

# THE YEAR THAT WAS 2020

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TMO ANNUAL REPORT





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## List of Acronyms

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
DENR	Department of Environment and Natural Resources
DepEd	Department of Education
IEC	Information, Education, and Communication
PASu	Protected Area Superintendent
PCG	Philippine Coast Guard
PCSD	Palawan Council for Sustainable Development
PN	Philippine Navy
PSFI	Pilipinas Shell Foundation, Inc.
TMO	Tubbataha Management Office
TPAMB	Tubbataha Protected Area Management Board
TRNP	Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park
UNACOM	UNESCO National Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization



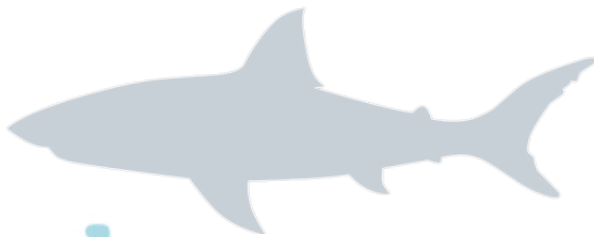


# Introduction

Here we chronicle the highlights in the management of Tubbataha in the year that shocked the world. We submit this annual report to the members of the Tubbataha Protected Area Management Board, our many partners, donors, and supporters whose contributions helped us achieve objectives for 2020.

The year was punctuated by shock and uncertainty. Implementation of plans was postponed, slowed down by the pandemic, the lockdown, and other health protocols. The manner of doing things may have changed with the emergence of the 'new normal' but our bottom line, that of conserving Tubbataha, did not. Doing this in the 'new normal' added a degree of difficulty to our work only because we were unaccustomed to it. But we are getting there...

In this report, we hope you see how your contributions are helping to save Tubbataha. Please know that without your help, this report would only be three pages long.

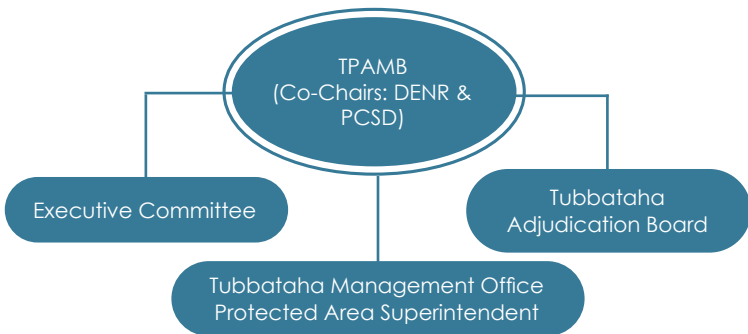


# Overview

Republic Act No. 10067, otherwise known as the Tubbataha Reefs Natural Park (TRNP) Act of 2009, is the main statutory framework for the management of Tubbataha.

It established TRNP as a 97,030-hectare no-take zone in the middle of the Sulu Sea under both the National Integrated Protected Area System Act (RA 7586) and the Strategic Environmental Plan for Palawan Act (RA 7611).

It also created the inter-institutional Tubbataha Protected Area Management Board (TPAMB), which is invested with the sole power to formulate policies for the Park. The Tubbataha Management Office was established under Section 14 of RA 10067 to implement the policies of the TPAMB.



