Health Status of Coral Reefs in Chabahar Bay, Iran

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Abstract—Coral bleaching is rapidly developing as a major problem for the health of coral reefs worldwide. This study examined the effect of some ecological factors on coral reefs in Chabahar Bay. We measured the coral cover and the linear extension rates at 3 sites in 6 months before and after monsoon. In order to estimate the loss and damage received by the coral colonies in the area, different methods were applied such as the Direct Observation method (via scuba-diving operation), Line Transect method, and the new method of Coral Watch. The results of the studies revealed the fact of a decrease in water transparency, as well as accumulation of a great deal of sediments in the sea bed. A great deal of deposits silted over the area, with a thickness up to 5 cm from the joining parts to the sea bed and have turned into white color. There were no significant differences among different geographical areas within the reef tract (Upper, Middle and Lower). The studies made through the Line Transect and Coral Watch are also proving the existence of the pressure and appearing the unwanted agents in the area, which prevents the growth and developing the coral reefs.

Index Terms—Chabahar Golf, coral reefs, coral bleaching, coral watch, line transect, zooxanthellae.

I. INTRODUCTION

The ecology of coral reef systems and changes in the community structure with respect to stress factors in the environment is one of the fundamental problems in environmental analyses [1].

Coral reefs are unique ecosystems in that they harbour an exceptional diversity of motile species [2]. Many of these species have a close association with the coral communities which form the reef framework and contribute to its complex physical structure [3]. A considerable number of studies have investigated the link between coral bleaching events and environmental factors. Scleractinian and Octocorals form endosymbiosis with single-celled dinoflagellate algae in the genus symbiodinium (commonly referred to as Zooxanthellae) [4].

This association is obligate in most coral species, with the coral host deriving a large proportion of its energy from the algal endosymbionts [5], although nutritional dependence on Zooxanthellae is generally lower in octocorals [6].

The Zooxanthellae also play a vital role in light-enhanced calcification of Scleractinian corals [7]. In healthy corals, Zooxanthellae occur at extremely high densities of ≥10 cells cm of coral surface [8]. During bleaching events, the symbiosis breaks down and Zooxanthellae are lost from coral tissues [9]. Consequently, the coral staves unless Zooxanthellae densities are covered rapidly and / or the coral has the ability to meet its energy demands through heterotrophy [10]. Siltation occurs not only due to disturbance of the benthic substratum by anthropogenic activities such as the operation of fishing vessels but also due to natural causes such as monsoon winds [11]. The Chabahar Bay along the southeast coast of Iran is influenced by both southwest and northwest monsoons. Apart from the monsoon effect causing siltation, mechanical damage to corals is also done by cyclones at times in this region [12]. Corals are limited by physical factors in the environment, but often exist in areas where conditions are close to the limit. The reef is a sensitive indicator of environmental stress because of its response to the stress [13].

II. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Three coral reef stations have been established. The Chabahar Bay reefs were monitored as three Zones, Shahid Beheshti jetty, Shahid Kalantari jetty and Tis jetty (Fig. 1). These areas are located in 25° degree of northern Latitude and 17, 18, 30 degree of eastern Latitude. Study areas were investigated about one-fifth of the Chabahar Bay. Sites were studied six months (3 months before monsoon and 3 months after monsoon). Sites were investigated either by Direct Observation method (via Scuba-diving operation) and the new method of Coral Watch. Water depths in all sites were between 3 and 7 m. Analyses of data used the software SPSS and Excell.

![Fig. 1. Map showed the study area at Chabahar Bay](image-url)
In the study, through diving operation, the above area was examined once a week, and all the changes have been indicated.

Moreover, the coral colonies have been exercised from the matter of health condition by means of Coral Watch method. In this method, which is widespread during the recent years, and is going to be recognized as the simplest, most accurate and cheapest method of estimation, a colorful table consisting variable colors with different levels of measurements is used. The colonies to be studied are chosen in a completely random way. In order to find out the congestion level of the symbiotic unicellular algae living with corals, the brightest part of a coral bush is firstly selected, and then it is compared to the color ranked chart. Then the code of the relevant color matching the selected part of the coral is register (Fig. 2-Fig. 4). The same procedure will also be applied for the darkest part of the coral bush, and the relevant code would be recorded as well.

In this paper it is focused on the asymmetrical pattern of monsoon forced, surface gravity waves that impinge on reefs facing the Oman Sea and the Chabahar Bay. Metrological data relevant to monsoon forcing (i.e. air temperature, rainfall, hours of bright sunshine, day length and wind velocity and direction) were obtained for the Chabahar Bay. These data are available in hard copy only, and are currently being digitized. In s transparency, Secchi disc was used. The water temperature will also be ordered to determine if water recorded a digital thermometer taken to the water on the top of the corals.

