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SWIMS tidings....

SWIMS tidings……

This December saw SWIMS celebrate its first anniversary since its reopening in 2003. It has been a hectic, but productive, year, now documented in our Annual Report (available in PDF format from our website www.hku.hk/ecology/swims/index.htm). To celebrate this event, staff and students enjoyed an extended Christmas party at which Dr Jonathon Stillman (University of Hawaii) gave a talk on the thermal physiology of Porcelain crabs, followed by traditional party fare! There was also an informal showing of a recent Pearl Report, TVB programme which focused on marine conservation. This programme went on air in early December and featured the research and teaching of SWIMS staff and students. Many of the students made cameo appearances but the real stars were Valerie Ho and Karen Lui who gave very polished and professional performances, highlighting their research and the importance of marine conservation. The party was also a good opportunity for the new higher degree students, Wallace Choi, Allen To, Anna Situ, Vivienne Bao Wei Wei and Kevin Kwok to join the SWIMS team and move into the institute. In mid-December we welcomed Olivia Starck from Oldendorf in Germany, who has joined SWIMS to conduct her MSc project. It has also been good to welcome back Drs Liu Min and Wai Tak Cheung who both returned in October to undertake Post Doctoral research at SWIMS. Over December, members of staff and students also participated in the Marine Biological Association of Hong Kong's Annual Meeting; presenting their work at the Scientific meeting, and joining colleagues from other institutions for the dinner afterwards.

The most exciting development has been the launch of a new partnership with Ocean Park Conservation Foundation (OPCF) to establish a University Internship Programme. Students from SWIMS and our Environmental Life Science programme had the opportunity to apply for this programme which sponsors them to work for 7-10 days on OPCF projects in the SE Asia region. Mr Timothy Ng coordinated the OPCF programme and, together with staff from SWIMS, held an introductory seminar and then conducted interviews to select the candidates. Competition was intense and 6 students were finally chosen: SWIMS postgrads Wallace Choi, Anna Situ and Kevin Kwok, and Environmental Life Science undergraduates Heidi Lau, Karen Chan and Katy Ho. These students joined projects establishing a marine mammal stranding network in Cambodia and working on the conservation of the Irrawaddy dolphin population in the Mekong River. They were formally presented with their internships at Ocean Park's Conservation Day in January, officiated by Prof Paul Tam (Pro Vice Chancellor, Research) representing HKU, Prof Nora Tam (City University) as the Trustee Chair of OPCF and the OPCF Ambassador Andy Lau! We are extremely grateful to OPCF for establishing this unique opportunity for our students. These students are just returning from their trips and are giving seminars on their experiences which I am sure will excite and enthuse others to apply for the programme next year! (See photo below.)

Gray A. Williams
Hon. Director SWIMS

MISCELLANY

"Reef Check 2004" a big splash at Sharp Island

by Allen To and Anna Situ

Just a month after the Big Fish Count in late June, commenced another local marine event, Reef Check Hong Kong 2004. Reef Check was originally developed as a way to monitor coral reefs around the world. This event is now carried out in over 60 countries and territories (Reef Check, 2004). The aim of the present annual event is to raise public awareness on marine protection. It also helps gather important information about marine life such as abundance of certain indicator fish species (e.g. wrasses, groupers, sweetlips), invertebrate species (e.g. cucumbers, crabs) and percent coverage of coral communities, and their health. We two, teaming up with Kenny Leung, Polly, Kiwi, Wai Tak Cheung, Jasmine, Karen Lui and a few HKU graduates, who are also interested in marine life, joined the event. Long Ke was our survey site on 28 Aug.

When our boat arrived at Long Ke in the morning, we were surprised by the colour of the water. It was totally brown or even red in some areas! As Dr Leung suggested, dinoflagellates of the species *Prorocentrum micans* had spread to this area and formed the red tide. A very large area

of the water was invaded by the red tide. As you may guess, none of us dared get into the water. Having reported this red tide sighting, our team eventually decided to move over to Sharp Island. This surge of red tide later spread throughout eastern waters.

Fig. 1. Team-scientist Wai Tak Cheung explaining details of our survey (Photo: Wong Yuen-Yee).

We divided ourselves into different teams, each responsible for a specific category of marine life as mentioned before. The survey was carried out along a 100 m transect line laid near the coast. The heavy rain of the few days before our survey had increased the turbidity of the water thus reducing visibility and making our survey difficult. This, combined with the rough water on that day, disturbed our survey substantially. Luckily, we all came back safe without getting injured, although some of us got seasick and… threw up overboard. Despite the poor water visibility, we were still able to record certain indicator species. For instance, over 40 wrasses (mostly *Halichoeres* spp.) were recorded. Also encountered during the survey, as reported by our teammates, were a juvenile painted sweetlips (*Diagramma pictum*) and a grouper (possibly *Epinephelus coioides* or *E. bleekeri*). Other marine fauna such as Clark's anemonefish (*Amphiprion clarkii*) (Fig. 2), cornetfish (*Fistularia commersonii*), cuttlefish eggs (Fig. 3), various kinds of starfish and cucumbers were also observed.

Although the Hong Kong government has made an effort to promote marine conservation and protection, for instance through the Big Fish Count and Reef Check, it is not uncommon to hear news about people stepping on corals, stealing corals and catching fish for aquaria. We saw signs of coral bleaching and damage during the Reef Check survey. The increasing frequency of red tides also deserves more attention. It is obvious that marine conservation entails long-term work, much more has to be done and learnt not only by the government, but also by the general public.

Fig. 2. The anemonefish, *Amphiprion clarkii* (Photo: Wong Yuen-Yee).

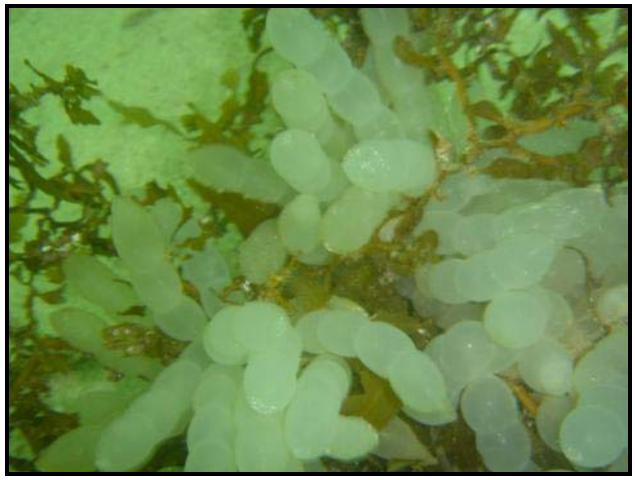

Fig. 3. Cuttlefish eggs observed during the survey (Photo: Wong Yuen-Yee).

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The Environmental Life Science Society

by Executive Committee, Environmental Life Science Society

The Environmental Life Science Society, SS, HKU Student Union, was established on the 2 March, 2005. A good start is half the way to success! No doubt the challenges of running a new society are overwhelming, but we, the executive committee, are determined to do our best to build a concrete foundation for our society and to work with sincerity and dedication.