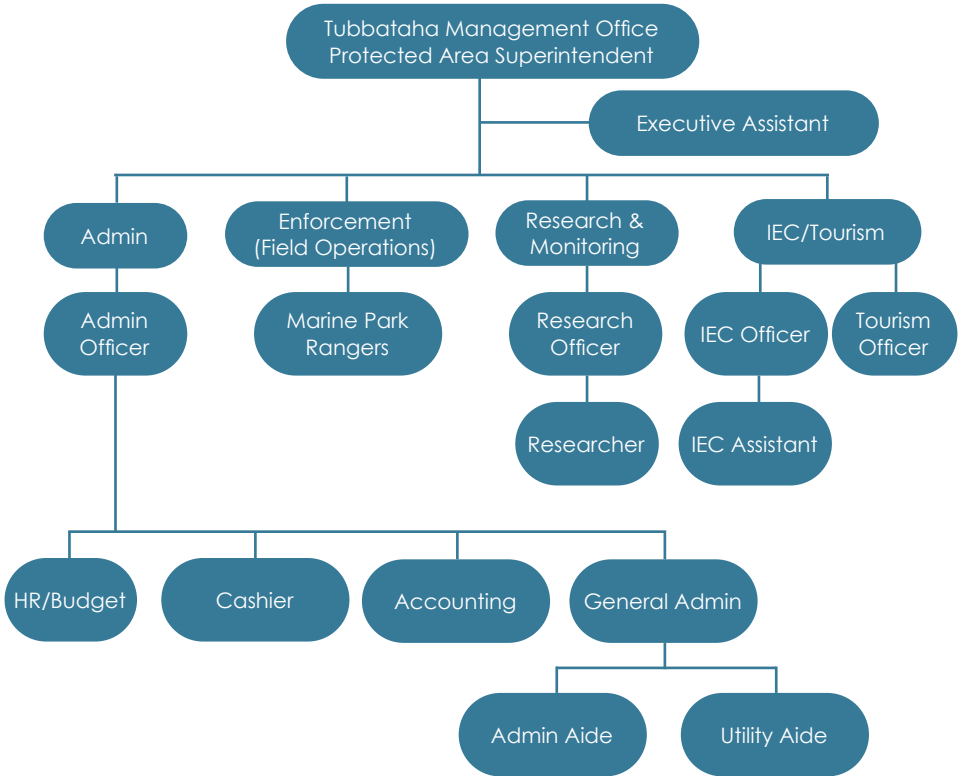
## VISION

A World Heritage Site that is effectively conserved to maintain ecological integrity contributing to the equitable distribution of benefits and sustained socio-economic development of present and future generations.

## MISSION

Conserve the outstanding universal value of Tubbataha through responsible stewardship and genuine partnership

## TMO Organizational Chart



### OBJECTIVES

To protect all life and maintain ecological balance within the Tubbataha Reefs

To provide benefits to diverse communities

To inspire stakeholder representation, stewardship, and support

# TRNP MANAGEMENT PLAN

The TRNP Management Plan is the blueprint for the administration of Tubbataha. It is prepared and implemented by the TMO upon the approval of the TPAMB. Specifically, the Plan:

- Articulates collective aspirations for Tubbataha
- Provides direction in organizing work
- Serves as a reference in allocating resources
- Presents a tool for monitoring progress
- Guides the measurement of outcomes



## CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT

The nexus for organizing and coordinating the work of conserving the Tubbataha Reefs, consists of providing the physical, institutional, and human infrastructure to efficiently manage the Park.

## SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Focused on supporting the Municipality of Cagayancillo in livelihood and environmental protection.

## CONSERVATION AWARENESS

The vehicle through which support, a sense of stewardship, and voluntary compliance is cultivated.

## ECOSYSTEM RESEARCH AND MONITORING

How we generate scientific information for decision making and for measuring biophysical indicators of management effectiveness.





## CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT



We conducted all planned regular and one special TPAMB meeting in 2020. Of the 14 TPAMB resolutions formulated, seven were administrative in nature, e.g., finance, plans, staffing, and seven had to do with Park operations such as enforcement and research.



Our Executive Committee did not fare as well. Only five of the monthly meetings were held as we tried to regroup and recover from the unthinkable state of affairs at the onset of the pandemic. But this did not stop the Committee from formulating nine resolutions, which were mostly administrative in nature.

## ENFORCEMENT



While everything seized around the world, our marine park rangers did not stop performing their duties. They were present in the field to safeguard Tubbataha against illegal fishing. In fact, they exceeded expectations by conducting patrols beyond the number required (160 of 120).

## CAPACITY BUILDING

We attended a few face-to-face meetings and trainings in January and February. Some of them were the:



47th Annual Pacific Seabird  
Group Meeting



Safety of Life at Sea  
(SOLAS) Training



UNACOM Partners' Forum and  
Fellowship" Reimaging Sustainability: Safeguarding Culture,  
Protecting the Environment

