

## Class of '78 Foundation—Report

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I spent the summer volunteering as a Divemaster for *Operation Wallacea* (Opwall), a British N.G.O. that works in conjunction with *Wallacea Trust* and *The Indonesian Institute of Sciences*. I worked and lived on the small island of Hoga in the *Wakatobi Marine Reserve* just off the coast of Sulawesi. The island itself is about seven or eight square kilometres and home to the Hoga Marine Research Station.

The coral reefs in the Wakatobi are the most biodiverse in the world. I've been diving all over the globe since I was twelve, and I've never seen coral that beautiful! Sometimes there would more than one hundred percent coral cover on the reefs—that means that not only are the rocks completely covered in coral, but there are different species of coral growing on top of other bits of coral. Not surprisingly most of the conservation research happening at the station was related to coral, and how to manage the park fisheries, so that fish can continue to survive on the reefs.

As a Divemaster I was essentially one of the safety guys that allowed all the research to take place. Every single research boat that went out had to be led by a Divemaster just in case anything went wrong. It was pretty challenging work because often the researchers were pretty inexperienced divers, so they needed pretty close supervision. With new divers, being a DM can be a little like being a hyperactive lifeguard because you're constantly scanning for little problems that could lead to serious situations underwater. Sometimes I would just be leading some less experienced divers on a coral reef ecology dive with one of the science staff; other times I would buddy one of the researchers and help count fish or lay transects (underwater tape measures at a constant depth that you use for monitoring different aspects of reef health). I spent a week on Opwall's wooden cetacean research vessel, the *Bintang Sedang* running marine mammal transects and doing *ReefCheck* dives.

My project was absolutely spectacular! There aren't any other words to describe it. I really felt like my presence was allowing some very important conservation to take place that was going to directly affect the lives of the people living in the park. At the same time, I also become a much better, more competent Divemaster. I was also able to make friends with lots of the locals and learn how to speak some Indonesian. Throughout all this I came to understand tropical reef ecology and field biology in ways that I previously hadn't.

Moreover, personally this project also allowed me to realize that this kind of work is what I want to spend my life doing. To come to that realization is pretty incredible and allowed me to galvanize a sense of academic direction that I didn't have leading into the project. To this end, I'm going to change my studies a little so that I will be able to pursue the kind of scientific conservation biology that I was a part of this summer.

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I'm refreshed, grounded and completely ready to return to school. This has been one of the greatest and most rewarding summers of my life.

Please allow me to extend my sincerest thanks to the class of 1978 Foundation for making it possible.

Nicholas Macfarlane '08