres over just a few days. Little research is available about the current Dugong population and migration around Sabah. Since the 1950's, there have been estimates that the population of Dugongs has dropped by 98%, also a figure related to worldwide patterns in the species decline. The University's Malaya Maritime Research Centre together with the UNEP- Division of Early Warning and Assessment, has started a six-month project to outline issues related to their conservation in Sabah. They are focusing more on the island areas near Sandawak, some 400km north of Sipadan, where a handful of lucky ecology focused divers have reported frequent Dugong encounters. Hopefully one day other divers will be invited to participate in the conservation of Dugongs. The conservation movement which assists the endangered leather back turtle in Malaysia, provides a good model whereby turtles are adopted by volunteers and divers assist to monitor them.

Promoting for sustainable diving awareness development around Sipadan is one step towards re-balancing a delicate ecosystem. Relocating the temporary accommodation from Sipadan to permanent sustainable accommodation in Semporna and other islands need to be done within the strictest of green guidelines. Tight Environment Impact assessments need to be implemented so that the protection of one ecosystem does not damage another. *"In the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, we will understand only what we are taught."* **Baba Dioum Conservationist.**

In December 2005 Tourism Malaysia will proudly support a team of EDA dive specialists in coral conservation to launch a promotion of eco- dive tourism packages in Malaysia. To find out more about them contact EDA: edadiver@eim.ae



Teaming Marine Life



Leather Back Turtle



Dugong also known as Sea Cows

CONGRATULATIONS



It is with great pleasure to express our deepest happiness and congratulate Major Omar Al Shamsi for his new ranking at Dubai Immigration.

Major Al Shamsi has always been a great help for EDA by supporting and sponsoring the Environmental and Youth activities.

On behalf of EDA's Board of Directors, Staff and Members we wish you all the Health and Progress in your upcoming Future.

ROCK YOU LIKE A HURRICANE!

By Phil O'Shea (PADI Course Director), The Pavilion Dive Centre, Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Dubai, UAE



During October, myself, my wife Fati and my Daughter Leni went on vacation to Colombia, South America. Fati and I decided to get a well earned break from parenthood and deposited Leni with her grandparents for a week. We capitalized on the opportunity and flew out to a remote Island in the Caribbean by the name of Providencia. There's not much to do on the Island as it is basically a dense mountainous jungle

environment with one road hugging the coast. Possible activities there include sunbathing, walking, horse riding along the beach and into the mountain trails and of course DIVE. Providencia is the 3rd largest Arcipelago in the world after the Great Barrier Reef and Belize, which was unknown to me until I arrived there. Brilliant, got some excellent diving ahead of me then!

DAY 1 Was a lovely warm sunny day with an air temperature of around 30 degrees and sea temp of about 28 degrees. Had a great time settling into the island for our 5 day stay. I visited the dive centre and booked to dive for day 3, which promised to be a great adventure.

DAY 2 The weather started to cloud over and we had a few spots of rain with a light wind and the sea started to kick up a little. Now bearing in mind this is October in the Caribbean, it is quite normal to expect a little rain as this is the beginning of their wet season. No concerns.

DAY 3 Way hey! I'm off diving and it's not to the Cement Barge! As I step out of our sea front chalet I see the sea state has become even rougher than yesterday and the sky has clouded over with a stiff wind. This Island is protected on this particular side by a reef break about a mile offshore, so the island only receives a slightly rough sea along the coast. As I make my way to the dive centre I think to myself that if these were the conditions back in Dubai, I would not hesitate to call off the dive because I know that the Visibility would be poor and the sea state is uncomfortable. That said, I am a seasoned diver and this is the only day that I am going to be able to dive and it's not every day that I get to dive in the Caribbean. I'm happy to hear that the dive is still on and to my surprise I am the only customer on the boat. I assemble my less than perfect dive gear with table tennis bat like fins, but luckily I have brought along my MARES Pure Vision and NEMO computer for that comfort zone. My Divemaster has headed out to the boat which is moored about 100m offshore just out of the surf zone to prep the boat for departure. The surface cover, another local bloke, is handling the DM's kit and heading off to the boat. I check my own equipment, don a worn out 3mm wet suit and head off myself. Text book surf entry with equipment donned and walk in backwards. As for the bloke who was our surface cover, he's got his DM's equipment thrown over one shoulder, weight belt on, fins and mask in hand. He gets an expected pounding by the surf and clearly has never done this before. As he gets out of his depth he really struggles and I have to intervene to prevent a drowning situation. As I try to inflate the partially worn BCD I notice that the arm of the

