

**Kon Tiki Krabi - Project AWARE Kids Program mission was to educate the local children about water resources, sharks, turtles and seahorses, and the desperate need to conserve them.**

The appalling weather the previous few days had me a little apprehensive about the day that lay ahead of us, as we were to be spending it outside with no less than 130 kids from the local school in Klong Haeng.

Organized primarily by Kontiki - one of the most prominent diving operators in Krabi and Koh Lanta - the Project AWARE Kids Program mission was to educate the local children about water resources, sharks, turtles and seahorses, and the desperate need to conserve them.



No stranger to conservation issues, Kontiki is the only dive operator in Thailand to have been awarded the prestigious Project AWARE Marine Environment Award 2008, since becoming a Project AWARE - GoEco Operator in 2006. They are one of the first to be involved and are very pro-active when it comes to doing something to help our environment - especially when it relates to our beaches and oceans.

So at the invitation of the Krabi Manager, Michael Wallentin and his team, I set my alarm for an early start on Friday 25th July. At the Kontiki dive centre the next morning, Pamela from Projects Abroad and I met up with the rest of the team that consisted of Andy, Geoff, Malene, Man, Ked and Wahead from Kontiki, and Justine from Greenfins. We loaded the truck with ice, soft drinks and fruit before heading over to the outdoor aquarium in Ao Nammao, the site for the days events.

Shortly after 9am, the kids started to arrive in busses and spilled off, babbling excitedly and being hearded together by their teachers. They were divided into 3 groups and taken to separate areas of the aquarium to begin their activities. I was with Andy, who had the task of educating the kids all about water - where it comes from and the need to conserve it. They were well behaved and attentive to what Andy had to say, and were genuinely surprised at learning facts such as the amount of the Earth's surface being covered by water - 70% - and the percentage of that which is drinkable - only 1%. Even I was surprised at that!

To demonstrate this, the kids had a small sample of water from where from their taps, others from their rain barrels. We tied a around the top of their bottles and see what kind of things might be results were very interesting - and were heard for a hundred meters, I



been asked to bring with them they live. Some brought water local stream, and still others small piece of filter paper squeezed the water through to filtered out of the water. The squeals of delight and disgust can assure you!

We even learned 2 new thai words from the children! 'sòk-gà-bpròk' - meaning 'Dirty' and 'tam aa-ha an' - meaning 'Clean'.

In the other groups, Goeff and Pamela were teaching the children misconceptions about sharks, as well as the plight of the endangered turtles. Sharks regularly end up on local restaurant menus in Ao Nang and Krabi, much to the cost of the ecosystem as they are top predators that keep everything below them in balance. They also take a long time to reproduce, so when they are caught for food, the population drops severely. Turtles are slaughtered for their meat but also the shell, which can be made into jewelry and tacky souvenirs.



Malene, Justine and Man were teaching the third group about seahorses. The aquarium in Ao Nammao breed hundreds of seahorses for release into the local waters as, unfortunately, they too fall victim the souvenir trade in Thailand. They can be seen in shops in Krabi town, dried and encased in plastic, on sale as a keyring or paperweight. The kids loved their task of drawing pictures of colourful seahorses.

After our group activities, we broke for lunch. I can safely say that if you have never seen 130 plates of chicken fried rice at once before, it is quite a sight! The kids got a chance to walk around the whole complex, and were delighted at seeing up close and personal black tip sharks, tiny baby seahorses and, judging by the squeals of excitement, the beautiful resident green turtle!



The last task of the day was to write letters to the local governor in Krabi, telling him of their experiences, what they have learned, and what they would like to be done about it. The kids were very eager to shout out suggestions on water conservation and a ban on shark meat in the area, which was duly noted down by their teachers. Other topics such as supplying more bins for rubbish disposal, posters to educate others on littering and recycling our waste were also included in the letters.



As a final treat, we all piled a section of mangrove swamp we would release over 1000 mangrove forests in Asia are hundreds of species of young shallow water and complex and protection from predators fragile developing stage. The opening the bags to release soon there were little batfish everywhere.



onto the busses and drove to a couple of miles away, where tiny juvenile batfish. The a vital environment for marine animals, as the root systems provide shelter whilst they are in such a children had great fun in the fish into the water, and swimming around

After all this activity, it was time to go home. The busses took us and the children back into town, the kids singing songs along the way. We said our farewells and got a chorus of Bye bye's and Thank you's along with a sea of beaming faces and some of the most energetic waving we could hope to see! Our day was done, and our mission accomplished. If next years Project AWARE Kids Day is as much fun as today, then count me in!

Story By Paul Stretton, AoNang.