

SeaLifeBase assists the Red List Assessment Workshop on Philippine Marine Mammals

by *Patricia Sorongon*

A workshop on the conservation status assessment of Philippine marine mammals, the first of a series, was conducted August 13 to 15, 2009 at the New Eurotel, North EDSA, Quezon City, Philippines. This was to facilitate specialists at the national or regional level to contribute their knowledge, based on field experience, in an effort to identify, monitor and develop appropriate management measures by the Philippine Red Listing Training Group. Marine mammal experts

who participated in the workshop will become members of the Philippine marine mammal Red List sub-committee, which will provide technical assistance to the Philippine Red List Committee (PRLC) and the Philippine Wildlife Committee, as stipulated in RA 9147 (The Wildlife Act of the Philippines).

Dr Louella Dolar gave an overview of the information on Philippine marine mammals, as well as the status of available information per species, while Moonyeen Alava

presented an overview of the IUCN Red List process (International Union for Conservation of Nature), including definitions, criteria, and the matrix to be followed during the assessment. Edna Sabater introduced the database structure to be used during the assessment, while five other presentations summarized the results of the studies conducted for various species of marine mammals in the Philippines.

The group, chaired by Dr Louella Dolar and William Perrin, applied the current

Red List global status of each marine mammal species to the Philippine national level for the following data categories: Philippine and depth distribution, habitat and ecology information, life history, population, longevity and reproduction, and



Participants of the IUCN-sponsored workshop on "Red List Assessment of Philippine Marine Mammals" held in Quezon City, Philippines.

Photo provided by the SeaLifeBase Project.

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major threats and conservation measures. The SeaLifeBase Project provided data on maximum size, maturity, ecology, Philippine distribution, food, and predators. Each category was discussed thoroughly by the

participants, with inputs based on their expertise (referenced as personal communication) or from published literature, and the Red List Status assigned and finalized in the IUCN database.

Gaps in the group's knowledge on the biology of Philippine

marine mammals were identified; about 80% of the 27 species are data deficient. This will hopefully lead to more research initiatives on Philippine marine mammals, or perhaps more SeaLifeBase collaborators on marine mammals of the Philippines.



A Response to End of the Line

The *End of the Line* — a documentary film on overfishing that featured many scientists, including two Fisheries Centre members/faculty — has sparked a lot of discussions, one of which occurred on the pages of SEED Magazine online (July 16). The *Sea Around Us* Project's Daniel Pauly and Jennifer Jacquet were among the six scientists to respond to how to alleviate overfishing in the article written

by Maywa Montenegro. Daniel suggests that a global crisis was inevitable, given that most nations had overfished their exclusive economic zones years ago. He provides two main ways to improve fisheries sustainability: 1. remove harmful subsidies, and 2. promote effective gear restrictions. Daniel also concludes that the small percentage of ocean that is protected, currently at 1%, is far too small to ensure long-term sustainability of many stocks.

Jennifer points out that overfishing is really about overeating. She suggests reforming the fishmeal industry, as one third of fish and seafood is currently turned into food to feed other animals. She also highlights the already-popular eat locally campaigns, and suggests that consumption of locally-caught fish could help. The full article is available at http://seedmagazine.com/content/article/finding_fish/P1/.



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The *Sea Around Us* website may be found at www.seaaroundus.org and contains up-to-date information on the Project.

Contributors

This issue features stories from three new contributors to the newsletter. Patricia Sorongon contributed the first article, and works with the SeaLifeBase Project, at the WorldFish Center, in Los Baños, Philippines.

Les Watling and Ken Sulak cowrote the second piece. Les is a member of the Department of Zoology at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Honolulu. Ken is lead scientist of the Coastal Ecology and Conservation Research Group, U.S. Geological Survey, Gainesville, Florida.

The *Sea Around Us* Project is a scientific collaboration between the University of British Columbia and the Pew Environmental Group. The Trusts support nonprofit activities in the areas of culture, education, the environment, health and human services, public policy and religion. Based in Philadelphia, the Trusts make strategic investments to help organizations and citizens develop practical solutions to difficult problems. In 2000, with approximately \$4.8 billion in assets, the Trusts committed over \$235 million to 302 nonprofit organizations.

FishBase, the Internet, and a deep-sea octocoral cruise in the Bahamas

by Les Watling and Ken Sulak

At the end of March, 2009, we set sail from Ft. Lauderdale on the University of Miami's research vessel, the R/V *F.G. Walton Smith*. Our mission was to sample and document deep-sea octocoral communities from the Bahamas escarpment, mostly at depths from 800 to 2500 m. This project was a continuation of work we started in 2003 on the New England Seamounts (NES), and continued with cruises to NES and Corner Rise (CR) in 2004 and 2005. In all we visited 15 seamounts and collected more than 400 specimens. Our primary sampling tool has been either the research submersible, *Alvin*, or the remotely operated vehicle (ROV) *Hercules*. Both

