Fish Stocks Increase Fivefold As Indonesian Dynamite Fishers Turn to Jobs in Coral Restoration

Fishermen drop destructive methods and earn their ‘daily catch’ with new coral restoration jobs through nonprofit Coral Guardian, boosting fish stocks in a pilot set to expand worldwide.

FLORES, Indonesia – A remote Indonesian fishing village is turning away from destructive practices in favor of restoring reefs, paving the way for long-term healthy fisheries.

The team working off the Indonesian island of Seraya-besar, 310 miles (500 km) east of Bali, have reported five times more fish in the restored areas, including protected species, in the last two years alone.

The project to employ former fishermen to restore reefs instead of damaging marine habitats is managed by Coral Guardian, a French nonprofit dedicated to the conservation, awareness, research and enhancement of marine ecosystems.

Since the work began in 2014, the 15-man team has planted more than 26,000 healthy corals and established a 1,550-acre locally managed marine protected area. Where corals have been planted in the MPA, fish counts have jumped from about 200 to about 1,000 fish per 100 square meters over the past two years.

The idea is to show how communities can turn their own tides toward long-term sustainability of their waters, and to use this first project as a model for others to follow.
"We believe that effective biodiversity protection requires the involvement of local populations, their participation in its conservation and their capacity to sustainably manage the ecosystems on which they depend," said Martin Colognoli, co-founder and scientific director of Coral Guardian, which is based in Paris, France.

Coral Guardian taught 15 former fishermen about reef science and health, and instructed them how to cut, grow and outplant corals. The organization also taught them how to manage the marine protected area and conduct biological monitoring.

Alongside the coral restoration, Coral Guardian is leading a study to track a group of 10 fishermen to gather consistent data about where fishers are most likely to fish, what they catch, how much they sell, and how much they and their families consume themselves. This data is used to monitor local fish populations for better management of surrounding ecosystems.

Now, the community works autonomously and has gained a natural appreciation and respect for the environment they have evolved to protect. They consider marine health part of their responsibility and have implemented their own fishing restrictions around restoration areas.

"The goal is to revive a circular economy around coral reefs, and show that there are solutions to combat local pressures on these ecosystems," Colognoli said. "The fishermen and the whole village fully understand the importance of protecting the reefs."

Sutopo, the local conservation program director who oversees operations in Seraya-besar year-round, said the community is grateful to have the education, training and support provided by Coral Guardian.

"At first, it was difficult for Coral Guardian’s idea to resonate with fishermen, because they’d been dynamite fishing since they were born," Sutopo said. "Now, the community welcomes Coral Guardian’s presence and has embraced their activity as they’ve seen how it’s helped their waters."

Following the success of Seraya-besar, Coral Guardian is planning similar programs in New Caledonia and Colombia in 2019.

To help start these and future initiatives, Coral Guardian has set up the Blue Center, a coral conservation training site where community representatives can come to learn about setting up a restoration program in their local waters. The aim is to create centers around the globe so program information and education is easily accessible to all.

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Press Release

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- High-definition b-roll video
- 60-second and 2-minute edited videos, including scripts
- Captioned high-resolution photographs
- Q&As with Martin Colognoli and Sutopo

About
Coral Guardian is a French nonprofit international solidarity organization dedicated to the conservation of coral ecosystems, raising awareness, scientific research and the enhancement of marine ecosystems. Coral Guardian aims to promote innovative approaches to marine conservation and encourage sustainable development models by deploying multiple angles of action through five areas of intervention, harmoniously combining the preservation of marine ecosystems, the enhancement of biodiversity and sustainable development.

The Ocean Agency is nonprofit dedicated to supporting ocean science and conservation through creative communication and technology innovation, providing media with stories and imagery to help raise awareness of ocean issues. This story is part of The Ocean Agency’s expedition program, conducted as part of International Year of the Reef 2018, an initiative of the International Coral Reef Initiative in collaboration with the UN Environment supported by The Tiffany & Co. Foundation.

The Tiffany & Co. Foundation seeks to preserve the world’s most treasured landscapes and seascapes. The Tiffany & Co. Foundation values healthy oceans and the important role that corals play in these ecosystems. The Foundation supports organizations that work to improve the health of oceans through research, preservation and management of coral reefs. Its grantees also promote awareness and education of the importance of corals and marine ecosystems through outreach to targeted constituencies such as consumers, ocean enthusiasts and other key stakeholders.

International Year of the Reef has declared 2018 the third International Year of the Reef (IYOR). This year-long celebration is a great opportunity to come together to raise and strengthen awareness on the plight of coral reefs, and to step up and initiate conservation efforts.