

SAVING PHILIPPINE REEFS

Coral Reef Monitoring Expedition  
Siquijor Province, Philippines  
April 22-30, 2017



**TRIP REPORT**

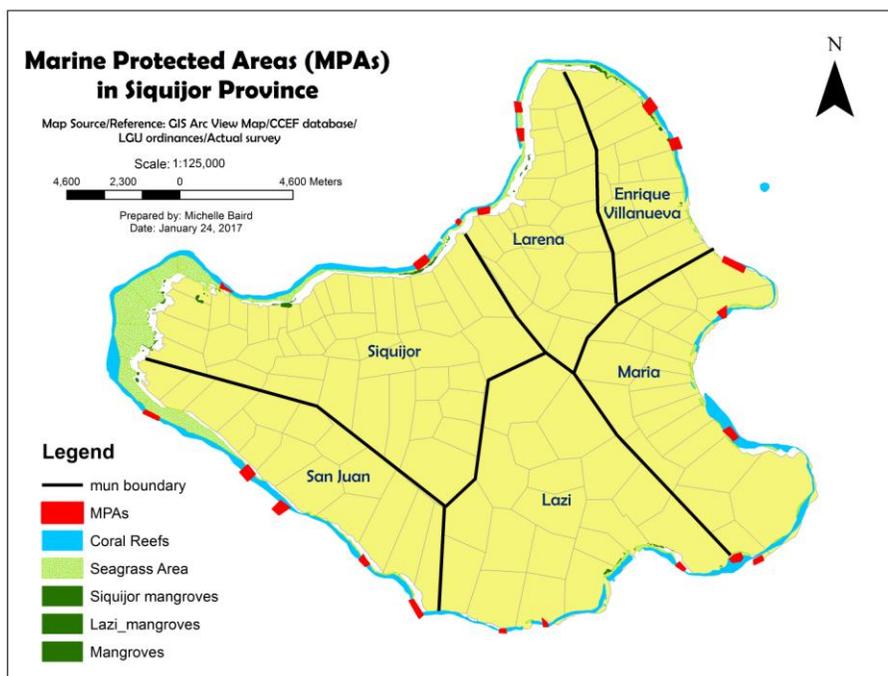
## The Expedition

The 9-day expedition to Siquijor was staffed by a much more diverse team than past expeditions. The team included five foreign volunteers, 10 CCEF staff, three Silliman University marine science graduate student, six volunteers from the Siquijor Provincial Monitoring Team (PROMOTE), as well as 11 military from the Philippine Armed Forces. The foreign volunteers joined from the U.S. and Australia; of the six, four were seasoned SPR attendees and two were first-time attendees.

The team returned to Coco Grove Beach Resort in the municipality of San Juan where it had stayed eight years ago in 2009, and found that the resort had expanded to approximately three times its previous size, now with two restaurants, three pools, and some dance floors. The team's two pump boats (of varying size and comfort level!) were contracted from Apo Island, and the boat crew was friendly, capable and attentive.

## Siquijor Province

Siquijor Province is an island province in Region 7 (Central Visayas) and the smallest island province in the Philippines. It is in the Visayan Sea biogeographic region, and is bounded on the northeast by Bohol Island, east by Camiguin Island, west by Negros Island, north by Cebu Island, and south by Mindanao. The sanctuaries vary in management arrangement and age, from newly established in 2016, to 30 years old. All are either managed by a local fishers' association, barangay council, or marine management council, in cooperation with the corresponding municipal government.



## Overview of sites visited



### Day 1 – April 22

#### Tubod Marine Sanctuary -

Orientation dive at Coco Grove Beach Resort  
The team arrived at Coco Grove Beach Resort and conducted their afternoon orientation and equipment-check dive to about 8 meters in the Tubod Sanctuary, the house reef of the Coco Grove Beach Resort.

