

Our Destinations



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by Claudio Di Manao

Monitoring a vast marine area needs time, men and money. We are talking about a sort of budget no one can afford; neither university nor government could cover such an expense. Even more: what such expense would be for, if common citizens are not involved into the problem?

Let us face this issue from our point of view, us marine and diving operators in the Red Sea: try to stop thousands of unknowing tourists from walking on a reef top, explaining them why they should not do so! Try to be polite, calm, using a proper language. Try to explain to the millions of viewers of 'Open Water' movie that fishing the sharks, the 'killers', is even a worse crime by striking the food chain straight to its top. Try to explain to the larger part of humanity that corals are not jewels; they are colonies of tiny polyps.

If you want to know if a reef is healthy or is indeed adapting to a new environmental condition you need to collect (yes, you: the ocean belong to all of us) an awful amount of data. And also: many areas in the world did not experience a crazy industrial development. One of these areas is the Red Sea coastal area. Now these 'virgin' areas host huge tourist settlement. And they, we, need to monitor the impact. At the Bologna University, Italy, someone found the solution to two of the major matter: costs and information. How did they manage? Get a diver, anyone of the thousands visiting Sharm every year, give him a proper briefing, a slate and send him in the water doing what he is here for: watching the reef. Give him something more: an aim to his observation, reinforcing his love and knowledge for the marine environment, and make him feel useful to the ambient he loves. Does it work? Yes. This project started in 1999 with the counting, by recreational divers, of the Mediterranean sea-horses (project Hippocampus). Later on, in 2002 - 2005 the campaign 'Sub per l'Ambiente.' (Divers for the ambient) followed, the results of this research made it to the science magazine covers, as Conservation Biology and Quark. Another objective of the program was achieved: medias attention leads to involvement, support, sponsorships, partnerships, trust and visibility of the sponsoring firms. More than everything else: the pleasure for helping the sea. This is the only way good ideas can work in the modern era. STE made it. Stefano Goffredo, responsible for STE, presented this project in the major diving centers of Sharm el Sheikh, invited by Umberto Pepoli, from SSI, Fulvia Lami, from SNSI, Holyday Service - Pianeta Diving, successful promoters of the previous Hippocampus campaign in Mediterranean Sea. Gof, this is Stefano Goffredo nickname, is not just a researcher: he is one of us, he has being working in the 'primeval' Sharm el Sheikh as diving instructor and dive guide. At he conference intervened Dr. Mohammed Saleh, president of EULF (Egyptian Underwater and Life Saving Federation) answering to many questions about marine conservation concerns. Project STE will be operational from January 2007. Good luck to STE, long life to Sharm reefs. more info: <http://www.steproject.org/>



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