

Project Update: August 2016

University Group

We recently had Southern Cross University from Australia send out 10 students focused on sustainable development and conservation ecotourism in the region. The students were each awarded the New Colombo Scholarship from the Australia Government after being selected from a lengthy application process. Half of the students were from the business tourism degree with the other half studying an environmental and marine science degree. The students were accompanied by associate professor Kay Dimmock.

The group travelled to Bangkaru and stayed on the island for three nights helping rangers with data collection, beach patrols and keeping an eye out for poachers along the poacher's trails. After returning to our base at Mahi-Mahi Resort, the students decided to focus on an awareness and marketing campaign for the VAST Volunteer Program (the VAST program will bring in money to help cover the wages for the rangers and the maintenance of the facility on Bangkaru, whilst giving volunteers the experience of a lifetime).



The outputs from the students work include;

- Affiliation letters to organisations in Australia.
This will help promote the programme and allow us to reach a broader network of potential volunteers, some of the students already volunteer for these organisations and had strong relationships with workers there. Organisations include ASR (Australia Seabird Rescue), OORCA (Organisation for the Rescue and Research of Cetaceans in Australia), Cairns turtle Rehabilitation Centre, Byron Dolphin Research Australia, BURG (Byron Underwater Research Group), SCU (Southern Cross University), Wildlife Asia and the Lismore Koala Hospital. Having these company logos associated with the VAST label will further enhance our program.
- Merchandise
A logo was designed to use for social media, marketing and merchandise. Some of the students are already fundraise through market stalls for the programmes they volunteer with. With affiliation we can potentially advertise through existing market networks and stalls, or potentially branch out and have our own.
- A colouring in competition for primary school students in NSW, VIC & QLD.
This is expected to raise awareness for sea turtle conservation in general whilst providing information on Bangkaru and a modest amount of funding through gold coin donations. Merchandise will be awarded to the best submissions, with social media recognition also adding value through awareness raising for the programme.

- Furthering relations with Southern Cross University.
The students enjoyed their time here so much they have decided to lobby the professor who helped organise the original trip to allow future students to experience a similar trip to the region. One of the students is also working for the student body at the university and has the option to champion one initiative per year, giving us another avenue for marketing and awareness raising.
- Speech / event night at the NMSC (National Marine Science Centre).

A student decided that her contribution would be a speech about the island and her experiences to the NMSC in Coffs Harbour. The NMSC have information nights where people can get up and present their research or interesting projects they are involved with. Lauren spoke to the director of the evening who decided that it would be best for the NMSC to put on



a night specifically about Bangkaru and invite their contacts from the media. This is expected to go ahead towards the end of the year.

The students have decided to stay on with the programme as ambassadors and plan to follow up on their ideas for the programme in Australia. They will continue to spread the word and be involved with decision making and adaptations to the programme into the future.

Poachers Caught Red Handed



We have managed to capture three sea turtle egg poachers in a recent sting involving the local military. The poachers were spotted on the turtle beach in the early hours of the morning, but attempts to follow them were unsuccessful. Rangers (with the local military) then walked to an area of the island they suspected was being used by poachers and snuck up on the illegal camp just before dawn. Three men were handcuffed and taken to the local military station for questioning.

One of the men was an elder man who had been poaching on Bangkaru for years. The other two men were apparently on their first trip to Bangkaru and learning how to poach turtle eggs from their senior colleague. The men had over 1,200 eggs in their possession. Current estimates are that the three men will be prosecuted and sent to jail for

approximately 3 to 6 years. One of our ranger team organised the military and timing and was supported financially for the action by one of our partners.

Socialisation

Following the arrests of the turtle egg poachers there has been an increase in attention on the Bangkaru Island from local communities, tourism operators, local government, police and the navy. We are making the most of this opportunity to spend time with each of these groups explaining the program on Bangkaru, and its relevance to local actors. We will also take this opportunity to discuss, and agree on, Standard Operating Procedures for bringing tourists to Bangkaru.