

Monitoring the mesophotic reef in the easternmost Mediterranean Sea

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For many years the Mediterranean Sea remained in the background of Israel's public and academic awareness. In recent years the discovery of gas and crude oil reserves in the Mediterranean Sea and its current situation as Israel's main drinking water source has placed the Mediterranean Sea in the spot light. The mesophotic reef is a twilight zone ecosystem, very unique due to its depth and scarcely explored. The Mediterranean Sea Monitoring and Research Centre in Sdot-Yam, was recently formed with the aim of creating long term biodiversity monitoring program and providing the required infrastructure. The Research and monitoring of the mesophotic reef of the eastern Mediterranean Sea is an emerging field. Until recently this area was not accessible to researchers and even now it imposes great challenges. In order to overcome those challenges and monitor the benthic community and conduct fish surveys our team uses special diving techniques of closed circuit rebreathers (CCR). This technics enable us to leave the standard SCUBA diving limitation of limited gas supply and stay longer (up to 5 hours) and complete all the necessary tasks. Right now we analyze our first year of data collection and our annual report will be submitted by the end of November 2015.