

Reef Check California

Fish transects sampling

Reef Check California (RCCA) surveys consist of visual surveys performed by scuba divers. At each site, buddy teams of divers conduct eighteen 30 m x 2 m benthic transects, to monitor key species of fishes (35 species), invertebrates (33 species) and algae (5 species & 4 invasive species) and to characterize the reef substrate and relief. Each site is divided into two "zones" by depth (shallow 5-12 meters and deep 12-18 meters - or from offshore to inshore at sites with little depth variation) to assure that samples are distributed across the face of a reef from inshore to offshore. RCCA's survey methods are based on visual census survey methods developed by the Partnership of Interdisciplinary Studies of Coastal Oceans (PISCO) and have been modified so that they can be taught in a reasonable amount of time to volunteer scuba divers. Species are selected because of their ecological or economic importance or because they are of specific management interest.

Fish are counted on 18 transects per site (9 transects in each zone). Each transect is a 2m wide x 2m high x 30m long swath along the seafloor. Fish are identified to species and their total length is recorded in centimeters. Cracks and crevices in the reef are searched using flashlights but no rocks are moved during the search. Ancillary data include the GPS location of each area, depth, underwater visibility on the bottom and water temperature. For a complete description see http://reefcheck.org/rcca/monitoring_protocol.php.