

Red Sea spinner dolphin protection supported by controlled ecotourism

Giuseppe Notarbartolo-di-Sciara

¹ Tethys Research Institute, viale G.B. Gadio 2, 20122 Milano, ITALY – giuseppe@disciara.net

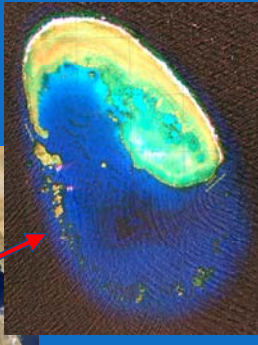
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Dolphin watching in Samadai

Spinner dolphins (*Stenella longirostris*) throughout the Tropics seek shelter within coral reefs during their daylight resting hours. This habit may bring them within easy reach of eco-tourists, thus making them vulnerable to disturbance.

Such is particularly the case in Samadai, a small reef, 1 km-wide, located 6 km off the coast of Southern Egypt.



Starting in the early 2000s, tourists converged daily to Samadai to swim with the resting dolphins in increasing numbers, in a situation progressively beyond control.

Growing concern that the dolphins would abandon the reef was brought to the attention of the Egyptian authorities, who suspended access to Samadai in December 2003.



Management action by the governing authorities

A provisional management plan was prepared in December 2003, based on precaution and on the scant knowledge available, and enforced since January 2004 when the reef was again opened to visits under controlled conditions.

The Samadai management plan

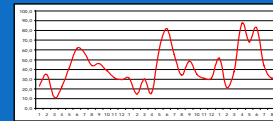
The plan envisaged: the subdivision of the reef into three zones including a large no-entry zone encompassing the dolphins' resting area (A), and a smaller zone (B) where guided visits are allowed.



The plan also included curtailing daily visits to 100 snorkellers and 100 divers visiting the reef aboard a maximum of 10 large boats; time limits for visits (from 10 AM to 2 PM); limiting admission of swimming visitors to a restricted zone adjacent to what was considered critical dolphin habitat, under the guidance of certified guides; the adoption of a code of conduct; the payment of a 15% entrance fee for each visitor; and the daily collection of data on dolphins and visitors to adapt future management.

The monitoring programme

Rangers were trained on monitoring techniques in Jan. 2004, and constant monitoring has continued ever since. Monitoring metrics included dolphin numbers vs. time of day/year, visitor fluxes and environmental variates. Data supported subsequent management adaptations.



Mean daily dolphin presence in Samadai, 2004-2006

References

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- Notarbartolo di Sciara G., Hanafy M.H., Fouda M.M., Afifi A., Costa M. 2008. Spinner dolphin (*Stenella longirostris*) resting habitat in Samadai Reef (Egypt, Red Sea) protected through tourism management. *JMBA*, doi:10.1017/S0025315408002221

Conclusions

Today, spinner dolphins' use of Samadai as a resting place is stable and regular, as documented by ongoing monitoring activities. Enforcement of the management regulations is constantly assured.

At the same time, tens of thousands of tourists every year enjoy the extraordinary opportunity of watching these animals in their natural habitat.

The successful establishment of the Samadai Reef dolphin protected area combines the conservation of marine biodiversity with local economic benefit.

Management action ensured the continued use of Samadai by the dolphins, safeguarding their existence and option values, while the opportunity cost incurred in limiting visits in number, space and time proved to be quite bearable by the local tourism industry.

At the same time, direct revenues from entry fees (in the order of US\$ 550,000-720,000 per year) significantly contributed to meeting the Red Sea Protectorates' operational costs, financing environmentally friendly boat moorings in the reefs, and allowing the Red Sea Governorate to create about 200 jobs in marine and coastal conservation projects.



Acknowledgments

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