LP inflator has disconnected from the shoulder of his BCD! That said though, we finally get to the boat without an incident. The engines roar into life as we depart from the buoy and head off to dive. These two characters looked like family members of Bob Marley and had a very rough and ready look about them, but were recommended as the best the island had to offer. As we get further out, the sea state picks up quickly, the wind picks up too and I have a uneasy feeling about the whole excursion. Once a good distance from shore and close to the reef break the sea state has picked up unbelievably and by no exaggeration the swell has to be a good 20ft. Now I'm really concerned as the dive boat is at best what you would consider a fishing boat by UAE standards. We are about 20 minutes out to sea approx a mile or so off shore. The DM is not phased by the sea and the surface cover bloke I now realize is only in training. The two of them continue to bicker as we continue on what now feels like a doomed adventure. Another 5 minutes pass and I really do have that gut feeling that something bad is about to happen. I think about telling the guy to turn around when he points out to a white buoy disappearing under the swell. We have arrived, so I think what the hell and we get ready to dive. Now at this point you expect some sort of dive briefing even if it is a very brief brief. In consistency of the day the DM said "OK let's go"! And he dived off the boat with his BCD under his arm, fins, mask and weight belt donned and never surfaced. I quickly did a 'No Buddy' check and backward rolled in. I peered under the surface to see my guide descending onto the reef 18m below me whilst he was getting into his BCD and correcting that feed hose problem he had on his shoulder. Amazing. The reef started at a depth of 18 metres where we descended, which was just about at the point where the reef turns into a 400ft deep wall. The underwater environment was a total opposite to that of the surface. The surge passed as we got to the reef wall, the water was completely still and the visibility was infinite, brilliant. There was just one small aspect that hit me straight away, although there was plenty of coral, there were NO FISH! Whether there is too much fishing going on, which I doubt for a population of 600 or whether the marine life knew something about the conditions that we did not, I was unsure. Anyway, we completed an uneventful 40 minute dive before returning to horrendous surface conditions. As I was ascending I was wondering if the boat was still in one piece and if the DM trainee if that's what he was could even drive the boat to our new location and find us. Unbelievably he arrived without delay and we quickly got back on board before powering off back to the main harbour on the island. The journey back was a thrilling surf on the growing swell at our backs.

The weather had definitely worsened now, most notably was the wind and the rain, the wind was really strong now! I was so relieved to get back onto dry land and I have to point out at this point, that despite what you have just read, I did actually fear for my life in those terrible sea conditions and could only think of Fati waiting for me as she looked out of her hotel window and my daughter Leni back in Colombia with her grandparents. I also knew that I was alone and could not expect any assistance from Bob's brother if things went sour! A truly memorable event for all the wrong reasons and despite infinite visibility probably the most boring dive I have ever been on.

To quickly wrap up, what I had just dived in was Hurricane

Wilma on its way to destroy Mexico's coastal resort of Cancun. The weather continued to deteriorate for the next 24 hours before we were evacuated from the Island from the help of the Colombian Air Force. On such an isolated and under developed Island there were no weather forecasts or weather channels to advise of the impending hurricane that we were heading into! Thank the powers that be, that we are all safe and back in Dubai so that I can share this exhilarating and terrifying experience with you all.

What to do!



REEF MONITORING COMMITTEE

As avid divers and environmentalists, we are tremendously lucky to live in a country with gorgeous reefs and marine life found along the UAE's coasts. Through the Reef Monitoring Project and Project A.W.A.R.E., the members of the Reef Monitoring Committee are able to contribute to environmental conservation of the UAE's natural beauty and resources and increase our skills and knowledge as divers. Thanks to the financial support of the EDA, UNEP and Pavilion Dive Center, we were given the specialized training, including coral fish identification, reef conservation and buoyancy training necessary to participate effectively in the Reef Monitoring Project.

By far, the most exciting aspect of our involvement in the Reef Monitoring Project and Project A.W.A.R.E. is the educational aspect: we will be working with participating high schools which will take on responsibility for the actual monitoring and reporting for the reef conservation project here in the UAE. Having schools, science teachers and students involved as the key players in the project ensures that the students get a sense of "ownership" for the project's long-term success. Even better, the participation of various schools means that we will have both local and expat students working on the reef monitoring together. So, through this project, we have a tremendous opportunity to give back something to the country where we live and work with adults and kids from a number of countries and backgrounds. The Reef Monitoring Project enables us to contribute truly scientific data to the international NGOs and UAE government offices committed to protecting coral and marine resources for all to enjoy.

