

## Conservation in ACTION

# Young environmental leaders in the Comoros

by Claire Forbes and Daniella Blake

Exploring coral reefs, snorkelling over seagrass beds, an introduction to the intricacies of marine ecosystems and dressing up as dugongs and turtles were some of the activities that the students on the Comoros Islands' first ever environmental camp participated in. The camp was implemented by Community Centred Conservation (C3), a British organization that has been working in collaboration with local partners in the Comoros since 2005.

C3 is based on Grande Comore from where it conducts scientific research, awareness-raising, and capacity-building projects with local associations and students on all three islands of the Comoros: Grande Comore, Mohéli and Anjouan. C3 held an adventure camp between the 20th and 25th August in Mitsamiouli, in the far north of Grande Comore, designed to train and educate secondary school students to become young environmental leaders.

The adventure camp participants included five students selected through an essay competition: Ikbal Anisse, Ben Kassim, Ansaou Abdou (Alexi), Mohamed Ahmed and Oubeid Soufouane. Al' yas'aa Ben Ahmed (Paradise) and Claire Forbes of

*"I saw lots of things that I had never even imagined, and learned many things that I never knew."*

C3 conducted the training, ably assisted by the Junior Ecoguards: Dega Hamada and Kadria Mhoma (the Junior Ecoguards are a group of young people from the village of Niomachoua on Mohéli, who have worked with C3 since 2006 and were recipients of the Volvo-UNEP Adventure Award 2008).

Over five days the students were introduced to ecological concepts, focussing on the interdependence of natural systems. Workshops covered mangrove, seagrass and coral reef habitats; pollution issues; endangered species and biodiversity.

"I saw lots of things that I had never even imagined, and learned many things that I never knew," said Kadria.

The students were able to link what they learned in class to the surrounding environment; for most of them it was the first time they had been given a chance to snorkel and see underwater.

"I was really impressed to have been shown a picture of a lionfish in a book, and then,



Kadria and Alexi give a presentation about endangered sea turtles of the Comoros.

when I was snorkelling I actually saw one!" Oubeid exclaimed.

Leadership skills were encouraged through small group presentations on different endangered species of the Comoros. The group concluded the camp with a final presentation on an environmental topic of choice. They wrote a range of poems, songs and sketches, which displayed just how much they had learnt.

It is hoped that the participants of the camp will use their new-found knowledge of the environment to raise awareness within their communities. The camp was very much appreciated by the participants who have since formed their own small association, Association pour le Maintien Environnemental (AME), that will continue to work with C3 on future projects.

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Claire Forbes and Daniella Blake,  
C3-Comores, BP8310, Moroni,  
Grande Comore, Union of the  
Comoros, info@c-3.org.uk;  
www.c-3.org.uk.



The Adventure Camp participants proudly display their certificates.