



National and international conferences are great resources for clubs and club members alike. It's in everyone's best interest to send people to conferences to liaison and gather information on new techniques.

REEF CLUBS – GOING BEYOND THE FRAG SWAP

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In the ongoing discussions about the challenges that face the saltwater hobby, the saltwater industry, and wild reefs themselves, the voices of reef clubs seem oddly absent. The trade that supplies our animals is under scrutiny (both justified and not), and ocean environments and the animals in them are under real pressure from human activity and environmental changes. However, I've noticed over the last decade that some reef clubs seem to have become more concerned with group buys, raffles, and securing vendors for events and less concerned with education and public outreach. Perhaps it's time for reef clubs to harness their latent power and look beyond the next frag swap. Think of the good work clubs could do for the whole hobby community and the wider world as well.

Reef clubs could be a huge source for vision and change in our hobby. They are widely distributed, technically savvy, well informed, full of passionate members, and poised to practically organize and utilize those members' various skills. And not only can clubs generate funds, but they are often sitting on a surplus of funds that is being saved for something yet to be determined. Furthermore, many reef clubs are 501(c) tax-exempt organizations, and reaching out to the wider world would seem to be a responsibility of holding such a designation.

Below are 10 suggestions for reef clubs to consider if they want to make the reefing world, and therefore the world at large, a better and more responsible place. These are only suggestions; your reef club can and should come up with its own ideas as well.

PROMOTE BEST PRACTICES

One of the benefits of joining a reef club is having access to the practical experience of other members. Most clubs have online forums where people new to reef keeping can ask questions. While this is great, clubs could do far more to promote best practices and responsible saltwater aquarium keeping. For example, a few pages on the club's website that discuss what the club generally feels are the best methodologies for reef keeping would provide an easily accessible resource for beginners in the hobby.

With the impending release of the *Finding Nemo* sequel, clubs could work with local media to inform the public about responsible reef keeping. Clubs could co-host movie nights with ocean-themed films at local libraries, schools, public aquariums, or theaters and use the opportunity to provide educational materials about reef keeping and the club.

LFS – PROMOTE THE GOOD, HELP THOSE IN NEED

Clubs have a vested interest in keeping good fish stores in business, and the best way to do that is to encourage members to shop at those stores. Once a quarter or once a year, clubs could host a shopping and social LFS crawl where members carpool or pile into a bus for a tour of the great stores within driving distance. This is an opportunity for clubs to educate members on why low price isn't the best criteria on which to choose an animal and why healthy livestock is worth the extra money. This also demonstrates the club's support for local businesses which are an integral part of their reefing community. Some club events could be held at stores, and the club could offer to present reef keeping workshops and seminars at the store, open to the public. This is a win-win as the store benefits from the additional business and the club gets to promote itself and its vision of responsible reef keeping.

Everyone knows there are good fish stores and stores that need help to reach their full potential. A reef club can let members know not only which are good, but why they are good. Clubs could even make the effort to help the stores in need of improvement - anything from constructive advice to offering to build and donate quarantine systems to the shop. Of course, not all shops will accept such help, but the effort really counts and makes club members aware of the issues at the local fish store level.



FUND AND PRODUCE A STUDY

There are many methodologies in reef keeping that haven't been tested directly. For instance, there seem to be no simple side-by-side studies of solid carbon dosing, no data on the accuracy of different heaters, and no efficacy ratings for different additives. It would be very easy for clubs to conduct such studies, and the results would benefit the hobby as a whole. This information would help reef keepers make informed decisions about which products to purchase and which methodologies to employ. All that is needed are two similar aquarium setups, one running with the item to be tested and one without – let them run for a few months while testing water parameters and write up the results for all to see. If the items needed for the study aren't already lying around in club members' garages, the club could easily purchase the equipment and reuse it over and over again to do different tests.

Running a simple study can be fun, social, educational, and a really helpful way to add evidence to support or reject practices and beliefs in vogue today throughout the hobby. Such studies may not be scientifically rigorous, but the results produced would be far more useful than the simple anecdotes that inform most of our

If your club is planning to produce a study on any aspect of reef keeping, please contact us for information on having your study results published in a future issue of RHM (info@rhmag.com).



hobby and may be good indicators of where further studies are needed. If more rigor is desired, researchers at public aquariums or universities could be contacted to help direct more complicated studies. Imagine the ground that could be covered if 20 different reef clubs started doing such studies and shared the results publicly.