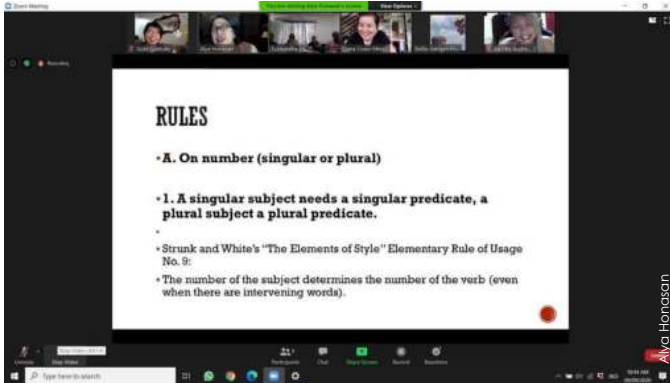


6th Digital Marketing 101  
Seminar for Beginner



Dive Operators' Meeting conducted in  
21 February 2020

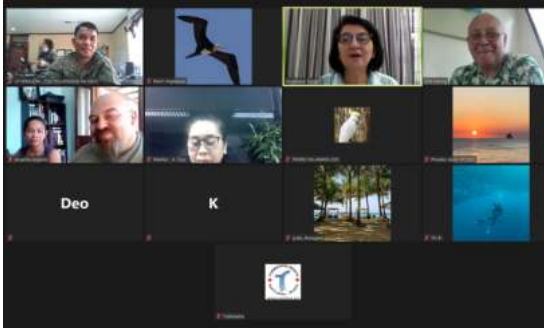
When we came back to work in mid-May after the two-month lockdown, we were welcomed by all manner of online trainings, webinars, meetings and whatnots. Congregations of people had migrated online and so did we. A few of the trainings, webinars, meetings we attended online were:



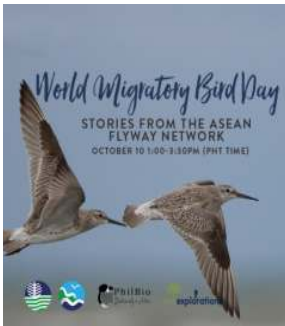
Writing First Aid for TMO staff with Ms. Alya Honasan



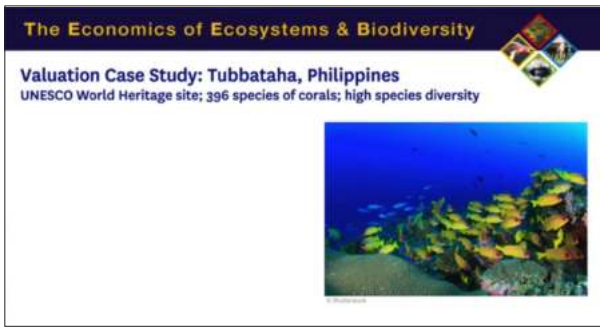
ASEAN Heritage Parks Covid-19 Pandemic: Impacts, Responses, and Recovery



The Management Effectiveness Workshop Evaluation, conducted once in two years, was held in December 2020. Governance, biophysical, and socio-economic indicators were measured by the 16 agencies and organizations in attendance. Results were generally positive. The exercise revealed research gaps that will guide studies in the future.



ASEAN Heritage Parks Covid-19 Pandemic: Impacts, Responses, and Recovery



In the Ecosystems Services Course offered by the University of Geneva through Coursera, the Tubbataha Act (RA 10067) was cited as a good example of how legislation could strengthen protection of a place. It was a proud moment.



We took advantage of the Department of Science and Technology scholarship and attended numerous online courses on Coursera.



We attended the Biodiversity Conservation Society of the Philippines' digital workshop series, Biodiversity Online.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature conducted a global assessment of natural World Heritage. Overall, Tubbataha got the rating Highly Effective, a testament to the vigilance of our marine park rangers.

For more details, visit: <https://worldheritageoutlook.iucn.org/explore-sites/wdpaid/68917>



We were also featured in [dost.gov.ph](http://dost.gov.ph) and [esquiremag.ph](http://esquiremag.ph).



# SEASON IN NUMBERS



**5** Dive boats

**8** Trips



A drastic decline in number of visitors was recorded this year because of the pandemic, from 3,475 visitors in 2019, it dropped to 139.



**139** Visitors



The revenue this year was PhP 740,500.00, 96.05% lower compared to 2019.



## CONSERVATION AWARENESS



Filled with anticipation and excitement, we took to the pier early in March and briefed tourists on dive boats bound for Tubbataha. As we were getting ready to repeat these briefings over a hundred times, we were stopped on our tracks by the surprise appearance of COVID19. We did only five briefings this summer.



NJabez Development Services 'loaned' us billboard spaces by the airport entrance. We have Mr. Job Arcinas and Pilipinas Shell Foundation, Inc. to thank for the opportunity to inspire people to support Tubbataha and marine conservation.

Our conservation awareness strategy hinged heavily on face-to-face activities with children and the youth. Our beloved Youth Ambassador Program, supposedly on its seventh year, and consistently funded by PSFI, had to be shelved. Our school campaigns met the same fate.