#### Evening 1

On the first evening we were introduced to the Municipal Agricultural Officers of all six Municipalities on Siquijor, and a representative of the Mayor of San Juan Municipality. Darell Pasco, Provincial Coastal Resource Management (CRM) officer and Chief Bantay Bagat (i.e., *Ocean Watch*), gave a short talk welcoming SPR, emphasizing the important role that CCEF has played on the Siquijor over the past several decades. He pointed out the 21 MPAs currently established on Siquijor are thanks to CCEF's efforts.

We were also introduced to the cadre of 4 Philippine Armed Forces who would be accompanying us on the boats, and 7 who would be coordinating with local Philippine National Police and patrolling the resort. We were provided security password phrases ("Charlie?...") and informed that the pleasant young men would be out of uniform, but around, setting up a communications base on the southern extreme of the resort's beach.

### Day 2- April 23

#### Breakfasts

Each morning the Coco Grove restaurant staff, supervised by Roselio (the husband of Gigi, who attended to the group's needs 8 years ago!) provided a decadent breakfast of rice, eggs, omelets, fruit crepes, toasts, bacon, sausages, fresh fruits, and various drinks. Each morning the breakfast was a decadent scheme to make everyone gain serious weight.

#### Tubod Marine Sanctuary (Dive & Snorkel)

In the morning of the second day the group conducted a shore dive in Tubod Marine Sanctuary. Situated in the southwestern side of the island, in the tourism-heavy Municipality of San Juan, this ~8 hectare marine protected area (MPA) was

originally established in 1989 through Municipal Ordinance 07-1989. A series of amendments in the ordinance and changes in the management body re-established it as a protected area in 2003 through Municipal Ordinance 15-2003. The MPA is managed by the Tubod Fishermen's Association and the Marine Management Council, assisted by the Municipality of San Juan, and the Coco Grove Beach Resort. A dense line of buoys marks the entire perimeter of the sanctuary, and constant resort supervision lessens the need for enforcement.

This fringing reef is characterized by a long stretch of sandy white then a large algal and seagrass bed in the reef flat, followed by a slope dominated by branching live hard corals. Although our house reef, this MPA also boasted some of the best nicest dive conditions and viewing. Following the dive, the group conducted a snorkel survey at 2-3 meters depth on the reef flat.

Two security details (who are members of the Armed Forces of the Philippines) joined each pump boat in full gear (i.e. in full military uniform and arms). These men began the trip jumping on and off the boat wearing their boots, finally deciding during the last days that taking boots off and rolling up their pants was a better approach.

### Maite Marine Sanctuary (Dive only)



Following the morning dive in Tubod, the group conducted an afternoon dive survey at the MPA in the neighboring barangay of Maite. Maite Sanctuary is a 6.3-hectare sanctuary also in the (tourist) Municipality of San Juan in

western Siquijor. The sanctuary was established in 2009 by Municipal Ordinance No. 2009-06, and rated Level 2 (of 4) on the MPA management effectiveness assessment tool (MEAT) when assessed in 2011. In 2016 Maite won the award for most enterprising MPA on Siquijor.

Visibility this first day of diving in both sites was good (~18-20 m), coral cover was plentiful, and the group enjoyed warm waters and no currents.

### Evening 2

That evening the group enjoyed a PowerPoint presentation on coral restoration techniques by Dr. Aileen Maypa, in preparation for the next day's activities, followed by a decadent dinner on the beach.

### Day 3- April 24

#### *Olang Marine Sanctuary (2 Restoration Dives)*



On the third day of the expedition, the group set out for the opposite side of the island by pump boats, to the Municipality of Maria on the eastern coast, to become familiarized with coral restoration techniques and lend a hand at site rehabilitation. Olang Sanctuary, a 21.4 hectare MPA established in 2002, and was devastated by Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in 2013, which heavily impacted the eastern shores of Siquijor and resulted in 90% loss in live hard coral cover within the sanctuary. Silliman University, under the guidance of Dr. Aileen Maypa, began an experimental project in 2014 to stabilize living coral fragments and restore fish habitat, assessing the impact that protection from fishing (i.e. being in a sanctuary) has on restoration success, as well as which levels of damage restoration contributes the most benefit beyond

natural regeneration.

