

# Thistlegorm moorings improved

**T**HE LATEST WORK ON **MOORING** systems laid around the Red Sea's *Thistlegorm* wreck was completed in mid-April.

The work was carried out by the Hurghada Environmental Protection and Conservation Association (HEPCA) to correct some design faults and damage that had occurred to the system of 32 mooring lines laid around the wreck last December.

HEPCA had found that "at least half of the lines" had been damaged and that the design alterations were required for operational "ease and safety". Following consultation in Sharm El Sheikh between HEPCA and "several of the larger dive centres" and other bodies, a series of changes was agreed.

Line lengths have been changed and it is hoped that this, and a stipulation that dive-boats combine mooring with the deployment of stern anchors, will prevent the mooring lines running up against parts of the wreck and chafing.

Other improvements, says HEPCA,

have included fitting all mooring lines with steel eyelets "to make tying on easier", and better buoyage "to aid easier identification".

Before the improvements, a number of boat skippers had been dropping shots directly into the wreck, in contravention of the new system.

"It is hoped that these new enhancements to the system will

eliminate any issues with diving operators using the mooring system, and will ensure that all who visit the *SS Thistlegorm* comply with its use," said HEPCA.

Implying that failure to respect the system would be an offence punishable in law, HEPCA, while issuing a warning to transgressors in January, stated: "Following the

installation of the new mooring system, mooring on the wreck is strictly forbidden and violators will be prosecuted."

The mooring scheme deployed at the *Thistlegorm* was instigated by HEPCA as part of its Saving the Red Sea Wrecks Campaign, launched to conserve this and other popular diving wrecks in the region. ■

## MCS identifies plastics as major threat

**THE MARINE CONSERVATION SOCIETY'S 2007 *Beachwatch* report has highlighted plastics pollution as one of the biggest threats to marine life. Such pollution is at its "highest level since records began", according to the report.**

*Beachwatch*, the survey project in which volunteers clear beaches nationwide during September and report their findings, began in 1994. Since then, says the MCS, "plastic litter on our beaches has increased by a staggering 126%".

Breaking the statistics down further, the MCS revealed that, in the past 10 years, "plastic drinks bottles have increased by 67%, plastic bags by 54%, and cigarette butts by 44%".

It added: "Plastic debris now accounts for over 58% of all litter found on UK beaches."

Plastics are of particular concern, the MCS said, because they "could persist in the marine environment for centuries with fatal consequences for marine wildlife.

"Over 170 species of marine life

including seabirds, turtles and whales have been recorded mistaking marine litter for food, resulting in starvation, poisoning and fatal stomach blockages.

"In addition, plastic packaging and discarded fishing nets injure, entangle and drown some of Britain's favourite marine wildlife, including seals and dolphins."

The report, based on data collected by 4000 volunteers on 354 beaches around the UK, can be downloaded at [www.mcsuk.org](http://www.mcsuk.org) ■