

MarBEF Outreach and education

By Olive Heffernan

A NEW COMMUNICATIONS resource has been developed under the MarBEF banner. The MarBEF Outreach and Education web pages were officially launched on 23 December 2004 at www.marbef.org/outreach.

Human perceptions of biodiversity, attitudes and behaviour directly and indirectly affect the sustainable use of marine living resources. Gaining support from society to protect and sustain the marine environment requires long-term concerted efforts in education and public awareness.

The MarBEF outreach web pages are intended as a communications tool to bridge the gap between researchers within the network and those who work on, are interested in or use the marine environment. First and foremost, these pages provide an easily accessible source of information and educational material on marine biodiversity in Europe. On these pages, we have explained terms and concepts central to marine biodiversity and then illustrated these concepts with descriptions and examples of marine biodiversity in Europe, both from a geographic and ecosystem perspective. We have highlighted the importance of marine resources to our everyday lives, from regulating the climate to providing us with

food, and have discussed threats to the future of these resources. Perhaps most importantly, we have provided material for those interested in learning about the marine environment, thus raising awareness, and we hope in time to provide opportunities for people to become actively involved.

Secondly, the pages are a source of downloadable outreach materials both for network members and for those outside of the network. Of specific use to network members are the downloadable presentations on MarBEF, which can be used to introduce the aims and objectives of the network at meetings and workshops. Also intended for network members are the information sheets on MarBEF, which detail each of the working themes within the network and their objectives for 2005. The sheets are designed as inserts for the MarBEF folder, available on request from the MarBEF Communications and Outreach Officer, Olive Heffernan, and are intended to inform the wider scientific community and stake-holders of our activities. We anticipate that net-work members will translate these pages into other European languages as the need arises, and that these translations will also be available to download from the site in time. Publicity material of interest to the general public includes posters, flyers, a presentation "An Introduction to Marine Biodiversity" and archived MarBEF articles from magazines such as *Marine Scientist*. Previous issues of this newsletter are archived as downloadable pdf files.

Thirdly, the site is a link to contacts, organisations and other websites concerned with marine biodiversity in Europe. A searchable database of contacts at conservation organisations and research institutes throughout Europe will soon be available on the site under 'Public Participation.' This section will also be used to announce details of upcoming outreach events of public interest, such as the proposed coastal monitoring scheme for amateur conservationists in 2005.

Although the main text on these pages is geared towards the adult general public, specialised pages will be developed in the coming year focused on schoolchildren, university students and other interest groups. Some of the resources that will be available include downloadable study sheets, details of marine biodiversity career and study opportunities, and a junior section with themed colourful pages and interactive games. Series of documents geared toward specific end-user groups, such as environmental managers, are being currently developed and will be accessible through these pages.

While websites are an essential and easily accessible tool in communication, to a certain extent they are like 'preaching to the converted.' This online resource is in its infancy, having just been launched, but our desire is to develop these pages in 2005 to attract as wide an audience as possible. We intend to achieve this by utilising many different types of media, making the site more innovative, attractive and accessible over the duration of MarBEF. We anticipate that this resource will develop as a vital communication tool in disseminating information from the network, building links with resource users, and educating on marine biodiversity in Europe. Any feedback on these pages is more than welcome and can be directed to olive@ecoserve.ie ●

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The screenshot shows the MarBEF Outreach and Education website. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links: Home, What is marine biodiversity?, Marine biodiversity of Europe, European marine biodiversity sites, Why is marine biodiversity important?, Threats to marine biodiversity, Newsletter, Public participation, Marine resources, School resources, and RSS. The main content area features a section titled 'Cold coral reefs' with a 'General description' and two images of coral reefs. The text describes cold-water coral reefs in the North Atlantic and their importance.

