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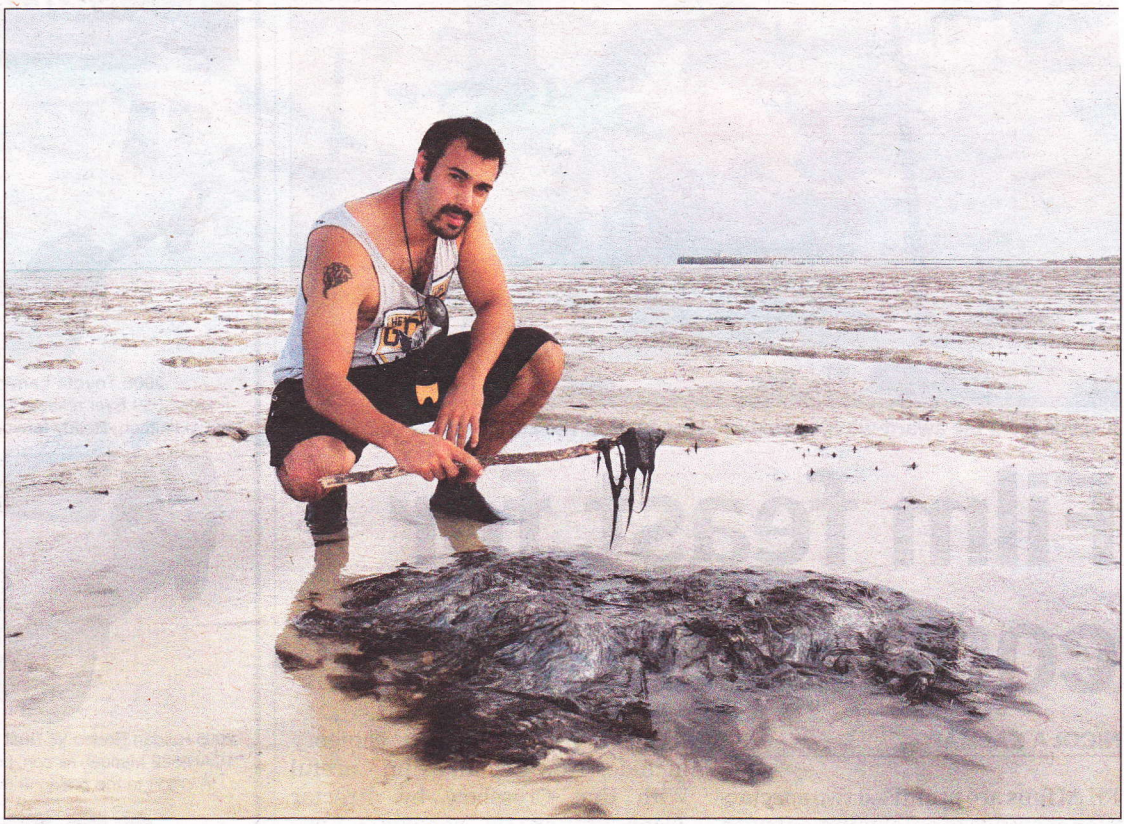

Tom da Silva has found lower levels of toxic lyngbya majuscule in Roebuck Bay while researching marine life in the Bay.
Picture Ben Jones

Algae fails to bloom thanks to heavy rain

BEN JONES

ROEBUCK Bay has been spared from huge outbreaks of toxic blue green algae which have plagued the bay's marine life on the mudflats during the wet season for the past five years.

Lower water temperatures and lack of sunlight resulting from consistent cloud cover and rain have been credited with keeping the toxic lyngbya majuscule algae from blooming throughout the bay.

Researchers from the University of Western Australia's school of animal biology have been in Broome for the past few weeks monitoring levels of lyngbya in the bay, and have recorded lower concentrations of lyngbya in the bay this year.

Sora Estrella and Tom da Silva have compared weather conditions from last year and this year; however, data on the nutrient levels in the bay, which are believed to be a major factor in the outbreak of lyngbya blooms, are being taken for the first time this year.

Ms Estrella said the nutrient levels measured so far in the bay were high this year but without the necessary data to compare it with assumptions could not be made in the short term.

"We haven't been able to complete the proper statistical analysis yet this year," she said.

Lyngbya is believed to thrive on iron, which Broome's pindan soils have in abundance while stormwater run-off, rich in fertilisers and nutrients, has also been blamed for large blooms in previous years.

Mr da Silva said the sheer volume of rain recorded this year could have had the opposite effect, washing nutrients away before they could be absorbed on the mudflats.

The researchers aim to map the effect of lyngbya on the bay's food chain by drawing up a food web, from microscopic creatures living in the mudflats to migratory shorebirds.