ASPEN AMAN



Many years ago a girl of 12 went to a National Geographic lecture on Dugongs in the Gulf. In an instant she knew that this is what she wanted to do, become a Marine Biologist. Her fascination of water and love of animals particularly these gentle creatures sculpted the next ten years of life. After four years at university at last a Marine Biologist! On returning to the Gulf this not so little girl worked voluntarily for ERWDA, Abu Dhabi on their endangered species (dugong's and turtles) Program, an unimaginable full circle.

I was that little girl and now with the help of EDA am part of the Coral Reef Monitoring Program. The Reefs of the UAE are beautiful and unique, boosting a vast and complex ecosystem which must be protected. The underwater world holds so much excitement and mystery for me and those that do not or have not had the chance to experience it are unfortunate. I hope that by our efforts the reefs will be sustained and many others will one day have the chance so see the wonder!

DONNA MEYRICK

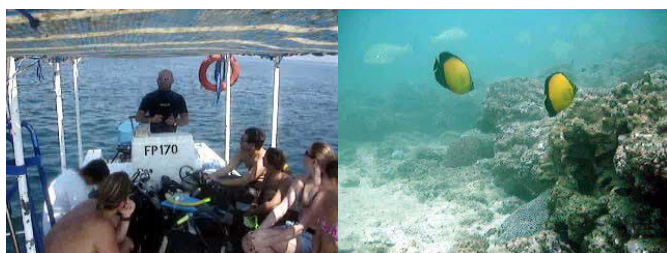
Whenever people hear the words conservation and environment in the same sentence they make the assumption that it is the responsibility of a big organisation or corporate company. It's also the general perception that only large bodies, like the UN for example, can make a difference and raise awareness about what it is to be aware about on that certain day. But we forget. We forget that it only takes one step at a time to cross a bridge, a road, the world! Heck, I was like that, still am some days, but I have to remind myself of the now clichéd statement; what do we leave our children's children. Clichéd for a reason? It all comes down to making a decision. We have the choice to give back to an environment that's made huge sacrifices to sustain humanity. What's more the giving does not include money, it's in the giving of the resources that we were born with. Our availability, our time, our passion. That is why I am here, just an ordinary person with no special skills and no special education, just a human being willing to be available, giving my time and affecting others with the passion I have in the recovery and conservation of this wonderful planet. Being part of the Reef Check team is one of the steps I'm taking to cross the bridge that leads to taking care of Dubai's marine life and educating myself and others about life on the reef and how to protect and sustain it. What a wonderful opportunity and revelation that conserving our environment, be it on land or in water, as an individual I can be part of a team on our way to make a difference.

NAYDEAN READER



Being an enthusiastic PADI diver, and having lived in the UAE for over 12 years, I have found that the marine environment (fish, plant and coral life) in the UAE has been rapidly decreased in numbers as well as the health being affected negatively due to recent developments in the area. This first-hand experience has lead to myself wanting to contribute the skills I have obtained through PADI training and other training to do my best in conserving the marine life. I only joined the Reef Monitoring Committee (Lead by EDA and Pavillion) as I trust these organisations and the other members to be putting in as much effort as we can, making the whole project a success, inspirational, and last but not least, fun. By being on the team I can proudly say that I am contributing to making a difference in saving the existing marine life, allowing new life to flourish, and provide important information to scientists who are working on an international project to ensure that the marine life is protected, monitored and even restored.

MANUEL A. BECK



I joined EDA's Reef Monitoring Committee because I enjoy diving and it's a way I can fulfil this and get the community service hours I need to graduate from school. I also joined because I think that it's important to think of the environment and how it's being effected by us humans. Joining this committee was just one way for me to help out the environment and also keep places I enjoy diving at healthy and prosperous so more people can enjoy them in the future.

ANDREW EL ZEIN



It's a great way to increase environmental awareness by giving people the opportunity to combine an activity they enjoy while learning how to appreciate the diversity, beauty, importance and fragility of the aquatic environment.