We lost the distribution network we prepared for the 2,500 Tubbataha notebooks that the Provincial Government sponsored in 2019. Instead, we coordinated the distribution of 1,000 notebooks to communities involved in the Tulay sa Bagong Normal: Tulong sa mga Bayani project of PSFI and other groups in coordination with DepEd Palawan and Puerto Princesa.

We also sent notebooks for all the elementary pupils and their teachers and the staff of the local government of the Municipality of Cagayancillo.



Tubbataha was featured in the three different national TV networks in 2020. GMA's Born to Be Wild and UNTV's The Dive featured tourism and ecological value. Kuya Kim of ABS CBN's TV Patrol featured our Facebook post on the impacts of marine debris on wildlife.



In November, the Oxford University podcast, Conservation Optimism, featured PASu Angelique Songco in the final episode of its show, Good Natured.

# MOOC conservation

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Global Protected Areas Programme invited us to be part of their 7th Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) focused on Marine Protected Areas (MPA). PASu Angelique Songco was invited to share the Tubbataha story for one of the modules, because, according to the organizers, the Park is a great example of an MPA that works. The course will be launched on the first half of 2021.



In October, Tubbataha was featured in an exhibit in France. Launched by the World Heritage Centre in partnership with Monaco Explorations, the exhibit called "Protecting UNESCO's Marine World Heritage through scientific research", run from October 7 to 30, 2020. A photo of marine park ranger, Segundo 'Seconds' Conales Jr., graced the entrance of the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris where the event was held.

## TOURISM

Ten (10) new moorings were installed in various locations through funds from the DENR. Insufficient moorings was one of the tourism issues in Tubbataha. Our issue now is the lack of users of these moorings.



A team of divers bore holes in hard coral substrate using an underwater hydraulic drill.



Two U-pins crossed with a single pin in the middle and cemented in place comprised the mooring for vessels up to 100 gross tons.

In preparation for the tourist season, we collaborated with Saguda Palawan, Inc., on the development of designs for shirts, hats, and rash guards to encourage visitors to donate. Thousands of these souvenir items are now in storage waiting for the resurgence of tourism in Tubbataha.

## Tubbataha Souvenir Items



**Support the conservation of Tubbataha.  
Donate now!**

## ECOSYSTEM RESEARCH AND MONITORING

Without the support of DENR we would have failed to conduct most of our research work in 2020.

We have five regular monitoring sites spread across the North and South Atolls and the Jessie Beazley Reef. Each site has two stations, in each station two depths, 5 and 10 meters, are monitored. This adds up to 20 specific sections of the reef being monitored in Tubbataha.



### Fish Population Monitoring

The average fish biomass was estimated at 117 grams per square meter ( $\text{g}/\text{m}^2$ ). The biomass is dominated by commercially important species of fish such as unicorn fish, parrotfish, and jacks. Since commercially important fish species are first to disappear from exploited reefs, it may be assumed that no or very little fishing occurs in the Park.



The biomass estimate is classified as 'very high' by Philippine standards. The same classification holds for species richness and fish density. Endangered, vulnerable, and near threatened species such as Napoleon wrasse, bumphead parrotfish, white, grey reef and tiger sharks, and whale sharks were also encountered.



## Reef Benthos Monitoring

But not all is well with our corals. An outbreak of unwanted sponges and algae was observed in two sites, resulting in a decline in hard coral cover. They are 'unwanted' because they inhibit the growth of hard corals due to competition for space. The hard coral cover was classified under Category B (33.3%), the highest in the Philippines being Category A (>44%).





## Coral Bleaching Survey

Coral bleaching affected 3-19% of hard coral cover. Branching corals were mostly affected, with shallow waters having slightly more bleaching than deeper waters.



## Water Quality Monitoring

The mean values show that Tubbataha waters is within the highest level of water quality for marine areas. Slightly elevated results were observed for four of the 10 parameters being measured. This includes fecal coliform, which may have been caused by seabird guano in the waters around the islets.



## Seabird Survey

A total of 32,633 adult seabirds from seven breeding species were observed this year. This is 18% higher than the 2019 count. Of the seven seabird species in Tubbataha, the Great Crested Tern made up the majority recorded this year.



## Seabird Nesting Structures

We are still challenged by the decrease in the population of the Black Noddy, which is now less than half of its 2015 population at 1,325 pairs. The loss of habitat is one of the major causes of the decline. In response, we manufactured nesting structures for the Black Noddy and provided them with nesting materials.



