



First crown-of-thorns removal action for the occasion of the International Year of the Reef 2008

On January the 15th, 23 reef enthusiasts came together on the PMBC (Phuket Marine Biology Center) boat for a crown-of-thorns starfish (COT) removing day at Koh Aeo. A few weeks earlier staff from the PMBC had found a serious outbreak of COT around the island of Aeo. COT are known for destroying the coral by eating coral polyps.



They decided, to the control of Khun Nipon PhongSuwan, the Green Fins project leader that the coral had to be saved and started collecting people from everywhere. There were 11 Thai staff from the Marine National Park Phuket, 7 staff and volunteers from the PMBC and 5 Farang and Thai volunteers from the Greenfins project gathered together for this day.

They left at 9 o'clock from the PMBC pier for the short ride to Koh Aeo. With 2 dinghies everybody was brought to different spots to cover a survey and COT removal of the whole area around the island.

In two dives the 23 volunteers managed to collect 460 Crown of thorns, together with the 244 only 7 PMBC staff already collected the week before totaling the amazing amount of 704 Crown of thorns around the tiny island.

When taken in consideration that there is already an outbreak of Crown of thorns when you see more than 10 of them in one hectare, this was a major outbreak. The reason why there can be an outbreak is an unbalance in the eco system. In earlier days the Crown of thorns were night predators, they never even came out in the day. They were eaten by the Triton Trumpet shell. In the sixties the amount of Triton shellfish decreased and since then there have been Crown of thorn outbreaks in many places although the reason as to why this particular outbreak occurred is unknown.



Most of the Crown of thorns were found on the South east site of the island of Aeo. On this site, 30 to 50% of the coral was already affected by the Crown of thorns. Mostly table corals such as *Acropora hyacinthus* were killed. Live coral cover was left around 30-40%. In contrast, on the other side of the island, coral reef was still in a good shape, with live coral cover

around 70%, and crown of thorns were not found.

The volunteers not only took away the Crown of thorns but also a few fishnets that were covering the coral as well as some plastic bags and bottles that were littering the reef.

After the dives, all the collected Crown of thorns were taken in a basket to the beach to be counted and dry out.

The PMBC along with Green Fins will continue to remain active throughout the International Year of the Reef and beyond to diminish the number of affected areas.

To see more photos of the day go to our Gallery Section or click [here](#).

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