STAY INFORMED OF LARGER ISSUES AND GET INVOLVED

The vast majority of all the animals in our hobby are collected in the wild, so it is important for us to keep tabs on how wild reefs are doing and advocate for their care and protection. Use some club resources to keep people up-to-date on what is happening out there in the wider world. Create some publicity in your area, donate some club funds, or have a fund raiser to benefit organizations doing good work in the oceans - Coral Reef Alliance (CORAL), Coral Restoration Foundation (CRF), and Sexual Coral Reproduction (SCORE) are just three examples of organizations doing good work. Clubs need to understand and take action on issues that face wild reefs, and it seems to be a good use of club monies to help keep these types of organizations funded.



This *Hydnophora* coral, and others, were donated to the Steinhart Aquarium by a local reef club and help educate over 1.5 million people a year about the dangers facing coral reefs.

MAKE THE INDUSTRY BETTER

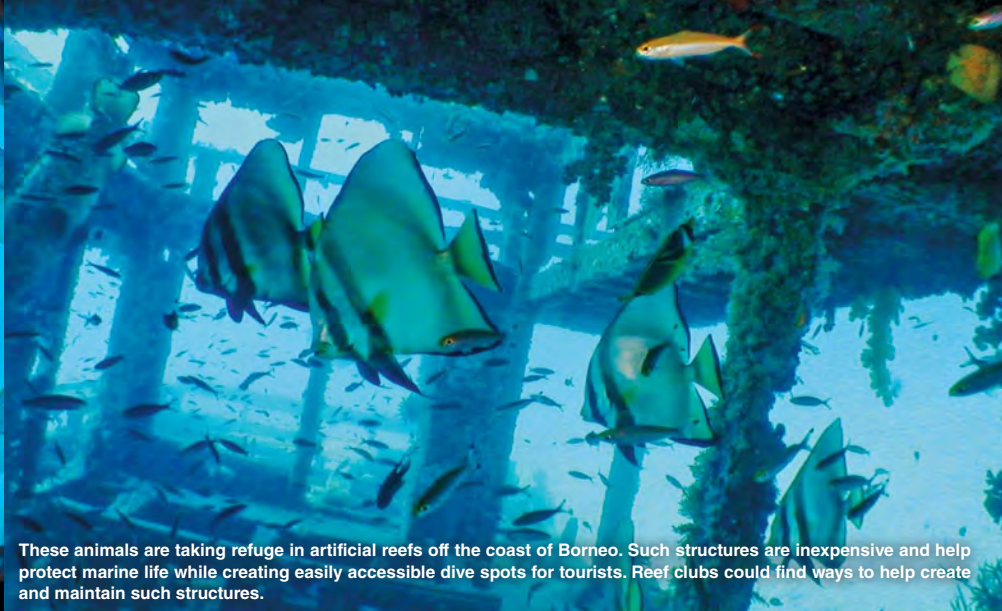
The chain of custody that brings animals from the wild to our aquariums isn't perfect, but what can be done to make things better? It is unclear that anyone has the answer, but what we do know is that not doing anything will result in no change or changes we might not like. Individual clubs, or coalitions of clubs, might be able to put pressure on suppliers to transparently improve their practices. Clubs could generate funds to encourage real world studies that could make a significant difference in developing better ways to collect, hold, and ship animals. Even simply engaging in the conversation could have positive effects on the well-being of the animals we all care about.

SEND MEMBERS TO NATIONAL OR INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCES

Conferences are a great way to gain exposure to different methodologies of reef keeping. Perhaps club funds could be used to send a club member or two (picked by lottery to avoid favoritism) to various conferences with the understanding that they write up or give a presentation to the club about the conference when they get back. Sending club members to conferences will also connect your club to other clubs which can be excellent resources for different perspectives on reef keeping, club management, speaker choices, and more.