### Masked Booby Update

This Masked Booby couple make a handsome pair. They are the only pair on record in the Philippines today. The coupling of this couple resulted in four eggs altogether. Only one survived up to the juvenile stage.



### Beach Reforestation

In June 2020, we planted a total of 430 saplings of trees formerly found in Tubbataha to restore the beach forest of Bird and South Islet.

Some of the planned and funded studies could not be carried out due to the pandemic. These include the carrying capacity study funded through KfW Stiftung, the surveys of marine turtles, shark, and rays, and the fish species inventory.



Towards the end of the year, we produced the 178-page Ecosystem Research and Monitoring Report. It contains the details of the information we just gave you above and then some. The report is available at our website, [www.tubbatahareefs.org](http://www.tubbatahareefs.org).

## SUSTAINABLE RESOURCE MANAGEMENT



In 2019, ten Cagayancillo Bantay Dagat personnel were trained in marine protected area management, enforcement procedures, environmental laws, etc. From this manpower pool, two are assigned to Tubbataha on two-month rotations to complement the PN, PCG, and TMO rangers who keep watch over the Reefs all year long.



The learnings and experience from Tubbataha are transferred and used in the management of local reserves in Cagayancillo.

Ten percent of the tourism revenues this year was allocated for livelihood projects in the municipality.

# Others



Phase I of the construction of the new ranger station was completed by the Provincial Government of Palawan. Installing the foundation of the structures was a challenging undertaking that involved dozens of construction personnel who spent months working on the project.

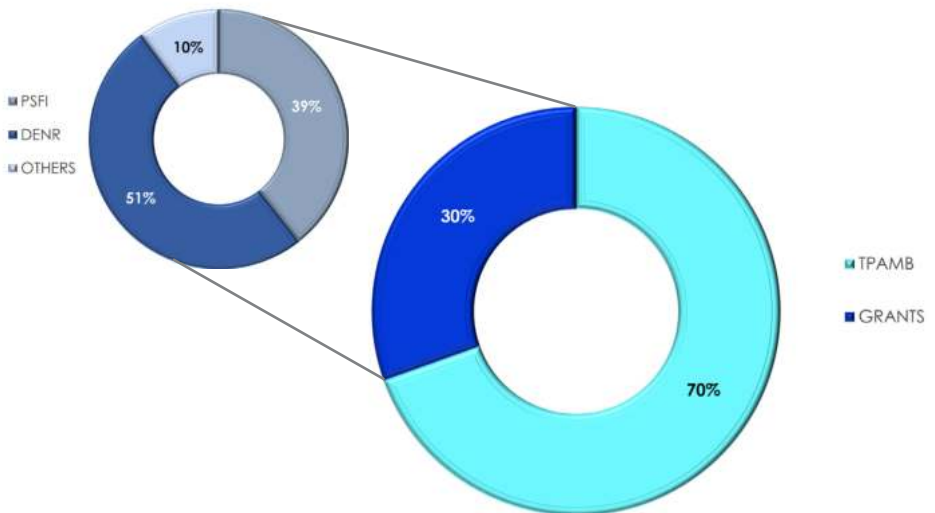
# Financials

## TRNP Trust Fund

Created under Section 17 of RA 10067, the TRNP Trust Fund comprise of conservation fees paid by tourists. The Fund is used to finance the management of Tubbataha. Each year's collections are used the following year, i.e., 2019 collections were spent in 2020. All unexpended funds are retained in the Trust Fund.

We spent a total of PhP 16.86M in 2020. Seventy percent (70%) of the budget came from the TRNP Trust Fund and 30% from grants.

## Sources of Funds

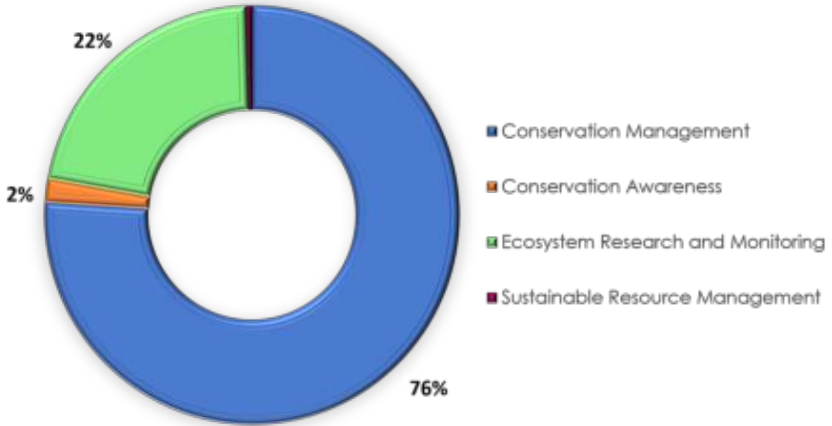


The bulk of the expenditure (76%) went to the Conservation Management Program, which included field activities, ranger supplies, and equipment, tourism management, capacity building, and administration.



