



Reef Guardians Required!

BleachWatch Egypt seeks volunteers for reef monitoring program

What is BleachWatch Egypt?

Approximately 20% of global coral reefs have been affected and damaged by coral bleaching and mortality, a direct consequence of Climate Change. BleachWatch Egypt is a community based coral reef monitoring program that acts as an early warning system for potential coral bleaching events. Trained volunteers report back on the health of their local reefs and the information is used to track bleaching events and other environmental damage over a much larger scale than would otherwise be possible.

BleachWatch Egypt is modelled after a similar and successful community program developed in 2002 by the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to monitor more than 2000 km of the Great Barrier Reef in Australia.

BleachWatch Egypt is part of the Climate Change and Coral Reefs Project – a unique partnership between HEPCA, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and leading travel and tour operator Kuoni Travel Ltd.

What's the point? Coral reef bleaching is irreversible – right?

Wrong! Well... bleaching is technically reversible if corals are alleviated from thermal or UV induced stress before they die. However corals may bleach in great numbers and can potentially suffer mass mortality.

You see....corals live in symbiosis with a single celled algae called zooxanthellae. Bleaching is a natural response to environmental stress (most often unusually high water temperature as a direct result of climate change). The coral polyps expel their colourful zooxanthellae and as a result lose their colour and turn transparent and what can be seen is the white calcium carbonate skeleton of the animal. When corals are stressed and expel their zooxanthellae they can lose more than 90% of their food supply. If the zooxanthellae are not regained the coral will starve and die.

Even though coral bleaching events may be caused by increases in temperature and UV radiation that are difficult to control locally, other manmade threats increase the probability that corals bleach and die. Such threats include pollution, freshwater runoff, sedimentation and disease. By monitoring coral reefs we can try to better understand the patterns of coral bleaching, help find out what makes some corals survive, and minimise, where possible, local threats that exacerbate the situation.

Where is the monitoring program happening?

BleachWatch Egypt is being launched this month at the Red Sea Diving Safari in Marsa Shagra, and will be introduced soon after to El Quesir, Lahami, St Johns and Wadi El Gimal.

A team of volunteers recently received BleachWatch training as part of Climate Change workshops in Hurghada and Marsa Alam, but we need more volunteers! We aim to cover all of the Egyptian Red Sea and so all diving operations and resorts that are interested should contact us.

Who can volunteer?

Everyone! That is everyone who regularly visits our coral reefs and is in a position to receive a short informal training and fill in an occasional simple report. The training will give you insight into marine and coral ecology and will be an invaluable way to contribute and support the health of your favourite dive sites.

We welcome applications from individuals who are divers, snorkelers or regular water users, as well as dive centres and other organisations who are interested in passing on their knowledge of the program. BleachWatch makes a great interactive educational tool for diving and snorkelling guests.

Great! How do I get involved?

Simple. Just send an email to bleachwatch@hepca.com to register your interest and we'll get in touch with you soon with more information and to arrange your training.

You can also find out more about Bleachwatch and the Climate Change and Coral Reefs project at www.hepca.com/projects and www.iucn.org/marine

Thanks for reading!