

Theme: Best Practice on Sustainable Tourism
(Tourism and Biodiversity)

Title: Sustainable use of Samadi Dolphins, South Marsa Alam, Red Sea, Egypt

BY



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Within the framework of the Southern Red Sea Ecotourism Initiative launched in 2003 by the Ministry of Tourism, Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs Agency and the Governorate of the Red Sea a management plan was established to conserve marine mammals and their sustainable use in the Red Sea. Partners included governmental agencies, scientists, the local community, private sector and NGOs.

A few years ago, divers discovered a unique coral reef, south of Marsa Alam town, known to local fishermen as Samadi Reef (28.98 11°N, 34.99718 E), where young and adult Spinner Dolphins *Stenella longirostris* regularly congregate in large numbers (~80). The place became known as “Samadi Dolphin House”. Since its discovery Samadai became a magnet to tourists, and it was visited by increasingly large numbers of snorkelers and divers. In response to this increased pressure, arrangements were made by the Nature Conservation Sector (NCS) and a local diving center to install moorings at the site, and to cap the maximum number of boats and visitors. The diving centre was given the authority for managing the site.

In August 2003, it was found that the site was vastly over used with up to 40 boats and 800 tourists visiting daily. Dolphins were chased, fed strange items, touched and disturbed by motor boats. It was also found that the number of dolphins has decreased remarkably to less than 40, and disappeared completely from the area when one of the boats was set on fire.

A decree was issued by the Governor of the Red Sea, on the advice of NCS, to stop all activities at Samadi till a management plan was developed and set in motion. Consequently, a scientific team surveyed the site, interviewed all stakeholders and held two workshops on modalities of managing the site, based on its carrying capacity and applying the precautionary and participatory approaches. The management plan focused on: establishing a zoning plan for the area, creating a restricted zone; defined times of use for visitors; developed best practices guidelines; implemented a monitoring programme; and initiated a service fee system. In conjunction with this it strengthened the law enforcement process; and implemented a public awareness programme. The management plan was discussed with concerned stakeholders, approved, and implemented in January 2004.

Sustainability of this best practice was apparent after one year. The overall average of 32 dolphins / day before the plan implementation increased to 78 dolphins / day after implementation. The monitoring programme also indicated an increase in the growth of coral reefs in the site, as well as improved our knowledge of Spinner Dolphin behavior (through photo identification). The number of visitors was within the carrying capacity of the site (200 individuals / day). Additionally the revenues generated from the service fee system exceeded US \$ 500,000 in one year. The income is shared between NCS, the Red Sea Governorate and local NGO's. These proceedings were used to maintain the site and improve its conservation. In response, the local tourism business has improved greatly as trip values increased and the quality of tourists and tourism experience improved through raising public awareness.

Lessons learned include: An area, even if small, when managed wisely it can generate sustainable high revenue. The precautionary and participatory approaches are important for adaptive management. Partnerships are a key for sustainable management. Local community support and involvement benefits every one. Expert opinion is invaluable. Economic benefits to the local community are a must. Selecting the appropriate staff is crucial. Support of the political leadership is important. Public awareness and marketing enhance tourism and conservation potential.

The Samadai Dolphin House case has proven to be an ideal model applying ecotourism policy and strategy to conserve biodiversity and to reach sustainable finance for biodiversity conservation through revenue generation by using economic instruments (service fee). It demonstrates that protection of nature and development can co-exist, based on precautionary and participatory approaches, and provides a strong case for the conservation of marine biodiversity in Egypt and elsewhere in the Red Sea.