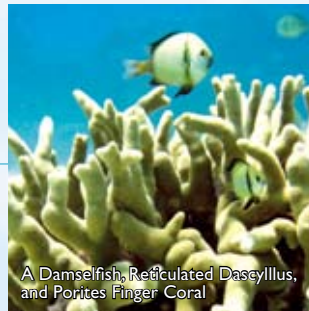


Saying goodbye to a cherished protector and becoming protectors themselves was the essence of their Papua New Guinea trip for the folks on board the SV *Infinity* journeys.

By **Abigail Alling**, President PCRF, and **Orla Doherty**, Managing Director PCRF.



A Damsel fish, Reticulated Dascyllus, and Porites Finger Coral



Tibetan Earth Treasure Vase onboard *Infinity*.

Kitava Reef and adjacent island

BURYING A TREASURE

In the Trobriand Islands of Papua New Guinea, one aspect of our journey came to a completion. For the last four years we have carried on board our ship an Earth Treasure Vase, a clay vessel consecrated by Tibetan Buddhist monks living in Nepal. According to ancient Buddhist tradition, they are crafted to bring protection and healing to the Earth. Our particular vase was dedicated to healing the coral reefs and oceans. Since its arrival into our care in October 2003, we have gathered periodically with people from remote islands of the South Pacific and Southeast Asia to honor the intention of the vase with blessings and offerings.

We opened the vase for its final ceremony in the magnificent setting of Fergusson Island, in a dawn-lit circle aboard *Infinity*. Joined by friends from the island, who had enthralled us with a magnificent display of sailing canoes and Kula traditions, we set sail for Egum Atoll which we had visited in 2003, a remote atoll of the Trobriand Islands with a vertical reef wall on its outside. Dolphins gathered at the surface, close to the narrow entrance into the lagoon, while grey reef sharks patrolled the wall below. In keeping with Buddhist tradition, we brought the vase underwater for the first and last time, and found a small cave along the wall in which to “bury” it. It is the only vase known to have been gifted from the Himalaya Mountains and buried in the ocean.

From Egum, we moved on to Kitava Island, just east of Kiriwina, one of the most famous Trobriand Islands. Back in 2003 during our reef studies, we found them to be in a poor state of health with

large amounts of algal overgrowth affecting the living coral colonies. However, closer to the shore lay massive *Porites spp.* colonies in almost perfect condition, creating a reef of contradictions. We returned in the hopes that it had perhaps made a recovery to a more dynamic ecosystem but found in fact that very little had changed. The overall threat factor was almost exactly the same (57% in 2003; 60% in 2007) and again, the dominant cause was algal overgrowth (46% in 2003; 50% in 2007). But the massive *Porites spp.* colonies were still almost unblemished in the shallows.

We fought against strong currents to repeat our transects from 2003 and found that the patterns of water movement around Uratu have changed in the last four years. There is new growth of *Acropora* and *Pocillopora spp.* colonies but the battle against algal overgrowth remains. This reef suffers from several detrimental factors including the nearby international shipping lane, past overfishing and a tsunami in the 1990s, and continues to struggle on.

For the next two months we will be based off Gizo Island in the Solomon Island’s western province, a reef we have studied thrice since 2000. A tsunami struck this reef in April 2007 and so it will be a critical study to assess its impact on the structure. At the end of February, we will commence our return to Southeast Asia and we’ll be looking forward to our upcoming visit with Raffles Marina in August!

“Join the Voyage” of the SV *Infinity*, Raffles Marina’s “club at sea” in Nautique and PCRF’s homepage at www.pcrf.org.