



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE REEF 2008
Top UK Marine Conservation Groups Join Forces for
Coral Reef Campaign

International Year of the Reef is a worldwide campaign to raise awareness about the importance of coral reefs and the threats they face. Throughout 2008 three UK groups, Coral Cay Conservation, Blue Ventures and Project AWARE Foundation, will announce public events and activities to promote reef conservation and motivate people to take action to protect them.

Three of the UK's most respected marine conservation groups – Coral Cay Conservation, Blue Ventures and Project AWARE Foundation – announced today they have joined forces to promote coral reef conservation during the International Year of the Reef 2008.

International Year of the Reef is a worldwide campaign to raise awareness about the importance of coral reefs and the threats they face. Throughout 2008 the three UK groups will announce public events and activities to promote reef conservation and motivate people to take action to protect them.

It has been 10 years since governments and conservation organizations around the world declared the first International Year of the Reef in 1997. During that first campaign, hundreds of groundbreaking studies were conducted to determine the status of coral reefs and numerous international policies were enacted to protect these vital resources.

"While much was accomplished in 1997, the threats to coral reefs around the world have grown exponentially over the past ten years," said Richard Nimmo, Managing Director of Blue Ventures. "Climate change, pollution and destructive fishing practices are threatening to irrevocably destroy these vital resources that are essential to life on earth. We must act now before it is too late."

Coral reefs have been called the "rainforests of the sea" because of the vast diversity of life they support. Reefs cover less than one percent of the Earth's surface, yet they are home to 25 percent of all marine fish species. But more than half of the world's coral reefs are at risk from human activities. At the present rate of destruction, 70 percent of the world's reefs will be destroyed by the year 2050.

Coral Cay Conservation is the principal UK coordinator (representing 'Reef Conservation UK') for International Year of the Reef activities. Peter Raines MBE, Founder of Coral Cay Conservation, said: "Coral reefs are a vital life-support system for hundreds of millions of people. If they vanish at the rates predicted, the economic and social consequences will be catastrophic. But there is good news out there, with coastal communities working in effective partnerships with UK volunteer organisations such as Blue Ventures and Coral Cay Conservation to protect, rehabilitate and sustainably use coral reef resources." Enlisting the help of volunteer divers and snorkelers around the world, Project AWARE recently launched CoralWatch to gather information on how climate change is "bleaching" and killing coral reefs. More than 400 CoralWatch coordinators have signed up to collect data and monitor reef health.

“Volunteer divers and snorkelers around the world are making their underwater experience count for coral reef conservation by getting involved in activities such as CoralWatch,” said Suzanne Pleydell, Director of Project AWARE Foundation International. “There are many questions that need to be answered regarding patterns of bleaching and recovery as well as the severity and duration of bleaching events. The data collected by CoralWatch volunteers is critical to help answer these questions and find solutions to protect these incredible habitats.”

Coral Cay Conservation, Blue Ventures and Project AWARE Foundation will work with like-minded businesses, government leaders, non-profits and individuals to raise awareness for the need of reef conservation and push for policies and programmes that will ensure these precious resources remain healthy and productive for generations to come. The three organisations have won international recognition over the years from such bodies as the United Nations, the World Conservation Union and governments worldwide for their work to protect coral reefs in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

For further information, high-resolution images or interviews please contact:

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Notes to editors:



Coral Cay Conservation (CCC): www.coralcay.org is a not-for-profit organisation at the cutting edge of ecotourism. Established in 1986, CCC’s mission is to protect coral reefs and tropical forests by working closely with the local communities who depend upon them for food and livelihoods. At the invitation of governments and NGO’s in host countries, CCC works to protect some of the worlds most remote and endangered coral reefs. CCC trains volunteers and empowers local people with the practical knowledge needed to monitor and protect the reefs.



Project AWARE: www.projectaware.org is the dive industry’s leading non-profit organisation conserving underwater environments through education, advocacy and action. Project AWARE Foundation offices located in Australia, the United States, Japan, the United Kingdom and Switzerland combine efforts to conserve aquatic resources in 180 countries. Through its Grant Programme, Project AWARE has distributed over \$2 million to worthwhile aquatic projects including public education, grass roots conservation, scientific research, public awareness initiatives and volunteer-supported community activism.



Blue Ventures: blueventures.org is an award-winning not-for-profit dedicated to working with local communities to conserve threatened marine habitats and resources for the betterment of people and nature. Funded almost entirely through eco-tourism revenue, Blue Ventures brings paying volunteers to project sites and trains them in scientific research, community outreach and on-the-ground conservation.

International Year of the Reef: www.iyor.org

Healthy coral reefs provide:

- Habitat: Home to over 1 million diverse aquatic species, including thousands of fish species
- Income: Billions of dollars and millions of jobs in over 100 countries around the world
- Food: For people living near coral reefs, especially on small islands
- Protection: A natural barrier protecting coastal cities, communities and beaches
- Medicine: The potential for treatments for many of the world's most prevalent and dangerous illnesses and diseases.



Several attempts have been made to estimate the value of coral reefs in terms of dollars. Benefits from coral reefs can be categorized into 2 types: "direct use values" (fisheries and tourism industry), and "indirect use values" (benefit derived from coastline protection). According to a United Nations estimate, the total economic value of coral reefs range from US\$ 100,000 to 600,000 per square kilometre per year.

Reef Conservation UK: www.rcuk.org.uk

Reef Conservation UK (RCUK) was formed to promote multidisciplinary conservation, public awareness and education about coral reefs, as well as to ensure that all reef related activities are conducted in a responsible manner.