

Study on cold water corals reveals manmade threats

By Andria Kades

COLD water corals in Protaras and Cape Greco are widespread but are all too often tangled in rubbish according to the first survey of its kind held on the island.

The project came to life after “an accidental catch” when fishermen found cold (also known as deep) water corals in their longlines. The find caught the attention of scientists in Cyprus who collaborated with experts from the Spanish Institute of Oceanography to form the CYCLAMEN project.

“Sadly, footprint of man’s activities is tangible in those deep coral communities. The most frequent companion to the corals was rubbish, litter of many kinds and perhaps provenance,” the report said.



Litter disturbing the habitat of the corals

“Corals and other organisms were occasionally tangled on relic fishing gear, plastic bags, car tyres and other unidentified debris.

Fish, crabs, starfish and sand worms could be seen among numerous plastic objects and glass bottles.”

This, Carlos Jimenez, a coral expert from the Cyprus Institute participating in CYCLAMEN said, is the basis to start a campaign on changing and fixing the problem.

Scientists boarded Greek research vessel AEGAEON for three days, working for 24 hours. During the day, a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) was used for immersions and samples were collected, while at night, data was processed and the seafloor was mapped.



Collecting coral samples

They collected 15 hours of video footage and samples of live coral specimens – which thrive at depths between 120metres and 150 – were brought to the surface to be studied in Cyprus and Monaco.

“Cyprus’ waters are already warmer and more saline than the Central and Western Mediterranean and the current increase in temperature will undoubtedly affect corals,” said the report.

“We need to find out in which way the corals will react to the changes in order to assist the authorities in the conservation and management of these unique deep coral habitats,” Jimenez said.

The project commenced in December 2014 and the survey was conducted in the first week of June, in the coastal area of Protaras and Cape Greco funded by the TOTAL foundation.

“This is a pioneer project for Cyprus and, through its associated scientific outreach programme, it aims to disseminate information about these ecosystems, still mostly unknown, to the general public,” the report added.

It is led by the Spanish Institute of Oceanography based in Mallorca, with participants from the Cyprus Institute of Research, Technology and Innovation, NGO Enalia Physis Environmental Research Centre; Aix-Marseille University – Mediterranean Institute for Biodiversity & Ecology in France; The Hellenic Centre for Marine Research in Greece; Centre Scientifique de Monaco in Monaco; the National Oceanography Centre in the United Kingdom and the University of Barcelona in Spain.

Locals and tourists can visit cold water corals collected by the project at the Ocean Aquarium Park, Protaras and visit the [project website](#).

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