

Marine life galore at Sipadan Island Marine Park

SEMPORNA: There seems to be a rejuvenation of marine life at the Sipadan Island following the government's decision to stop the resort activities there five years ago and limit the number of daily visitors there ever since.

The 2010 Sipadan Island Marine Park Scientific Expedition from 26 to 30 April that was undertaken for the first time after the human activities on the island ceased found that the reefs, fishes, turtles and seaweeds have regenerated.

The current situation will help to preserve Pulau Sipadan's heritage for the future generation all over the world.

The research team headed by UMT's Marine Science Department lecturer Dr Juanita Joseph found the presence of more young turtles and this clearly indicated the rise in the turtle population in Sipadan Island over the last five years.

"This is proven throughout the expedition, between 50 and 60 turtles were caught in the feeding area," she said.

According to her the method used in the turtle studies is to catch, measure their size and mark them.

Blood samples are also taken for genetic studies and to ensure the continuity of the study that was conducted since last year, she said.



Dr Juanita noted that throughout the expedition about 42 Green and Hawksbill turtles were caught for the study and released later.

On the number of turtles that land to lay eggs around Sipadan Island, Dr Juanita noted that it is still too early to decide as there is no complete data recorded since last year for comparison purposes.

He said, the gazettement of Sipadan Island as a park under the care of Sabah Parks has provided the

turtles a protected habitat and allowed their population to increase.

The expedition this time managed to record new species of seaweeds.

Irwan Isnain from Sabah Parks who is leading the research noted that, the seaweed covered waters around the island is really vast and it extends to the reefs and attracts turtles to feed.

In this expedition too, the fish researchers found two species of the threatened Humphead



(top) Positive signs of rejuvenation can be seen on the marine life around Sipadan Island Marine Park following the government's decision to stop the resort activities there five years ago and limit the number of daily visitors ever since. - Bernama photo

(left) Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) Marine Science Department lecturer Dr Juanita Joseph catching a turtle in the waters off the island.

Wrasse and Humphead Parrotfish, known as 'Maming' and 'Kat' respectively in the local language thriving at the waters of Sipadan Island National Park.

Dr Mabel Manjaji from UMS found overwhelming numbers of coral grouper a clear indication of a healthy coral ecosystem.

The presence of schools of Barracuda, Jackfish and Humphead Parrotfish point out that things are better now compared with five years ago.

"By limiting the number of divers in the island waters, the fishes have returned to Sipadan," noted Dr Mabel.

The presence of the fishes at the waters of Pulau Sipadan is also due to the healthier reefs now compared with five years ago.

The reef researchers in this expedition headed by Daud Awang from the Malaysian Fisheries Department found that since five years ago many juvenile or individual reefs have emerged.

He proposed to Sabah Parks to monitor diving activities around the waters of Sipadan Island to ensure there is no damage to the reefs.

Studies also indicate that the reefs are rich in algae.

Dr Normawaty Mohd Noor from UMS who studied the algae pointed out that the algae serves as the water quality indicator and their diverse presence is certainly a thumbs up for the environment here.

The high species diversity points that the natural environment in Pulau Sipadan is in good condition.

The 2010 Sipadan Island Marine Park Scientific Expedition has met its objective to check on the marine life at the Sipadan Island Marine Park that has witnessed the rejuvenation of nature since all human activities ceased on the island. — Bernama