Divers returned to the same plots on both dives, affixing coral fragments in very low visibility (<5 m) to plastic stabilization mats installed by PROMOTE volunteers in previous seasons. Each diver estimated their restored area and was presented with

a personalized certificate of restoration on the last evening of SPR.

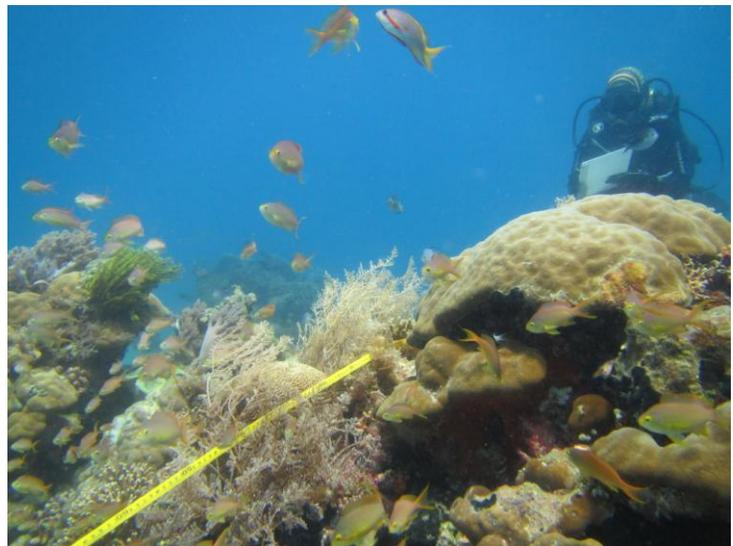
The long (and wet) trip by boat (approximately 2.5 hours each way!) was slowed by an unexpected northeasterly wind and chop, making the passengers of the small boat wet and uncomfortable, but provided great opportunities to view the remote coasts and cliffs of the southern half of the island. Luckily for the small boat passengers, the wind laid down for the returning leg.

In general, assisting with restoration activities was among the most mentioned highlights of the trip!

#### **Day 4 – April 25**

##### Paliton Marine Sanctuary (2 Dives)

After the previous day's tiring boat ride the SPR team enjoyed a nearby dive in Paliton, also located in the western municipality of the San Juan, towards the northern boundary of the municipality. The MPA was legally established in 2008 through Municipal Ordinance 21-2008. The MPA is managed by the Paliton Marine Management Committee, jointly with the Municipality of San Juan. In 2016 Paliton won the award for most popular MPA for tourism in Siquijor largely due to the Paliton Wall dive.



This MPA is unique in Siquijor in that it is offshore (beginning approximately 100 m from shore) but is also characterized by a wide intertidal and reef flat, with



branching and massive colonies of hard corals toward the crest. The crest is a 90 degrees drop-off with its walls covered with tunicates, hydroids and gorgonians. The area is referred to as the Paliton Wall and is a popular Siquijor dive site. Transects were surveyed at the crest just before the wall drop-off.

On this day, a couple of the later submerging groups had some trouble finding the first two transects,

swimming against the current in their search. Then a new SPR attendee laid only half a transect. These almost crises were topped off by strong currents making for 'energizing' swims back to the boat.

#### Dive 2: Paliton Marine Sanctuary

The group returned to Coco Grove for a satiating lunch of typical Filipino foods, such as fish in sauce, sizzling chicken in coconut sauce, sweet pork, garlic rice, fresh fruit, and fresh fruit juice, then headed back out to Paliton wall in the afternoon for a recreational drift dive at ~22 meters.