PARTNER WITH YOUR LOCAL PUBLIC AQUARIUM

Public aquariums are often looking for sources of coral to put on display. A reef club could partner with their local public aquarium to farm corals needed for exhibits. This doesn't even have to be a local aquarium; distant public aquariums often need coral which they have trouble sourcing. Find out which aquariums are looking for coral and get farming! Members could also offer to volunteer at public aquariums to help keep the animals and exhibits in tip-top shape or become docents and help convey information to guests. Clubs could also work with local public aquariums to develop programs or seminars on any number of reef-related topics. It is



These animals are taking refuge in artificial reefs off the coast of Borneo. Such structures are inexpensive and help protect marine life while creating easily accessible dive spots for tourists. Reef clubs could find ways to help create and maintain such structures.

important to note that each public aquarium handles such things differently, so your best bet in starting this kind of collaboration is to ask the aquarium and offer to help or be involved. If this kind of program does move forward, expect to do some training and paperwork.

BEACH CLEAN-UPS

This one is a no-brainer as the connection between saltwater aquarium keeping and beaches is obvious. Be involved with all local beach clean-ups in your area (there are many, so check the websites) or organize your own. Once or twice a year, organize the club, have a picnic, and clean up a local beach. Wear club shirts and use the event to help educate the public. Have some cards made with info about your club and why it is important to keep beaches clean. Invite a celebrity and try to get news coverage. Don't live near a beach? Clean up any public area in honor of beach clean-up day.

GENERAL OUTREACH

Clubs can be instrumental in helping to educate the general public. Think about putting together a program to install a reef tank in a local library, a local school, or your city hall. These displays can show how to responsibly care for marine animals by simply having cards, flyers, or an informational panel available to educate passers-by. And don't stop with educating about reef keeping; the realities of the multiple dangers that face wild reefs and the challenges of sustainable/responsible fishing methods are also good topics for public education.

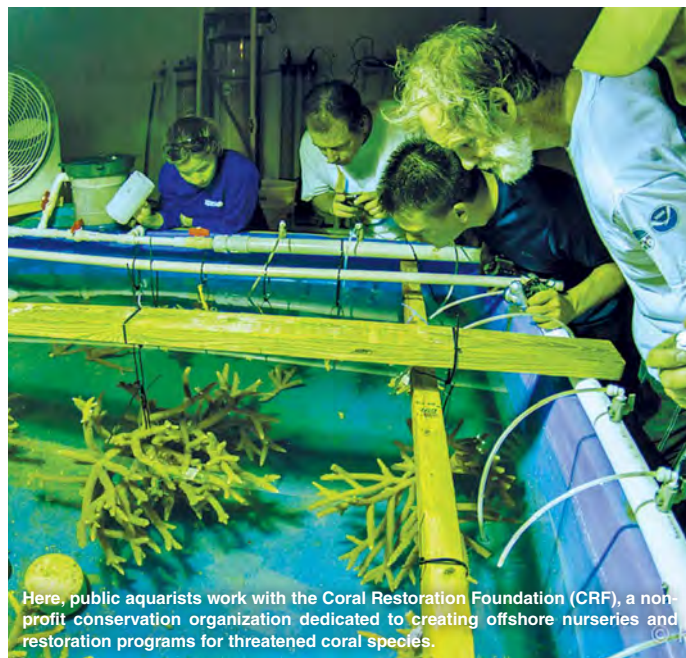
LEGAL STUFF

There are legal issues affecting the hobby and industry that we love. Get your club involved so your voices on the issues are heard. Join and support the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) or the Marine Aquarium Societies of North America (MASNA) and make sure all your members know about the issues facing wild ornamental fish and coral collection.

LAST THOUGHTS

In writing these suggestions, it occurred to me that such projects may also help clubs avoid 'old member syndrome.' Club members that have been around for a long time tend to become less and less enthusiastic about answering the same basic questions over the years. Often, their participation in reefing events wanes, and their knowledge and experience is lost to the community. Perhaps reef clubs that engage these members to take on bigger issues can help these old salts stay active in the club communities where they are so valuable.

Reef clubs are amazing organizations with incredible potential. I hope the above suggestions inspire clubs to look beyond their tanks and take action to engage in the larger world.



Here, public aquarists work with the Coral Restoration Foundation (CRF), a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to creating offshore nurseries and restoration programs for threatened coral species.