To monitor the condition of the reefs and of the various organisms, twenty-two percent (22%) of the budget was spent. Information and education activities used only 2% of the financial pie, mostly for the development and production of information materials.

## Percentage of Expenditure/Program



## Grants

The DENR provided the most grants to TMO this year, funding the bulk of the cost of research work in the Park. PSFI provided counterpart funding for research, supported enforcement and education activities, and provided supplies and equipment for field and office work.



Pilipinas Shell  
Foundation, Inc.

# Issues



The excessive growth of unwanted sponges and algae in some sites is a cause for concern. We are yet to find out if similar growths are taking place in parts of the reef that we do not monitor regularly.



Coral bleaching plagued our reefs last year. After our coral study in 2021, we will find out the extent of damage.



Our current ranger station is in a sad state of disrepair, as we reported in 2019. In December, strong waves battered the floor, carving a gaping hole in our kitchen. Our rangers have since repaired the damage but the hole showed how much our 21-year-old station is dying for a replacement.

For the first time in two decades, tourism in Tubbataha closed and with it the major income stream needed for conservation. In our 2018 annual report we wrote:

'We now have the beginnings of a contingency fund, set aside in case unforeseen adverse developments affect the number of visitors and revenues in the future.'

Little did we know that the 'unforeseen adverse developments' would come so soon and so unexpectedly - a veritable deer caught-in-the-headlights moment.

When we finally came to and the national lockdown was lifted, the diving season was half gone, there were zero tourists in the Park, and we generated the lowest revenue 'in captivity'.

# Prospects for 2021



Generating better understanding about the extent and causes of the proliferation of unwanted sponges and algae in some of our permanent research sites will entail much effort, time, and funds.

Nevertheless, with the support of scientists and funding from other agencies, we will attempt just that in 2021.



We look forward to the completion of Phase II and the rise of the new ranger station. The Provincial Government is mobilizing resources to fund the rest of the work.



Environmental education has a new venue! We are looking for ways to engage students and the youth in marine conservation through various media by riding on the new 'mainstream'. Online and distance education have their challenges and we plan to master them in 2021 .



We look forward to the resurgence of the Masked Booby population in Bird Islet, one bird at a time. By providing a safe habitat for these birds, the highest known population in Bird Islet of 150 individuals may yet become a reality.

# TUBBATAHA MANAGEMENT OFFICE PERSONNEL CY 2020

Angelique M. Songco	Protected Area Superintendent
Anthea Kristha C. Valenzuela	Executive Assistant
Segundo F. Conales Jr.	Marine Park Ranger/Researcher
Jeffrey M. David	Marine Park Ranger/Researcher
Noel A. Bundal	Marine Park Ranger
Cresencio P. Caranay Jr.	Marine Park Ranger
Mary Grace D. Barber	Administrative Officer V
Elizabeth D. Ordas	Administrative Officer II (Cashier)
Lyka Mae P. Irang	Administrative Officer II (Finance)
Anatalia M. Liu	Administrative Officer II (HR/Budget)
Edora Mae U. Precinillo	Administrative Assistant V (Bookkeeper)
Rose Lyn B. Magbanua	Administrative Assistant IV (Procurement)
Charmaine R. Aguilar	Administrative Aide
Maria Retchie P. Alaba	Research Officer
Rowell C. Alarcon	Researcher
Gerlie T. Gedoria	Researcher
Emmalyn N. Tura	Tourism Officer
Val Angeline U. Pedro	IEC Officer
Karl Joriel A. Amurao	IEC Assistant



Text: Angeliave M. Songco  
Layout: Karl Joriel A. Amurao



TUBBATAHA MANAGEMENT OFFICE  
Manalo Extension Barangay Milagrosa  
Puerto Princesa City 5300 Palawan  
(048) 716 - 1631

E-mail: [tmo@tubbatahareefs.org](mailto:tmo@tubbatahareefs.org)

[www.tubbatahareefs.org](http://www.tubbatahareefs.org)

FB: @OfficialTubbataha

IG: @tubbatahareefs