#### Evening 4

That evening, Moonyeen Alava, Executive Director of CCEF, gave a PowerPoint presentation on the 2016 accomplishments of CCEF. Highlights included the SPR expedition and data collection in Coron, Palawan, and the establishment of three new MPAs on Siquijor island, as well as a provincial MPA awards ceremony, leveraged by funds from UNICO and CCEF staff. All five winning MPAs were on the dive list for the 2017 SPR trip (Paliton, Bino-ongan, Maite, Caticugan, and Tulapos). Unfortunately, scheduling complications did not allow us to visit Tulapos.

Following the presentation, volunteers were dined at the second restaurant on the beach, followed a beach show of fire dancers, local drummers (who are also Coco Grove staff), the "Siquijor" song performed by wait staff, and an open dance party. SPR team members danced with the other resort guests, and Ae Sabonsolin (CCEF staff) was invited up on stage to sing.

#### **Day 5 – April 26**

##### Bino-ongan Marine Sanctuary (Dive & Snorkel)

Located in the northeastern coast of Siquijor in the Municipality of Enrique Villanueva (E.V.) (previously Talingting), the Bino-ongan Marine Sanctuary was established in 2012. It is managed by the Barangay council, assisted by the newly formed Women's Group (who organize beach clean-ups), and the municipal government. Bino-ongan Marine Sanctuary enjoys high community support, and in 2016 it won the award for best managed MPA in Siquijor, although it reports that fishers sometimes cut and steal marker buoys.

In order to maximize time in the water diving, the group elected to take a 1-hour road trip in air conditioned shuttles provided by Coco Grove Beach Resort, and was met by the boats and tanks, which had left at 6:00am to make the 3 hour water trip.

Upon arriving, SPR's long-term efforts to protect Philippine reefs was acknowledged by visits from several local political figures and individuals involved in the management of the marine sanctuary. These included the Mayor of the Municipality of E.V., the Municipal Agricultural Officer, the Barangay Captain and several Barangay Council members, and members of the Women's Organization.

The sanctuary contains mangroves abutting the trans-island highway, a wide shallow reef flat and a crest characterized by foliose coral. A boardwalk and guardhouse has recently been re-installed between the mangroves (following typhoon damage), allowing visitors to view the marine life for a fee. The common practice of feeding fish with bread is discouraged by CCEF and the pier contains educational signage created with assistance from CCE Foundation.

During dive surveys, several floats were raised to mark the start of the various transect sections, in order to exclude a long (~200m) sandy stretch on the inside of the sanctuary. However, this resulted in some underwater comedy as teams began reading the wrong transects, leading to transect switching, and a long period under water.

The team snorkeled into shore on their snorkel surveys, and walked through the long shallows to have lunch on shore together with the community. The Bino-ongan women's group had made smoked fish, mais, and local breads to add to the excessive amounts of pancit (noodles), rice and pork provided by the Coco Grove restaurant.

Although we had planned an afternoon dive in neighboring Tulapos Marine Sanctuary (the oldest sanctuary in Siquijor, and winner of the 2016 award for best MPA enforcement in Siquijor), Coco Grove Beach Resort was not able to provide sufficient tanks for two dives, and the second dive was abandoned.

#### Evening 5

The group celebrated the birthday of two volunteers (Mark Copley and Julia Cichowski) with cake and songs led by the always energetic Coco Grove staff.

#### **Day 6 – April 27**

##### Cangmunag Marine Sanctuary (Dive only)

This 12 hectare sanctuary at the southern extent of the Municipality of San Juan was established in 2010 by Municipal Ordinance 2010-004. The shoreline is marked by steep limestone cliffs, and no beach. A bamboo access ladder has been installed to reach the MPA from shore.

The group experienced heavy rain in the morning, but visibility on this day was comparatively excellent. However, the current presented a challenge, and the dive pair conducting the furthest transect opted to be picked up by the small boat on the far side of the reserve, rather than struggle back.

##### Tubod Marine Sanctuary (Recreational dive!)

In the afternoon the group returned to the house reef (Tubod Marine Sanctuary) of Coco Grove Beach Resort, and enjoyed a fun dive led by a Coco Grove dive guide.