ZEINA JOKADAR

I consider myself very lucky to be part of a select group of volunteers who are getting trained for the Reef Monitoring Project (RMP). Reef Monitoring is a vital area that we need to concentrate on in this part of the world, especially due to the massive construction developments happening in the UAE. Being in the Reef Monitoring Committee means that I will get to learn and understand the actual state of our coral reefs and marine life. A lot has been damaged due to continuous dredging, oil spills and reckless anchoring methods. Our RMP training involves extensive training in identifying the various types of corals and marine life, conducting underwater surveys, writing reports and most importantly recognizing damaged marine life and trying to restore and prevent further future damage from happening to surrounding areas. My role as a member of the RMP committee is to create awareness of what is happening to our underwater world and to educate as many people as possible on how we can protect our delicate reefs and marine life. Hopefully, we will be able to get this message across to school children who are our hope for the future.

As a UAE national, I feel that I have the responsibility to do more to protect and restore our reefs, and more importantly to educate people, especially young nationals, by urging them to become more involved with environmental issues and being more aware of what is happening to our country's marine ecosystem.

LEENA ABBAS



Dear members,

Happy Eid,

Merry Christmas

and Happy New Year!



Eco regards,
EDA

UPCOMING EVENTS

MONTHLY MEMBER TALKS

Monthly Member Talks is a discussion series on topics that EDA believes will be of interest to its members. Led by individuals who are experts in their respective fields, the talks aim to provide members the opportunity to gain knowledge whilst interacting with each other and the speaker.

EDA are excited to offer members the chance to spend an evening with guest speaker: Brad Norman (One of the Founders of ECOCEAN).

ECOCEAN works to generate public awareness for marine conservation issues. ECOCEAN also encourages and facilitates quality research to provide important information (data) to assist with 'best practice' management for the future conservation of the marine ecosystem.

For information visit their website: <http://www.ecocean.org/>

Date: Saturday, 26th November 2005

Time: 7:00pm

Location: Dusit Dubai Hotel, located on Sheikh Zayed Road (next to interchange one), in Al Wasl C Ballroom.

The event will certainly be interesting and light refreshments will be available.

Please contact Ms. Erna on 04-3939390 or

Email: projects@emiratesdiving.com to reserve your place for the talk



Chairperson Mr Faraj Butti Al Muhairbi

Vice Chairperson Mr Essa Al Ghurair

The Secretary General Mr Jamal Bu Hannad

Financial Director Mr. Khalfan Khalfan Al Mohiari

Head of the Technical Committee Mr. Omar Al Huraiz

Head of the Scientific Committee Mr. Mohd Al Salfa

Technical Adviser Mr. Ahmed bin Byat

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Erna Magbanua

Graphic Designer

Ally Landes

MISSION STATEMENT

To conserve, protect and restore the U.A.E. marine resources by understanding and promoting the marine environment and promote environmental diving.

LEGISLATION

Emirates Diving Association (EDA) was established by a Federal Decree, No. (23) for the year 1995 article No. (21) on 23/02/1995 and chose Dubai as its base. The Decree stipulates the following responsibilities for EDA.

- To Legislate and regulate all diving activities in the UAE.
- Ensure environmentally respectful diving practices in all EDA members.
- Promote and support the diving industry within the UAE by coordinating the efforts of the diving community.
- Promote diving safety in the commercial and recreational diving fields through standardization of practices.
- Promote and preserve historical aspects of diving within the gulf region and enhance environmental education to diving and non diving communities through EDA activities.

CONTACT DETAILS

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Email: edadiver@emirates.net.ae, projects@emiratesdiving.com

Website: <http://emiratesdiving.com/>

EDA IN AUSTRALIA



EDA SUPPORTER:

Susan Pritchard from Australia, Project Coordinator, Clean Up The World

CHRISTMAS IN MUSANDAM

Divers Down has still got places for the Musandam trip on the 28th December till the 30th December. We will leave at around 2030hrs on the Wednesday evening and return on the Friday around 1830hrs. This would make a great Christmas Present for your partner/buddy or a present to yourself. What better place to try out all your new diving gear you got from Father Christmas!

The costs are: 1320Dhs for seven dives, tanks and weights with food, kit hire is 50Dhs per day and torch rental 30Dhs. The government of Oman still charge 20Dhs for the diving permit. The 50% deposit can be paid directly to us or left at the Pavilion Dive Centre in an envelope marked Divers Down with your name.

Hope to see you on board!

Ho Ho Ho

Paul Sant (a clause)

www.diversdown.tk

Mobile: 050 5531688 Tel: 09 237 0299





Good Food, Good Life