

Community Participation in Monitoring for Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada

Participación de la comunidad en el monitoreo de la enfermedad por pérdida de tejido de corales pétreos en San Vicente y las Granadinas y Granada

Participation communautaire à la surveillance de la maladie de la perte de tissus des coraux pierreux à Saint-Vincent-et-les Grenadines et à Grenade

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) has been a prominent issue in the Caribbean since it was first reported occurring outside of Florida and found in Jamaica in 2018. The disease spreads rapidly and affects more than 20 species of corals. While coral diseases are not uncommon on Caribbean coral reefs, SCTLD poses a more significant threat due to the high mortality rates, number and species of corals affected, and its large geographic range. Small island nations, such as St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada, are particularly vulnerable because of their lack of resources to properly mitigate this disease.

During a three-month period between October 2020 to December 2020 Sustainable Grenadines (SusGren) conducted training sessions for coral identification and SCTLD identification. Our training included in classroom sessions and in water sessions. The in water sessions were for the researchers to learn to use the data sheet and to ensure they knew how to properly identify corals and SCTLD.

Sites were chosen in accordance with the highly susceptible sites on the AGRRA dashboard. The permanent monitoring sites were also chosen along with sites rangers and dive operators recommended. Data was collected using roving diver methodology for SCTLD to determine prevalence of the disease. We carried out two to four, fifteen minute dives at each site. All susceptible corals were recorded, other diseases and bleaching were also observed and recorded. In total, 4 in classroom training sessions were completed, 4 in water training sessions were completed, 3 zoom training session completed, 21 individuals were trained, with 34 hours spent training and 31 surveys were done on 6 islands.

We collaborated with dive operators in St. Vincent mainland, Union Island and Grenada, Tobago Cays Marine Park, The Fisheries Division in St. Vincent and Grenada and the Chief Environmental Officer in Mustique. Based on the monitoring in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada we determined that SCTLD is not present. Since December 2020 monitoring has continued in Grenada and there has been some concern for SCTLD. Ongoing monitoring should continue to take place in the event that the disease spreads to these coral reefs. More education, awareness and training for stakeholders is important so that mitigation measures can be taken to properly deal with this disease.

We recommend, if possible formal AGRRA training for Community Researchers. Learning over twenty corals in a short space of time can be challenging. We also recommend that Community Researchers have adequate diving experience as buoyancy was an issue and therefore, made some data illegible. Overall Community Researchers and dive operators were enthusiastic and happy to learn.

KEYWORDS: SCTLD, Grenadines, Grenada, Community, Research