III. RESULTS

The upwelling that occurs during the southwest monsoons provides a thermal refuge for marine life in Chabahar Bay during summer months when other late May and one in October, rarely do these maxima exceed 30°C. Temperatures during the upwelling season can fall to 18°C, but generally average 20°C. In contrast, non-upwelling area in the region have a single annual temperature maximum in June, July and August of 32-33°C. The cool water brought to the surface by the upwelling also contain high level of nutrients and also contain very low levels of dissolved oxygen. The high nutrient conditions stimulate rapid growth of phytoplankton and seaweeds that reduces the amount of light reaching the corals and increases rates of bio-erosion, whereas the periodic anoxia. On the southern coast of the Gulf of Oman, upwelled water remains below a strong thermocline that in turn is pumped up and down by long-shore winds. In shallow water, this rapid pumping of the thermocline induces rapid temperature fluctuations of up to 8°C in less than 2 hours. Corals appear unaffected by this rapid fluctuation and its cooling effect probably serves to reduce the thermal stress, which otherwise could cause bleaching.
Fig. 7. Average Annual transparency before Monsoon

Fig. 8. Average Annual transparency in Monsoon

Fig. 9. Coral colours Score station 1 before Monsoon

Fig. 10. Coral colours Score station 2 before Monsoon

Fig. 11. Coral colours Score station 3 before Monsoon

Fig. 12. Coral colours Score station 1 in Monsoon

Fig. 13. Coral colours Score station 2 in Monsoon

Fig. 14. Coral colours Score station 3 in Monsoon

Fig. 15. Percentage of Bleaching coral reefs in station 1 before Monsoon

Fig. 16. Percentage of Bleaching coral reefs in station 2 before Monsoon

Fig. 17. Percentage of Bleaching coral reefs in station 3 before Monsoon

Fig. 18. Percentage of Bleaching coral reefs in station 1 in Monsoon
IV. CONCLUSION

From the studies result, the major abiotic fauna present on these areas was covered 39% of this life form. Coral present on these areas was hard coral 26.6% compared to soft coral 10%, 5.5% of the areas covered by Dead Coral, 13.5% of the areas covered by algae, 1.3% of the areas covered by other fauna. Much of the Iranian coast in Gulf of Oman is sedimentary and expose, therefore unsuitable for coral growth. Sediment and pollutant from land and coastal engineering activities resulting in water environment quality deterioration and coral reef damage in this areas [14]. More and more sediments and pollutants come from port construction and breakwater barrier in Chabahar bay. The level of sedimentation has vigorously significant different between 2009 and the year before it. On 2002 a secondary breakwater was established between the Beheshti jetty and the area of growing coral reefs. During the year 2004, the coral reefs in that area faced quite a serious problem due to dredging operation took place in the area, and also the existence of a new breakwater. Concurrent with part construction In 2009 a relocation project has been started with a non-professional team that results research team mistakes in coral relocation such as mistake in eletion of site selection, mistake in bedding and fixing of coral bushes on their bed especially in Lipar area, so it has been resulted to damage coral reef in this area. Also over fishing and using of destructive fishing is caused the15% of Tis area covered by dead coral [15]. Clarifying factors including decline and damage of coral reef is the basis for maintaining ecosystem health, but continues to the subject of much debate and speculation. Poor awareness of the problem and insufficient political will be a casual agent behind damage to coral reef and a threat to their future survival [16], 17]. Strengthening integrated management is the only way to restore and improve Chabahar bay coral reef ecosystem. This area has special protection value for high biodiversity in the past as well as at present, and should be given more attention of management than before. If coral reefs are lost, many coastal population will lose their primary source of food, jobs, cultural heritage and long term prosperity. To conserve these natural treasures, we must reduce human impacts on coral reef by immediately controlling pollution reducing over fishing and increasing protection and sustainable use of our valuable coral reef resources [18].

REFERENCES


Akrar Tehranifard was born in Tehran on 9th Jan,1964. she joined the Iaul faculty in 1992 after nearly ten years on the graduate faculty at Tehran university. she received her B. Sci in Zoology from Tehran University from 1979 through 1986, she received her M. Sci. Marine biology at Tarbiat Modares University, Tehran, Iran from 2001 through 2006 then she received her Ph.D in Marine biology from Islamic Azad University from 2001 through 2006. She has served on the Microbiology department for over thirteen years and currently teaches students cell biology. she has served in many administrative positions. Head of department of marine Biology from May 2006 to 2008. Assistant of Science college Islamic Azad university of Lahijan from May 2008 to present. Dr. Tehranifard Professional includes membership of Iranian Journal of Biology (JIB) Scientific Research, Member:2006 to present and European Aquaculture Society (EAS), Member:2006 to present.