## Evening 6

In the evening the group attended a presentation on nudibranch presented by a Silliman University graduate students specializing in nudibranchs and other invertebrates, followed by dining on the beach. Dinner on the beach was followed by the same drumming, fire dancing, and Siquijor song, presented by the Coco Grove staff. However, this time SPR volunteer, Laurent Boillon, joined the women in their hip swaying performance.

## **Day 7 – April 28**

### Nonoc Marine Sanctuary (Dive & Snorkel).

Nonoc Marine Sanctuary is located in the northern Municipality of Larena, near the border of Municipality of Siquijor. The 4.1 hectare marine reserve was established in



1996 by a Municipal Order. It is managed by the Nonoc Fisher's Association, the Marine Management Council, and the Barangay Council.

The coastal access to the sanctuary was undeveloped, and featured a large, old

stone jetty. The shallows were marked by extensive algal mats. This reserve featured large stands of branching coral, and some of the SPR and PROMOTE volunteers explored a wall at the western boundary to 25 meters. Because of the small size of the reserve, only 3 transects fit end to end inside the reserve, requiring the fourth be placed 10 meters towards shore, parallel to the others.

A highlight of the 1.5 hour boat ride to Nonoc was the approximately 50 dolphins spotted by the large boat (but somehow missed by the small boat!). On the return trip to Coco Grove, several small groups of dolphins were spotted.

### Cangbagsa Marine Sanctuary (Dive only)

A very short distance away we visited Cangbagsa Marine Sanctuary, also located in the northern Municipality of Larena, near the most populous town on Siquijor province, Larena. The marine sanctuary is situated in front of Flora's Dive Shop, and abuts the town cemetery.



### Evening 7

That evening the group enjoyed a cultural show put on by the Siquijor State College dance organization. The dances ranged from traditional wedding dances from the islands of Luzon to modern hip hop renditions, including the ever popular and interactive bamboo-jumping Tinikling. SPR volunteers Tom Costopoulos and Laurent Boillon were coerced (much to their dismay!) to join on stage and test their coordination. A robust buffet, including a full 'lechon baboy' (pig grilled on a rotating spit), sushi, and dessert table was presented for dinner.

### **Day 8 – April 29**

#### Caticugan Marine Sanctuary, (Dive & Snorkel)

Located near the northwestern tip of the island in the Municipality of Siquijor, this 13.5 ha MPA was legally established in 2003 through Municipal Ordinance 415-2003. This MPA is managed by the Caticugan Fishers Association and Caticugan Marine Management Council. A self assessment conducted in 2013 using the MPA management effectiveness assessment tool (MEAT) rated Caticugan Marine Sanctuary Level 3 (of 4). Caticugan is well marked with buoys, and in 2016 Caticugan also received the award for most improved fish stocks in Siquijor.

This fringing coral reef includes several habitats like rocky intertidal, sandy and soft bottom, and a wide seagrass bed. This site is also known for eagle ray sightings, however none were reported by the SPR dive team.

This last boat ride enjoyed a series of humorous photo sessions of SPR and PROMOTE volunteers posing together with heavy artillery borrowed from the military men.

### Evening 8

At the conclusion of the day, certificates of appreciation were presented to our military escorts and provincial monitoring team volunteers (PROMOTE), as well as to SPR volunteers for their contribution to coral restoration efforts. The group shifted attention to the long-held tradition of voting for the top five photos during the 2017 expedition. The voting was deftly mediated by SPR veteran Alistair Pennycook, and yielded energetic battles for five 'Best of' categories. Winners included Ae Sabonsolin, Mitch Baird, Mark Copley, AJ Lozada.

The evening concluded with another birthday celebration, this time of Silliman University graduate student staff at the beach restaurant.



## Messages from Some of the SPR 2017 Volunteers:



[Alastair](#)



[Tom](#)



[Julia](#)



[Laurent](#)