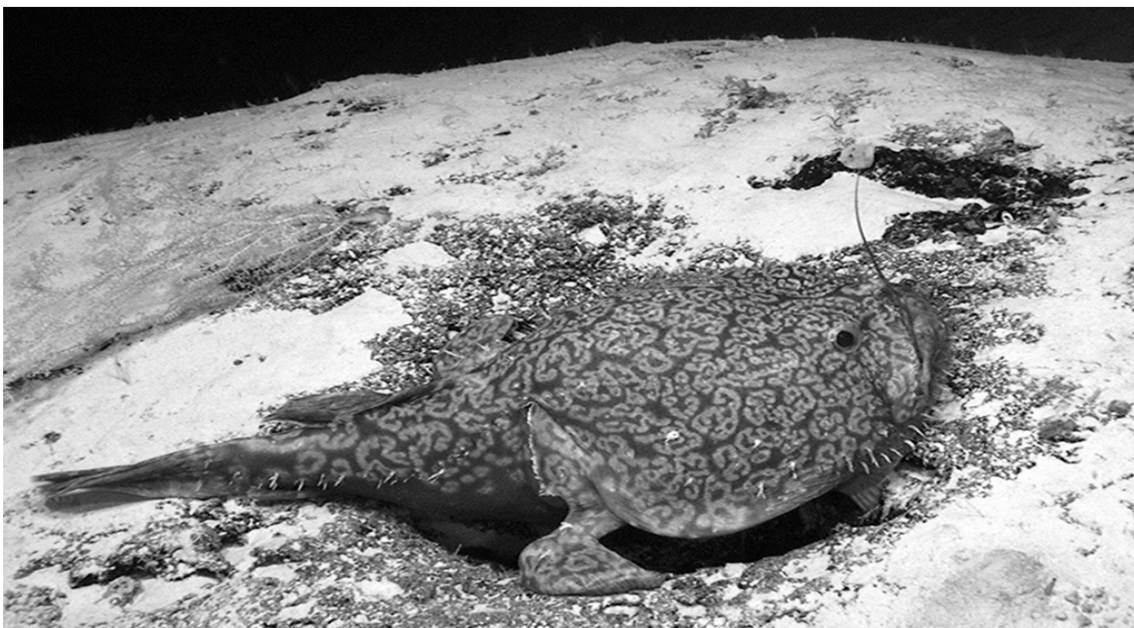
were equipped with manipulators to collect specimens, and boxes to store them in for the ride to the surface. In addition, both were also well-equipped with video cameras, so we always took the opportunity to record on video all of the interesting things we saw, especially the fish, and we always have had, as a member of our team, a person who could identify the fish.

One of us (KS) had sampled this Bahamas area for fish when he was a graduate student. Of course, in those days he used a trawl and sometimes the specimens would be a little beat-up. For this cruise, we had two technological advantages: a superb ROV (the *Global Explorer*)

with hi-definition television camera, and live access to the Internet. When a fish came into view, the general protocol was to try to get very good lateral views of the whole body, but especially the 'face', so that the prospect of identifying the fish was high. With the video camera we had, and excellent piloting on the part of the ROV crew, we were almost always able to fully image the fish such that identification would be possible. Such images were often taken close enough so that the number of rays in the fins could be counted, or other diagnostic features verified, if that was needed.

Having studied the fish in the area before, Ken could identify

...images were often taken close enough so that the number of rays in the fins could be counted.



The rare *Sladenia shaeferi*, identified at sea using FishBase. Image taken by the ROV *Global Explorer*, and courtesy of Bahamas Deep-Sea Coral Expedition Science Party, NOAA-OE.

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Existing images in FishBase were extremely helpful in definitive identifications during the mission.

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most of what we saw. But there were several that he had not seen alive and unbattered before or recognized but wondered whether they had been encountered in this area of the ocean before. This is where having an Internet connection was valuable. Whenever a question like this came up, Ken logged on to FishBase, searched the taxon of interest, pulled up a list of known species, then checked if the known geographic and depth distribution of the suspected species matched the study area. He could also determine which similar species occurred in the dive area, pull up an archived FishBase photograph, and check descriptive and diagnostic details. The issue was often settled in a matter of minutes, sometimes while we were still observing the fish on the video screen.

Access to FishBase also allowed

Ken to ensure that the latest scientific name changes and spellings were used in our cruise database. On previous cruises, he has typically gone to sea with a large chest full of reference texts and faunal guides. However, he observed that it is physically impossible to bring all the taxonomic reference books and papers that one would need to facilitate visual identifications and validate taxonomic names at sea for the diversity of the deep-sea fishes encountered. Equally, it would be impractical to scan all such books as portable pdf files, and impossible to stay current with name changes for all taxa. However, with online access to FishBase, he will be able to leave many heavy and valuable books in his home office on future ROV missions, and able, as well, to access the latest taxonomy. Existing images in FishBase were extremely helpful in definitive identifications during the mission. For example, FishBase images of the angler,

Photocorynus spiniceps, enabled a species-level identification, where our determination otherwise was simply family Linophryniidae. Again, FishBase information was instrumental in confirming the identification of a second very rare fish, Sladenia shaefersi, Family Lophidiidae (pictured on page 3). He noted that more comprehensive inclusion of good quality layout and underwater images of each species would be a very desirable FishBase upgrade.

Thus, FishBase should more vigorously encourage scientists to contribute images; the experience recalled here shows why.

Editor's note: FishBase was developed at the World Fish Center, in collaboration with the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN. The database holds information on over 30,000 fish, and can be accessed at www.fishbase.org.



Sea Around Us newsletter print version will cease

In 2010, the Sea Around Us newsletter, as well as FishBytes, a newsletter published by the Fisheries Centre, will be going fully electronic. We want to thank all of our readers for their continued support over the years. We request that those readers who are receiving hard copy versions of our FishBytes and Sea Around Us newsletters kindly email the editor, at FishBytes@fisheries.ubc.ca or SeaNotes@fisheries.ubc.ca, with their electronic address, if they wish to continue reading our newsletters. Having a fully electronic format will help us to be more sustainable by reducing our reliance on paper, and will allow us to use colour for visual aides to communicate with our readers, such as photos and graphs. We appreciate your cooperation and patience as we make this transition. We hope you will continue to read and enjoy our newsletters! If you have any comments or suggestions for us regarding this transition, please email the editor at FishBytes@fisheries.ubc.ca, or SeaNotes@fisheries.ubc.ca.

