

Volunteers at Coral Bay

by
Stephanie Turner

A TRIP to an isolated lagoon just south of Coral Bay, where several hours a day are spent swimming over a beautiful coral reef may seem like a holiday dream come true.

But CALM volunteers know better, as seven of them (who have 'been there, done that') will tell you with great satisfaction - 'there was a lot of hard work to be done.'

The 'magnificent seven' were: George Arnold, Neil Thomson, Murray Fisher, Anita Relo-Fisher, Glenn Willmott, Kelley Holborn and Maxine Dawes who recently joined me on a field trip to Coral Bay, Ningaloo Reef, to assist with a study of the biology of a coral-eating snail, *Drupella cornus*, which has been responsible for extensive coral damage in the Ningaloo Reef Marine Park since the early 1980s.

The primary research objectives of this trip were to study the development of the early larval stages of *Drupella*, using *in situ* larval rearing equipment borrowed from the

Australian Institute of Marine Science and to examine potential fish predation on the adult snails.

The volunteers toiled long and hard, assisting with working the fish traps, the twice daily general maintenance of the larval-rearing equipment (cleaning filters, changing the power supplies, checking anchor lines were still in position, etc.), collecting and processing water samples for chlorophyll analysis and collecting spawning snails to take back to the laboratory in Perth.

One day Neil

accompanied me on a 4.30 am drive to Carnarvon to meet the plane carrying *Drupella* eggs from Perth for the experiments, (while George insisted he would prefer to stay in bed!).

Meanwhile, Anita and Murray spent eight hours in the water just sampling the larvae, (that is collecting larvae from the equipment in order to record growth rates and survival).

At the end of the study, Maxine helped dismantle all the equipment, amid clouds of purple ink released by an angry, unidentified, but undoubtedly very large

occupant of the coral bommie used to anchor the equipment.

Meanwhile, Murray 'volunteered' to release an even angrier moray eel that had strayed into a fish trap being used to examine predation on *Drupella*. (Thanks Murray - I was right behind you, honest!!).

To all of you, thanks for your enthusiasm and assistance in the field, and for sharing the pleasures and agonies - mainly related to the camp-beds and my general lack of cooking ability.

Maybe next time, Anita, you'll get to swim with a shark.



Anita and Murray inspecting a fish trap baited with adult *Drupella*.

Photo by Stephanie Turner