

Progress in Tela reef conservation in Honduras

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Some years ago the city of Tela in Honduras was only known for its beaches. No one was aware that underwater additional national heritage could be found. The coral reefs of the Tela Bay are this other treasure.



The Tela Bay in Honduras has coral reefs, the conservation of which needs attention. Photographer and copyright (c) 2013 Erkki Siirila.

Francois Ligeard, The Chamber of Tourism of Tela, says: "The good news is that we can offer a new site for both the national and international tourist. We have to highlight the fact that this place is very beautiful. It has high cover of live coral. We notice that always when we dive on this reef. One easily gets emotional because every time we go the local reef we find something new and more beautiful."

Dennis Sierra, The Prolansate Conservation Foundation, Tela, sees the "newly discovered" coral reefs in the following way: "The best news is that in Tela we have many people both in the civil society, local government and the business sector who are very interested in the conservation of the coral banks of the Tela Bay. The preservation needs have an acceptance at the community level. Also at the level of the central government there is a lot of interest in declaring a marine park in the Bay of Tela."

Only fishing was done on the local Capiro Reef in the past. Nowadays, divers come here to see the angelfish and the many species of coral. For example, black coral is found here.



The coral bank of Capiro is the best known reef area in the Tela waters. Photo and copyright (c) 2013 Erkki Siirila.

Dennis Sierra: "Logically we look toward the future generations. We need to implement conservation actions in the Bay area, if we want to leave this ecosystem as a heritage to our children. Tela has been favored by God. We have to remember that the natural richness we have in Tela contributes in a positive way to tourism opportunities here. Tela has its future in the resources of that Bay."

Francois Ligeard: "The biggest challenge we face is to take care of the reef both for our generation and the future generations. We need to get the fishermen and other local people involved to be able to preserve this reef. We have been working already by installing permanent mooring buoys. In this way, we need not anchor the boats and we can stop the damage that has been caused to the reef by anchors in the past."

The mangroves of the Bay may not be forgotten as reef conservation is promoted. The mangroves produce nutrition for marine life. In addition, among the roots, many species of coral reef fish live during their juvenile stage. The mangroves also protect the coast from the waves of the sea.

The seagrass beds in the Tela waters have functions similar to those of the mangroves. In addition, many reef fish migrate to the seagrass areas in order to eat.

When forests are preserved, there is only little erosion on land and less mud enters the sea via the rivers. This is crucial in reef conservation as the corals need clean and clear water. Related to the above, it is also necessary to develop the treatment of sewage and waste waters.

In the Tela Bay there are very healthy coral colonies. It is important to take care of the reefs, because climate change threatens them, through the elevated sea-water temperatures and through the acidification of the sea.

Coral reefs will be more resistant to global environmental changes, when at the local level there is no overfishing and when the other pressures are kept at the minimum level. In this way, the coral reefs of Tela will produce economic and environmental benefits to us also in the future.