



The International Year of the Reef

Ten years ago, 1997 was declared the International Year of the Reef (IYOR), in a global effort to increase awareness and understanding of coral reefs, and support conservation, research and management efforts. Recognizing that ten years after IYOR 97 there continues to be an urgent need to increase awareness and understanding of coral reefs, the International Coral Reef Initiative designated 2008 as the International Year of the Reef (IYOR 2008).



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Coral reefs are incredibly rich and complex ecosystems, sometimes referred to as the “rain forests of the ocean”. They are also highly endangered and face numerous threats, among them:

- Overfishing and destructive fishing practices (dragnets, fishing with explosives)
- Destruction of mangroves and other coastal habitats, and runoff of nutrient-rich soils and waste, leading to eutrophication (algal blooms that ultimately kill off other life)
- Thoughtless, unsustainable mass tourism
- Coral bleaches caused by rising water temperatures
- Taking of corals, clams etc. for souvenirs

At least 20% of the earth’s reefs are already damaged beyond repair, and another 50% are strongly endangered.

IYOR 2008 will:

- Strengthen awareness about the ecological, economic, social and cultural value of coral reefs and associated ecosystems
- Improve understanding of the critical threats to coral reefs and generate both practical and innovative solutions to reduce these threats
- Generate urgent action at all levels to develop and implement effective management strategies for conservation and sustainable use of these ecosystems

Go to the IYOR – website for more information, events and fun:
www.iyor.org/default.asp

More information on IYOR 97 can be found here: www.publicaffairs.noaa.gov/coral-reef.html

Focus on community dolphin conservation in Kenya

In 2008, the YoD in Kenya will focus on community-based conservation action, aiming for sustainable approaches to the use of marine resources.

“The year 2008 is an opportunity and a time to exchange unsustainable livelihood practices for responsible engagement in order to protect your means for sustenance. The focus is on the fishermen who have profound impact on marine life and the boat

operators' practices, which directly affect dolphins in our coastal waters". This was a message given to the local communities during a Baraza (public meeting) at the Kenya Wildlife Service HQ in Shimoni.

To build on last year's achievements and establish a firm foundation for integrating the community in dolphin protection, other coastal settlements were identified as key partners in the effort to mobilize the coastal community for the protection of dolphins. The meetings, convened by YoD Kenya coordinators, were attended by the area councillor, local chiefs and village elders, fishermen, boat operators and community members. The aim was to consult on the way forward in protecting local marine resources and limiting impacts from bycatch and the use of improper fishing gear.

Addressing the gathering were Philip Mwakio, Assistant Director, Kenya Wildlife Service Coast Region, Yusuf Aden Senior Warden, Kisite Marine Park, Dan Schumacher, TUI Kenya Resident Manager and Abdulaziz Abdalla from Pollmans Tours & Safaris. The participants supported the YoD initiative and consented to undertakings that include monitoring and assessment of dolphin watching practice by boat operators as well as enforcement of dolphin watching ethics. An exchange of fishing nets presently in use with appropriate gears was also envisaged and will be initiated soon.

To reduce dependency on marine resources for livelihood, the communities will try to adopt organic farming methods to enhance land productivity and farm diverse food crops.

In March, a three day orientation on dolphins was conducted by the YoD resource team for Majoreni and Vanga Primary Schools where the students were introduced to the value of dolphins as key species in maintaining the integrity of the marine ecosystem, dolphin social and ecological behavior, species identification, threats and challenges and the role of the community in dolphin protection.

Last year's participants Shimoni, Mkwiro and Wasini Primary became lead schools for the dolphin awareness campaign in the YoD 2007. The three schools received a more intensive training programme on dolphin conservation and will take the role in preparation of the Dolphin Club launch in April this year, aimed at institutionalising dolphin conservation as part of the school curriculum.

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