EMD

"Our Island. Our Environment. Our Responsibility."

January 2013

Monthly Newsletter From The Environmental Management Directorate

DARWIN MARINE BIODIVERSITY AND MAPPING PROJECT UPDATE

With the start of the New Year the Marine Biodiversity and Mapping project is now getting into full swing. The first two months have been spent with me familiarising myself with St Helena waters (i.e. a good excuse to get out diving). As well as being highly enjoyable, they have been very productive with every opportunity taken to gather pictures of all the underwater creatures and collecting any unusual species. The photos are for a production of identification keys for training of divers for the island wide habitat and species surveys. January has also seen the start of the collection dives – hunting under rocks and in crevices for small invertebrates. Already several of the animals that have been collected haven't been recorded from St Helena before and some even appear to be new species. These will now be sent to taxonomic experts for further examination. A lot of time has also been spent in setting up literature reference collections, databases for historical records, forms for records of dives and sample collections and ordering all the equipment needed for the survey work. Equipment has also been purchased to go in the new marine laboratory including some high quality microscopes for use in identifying the different species. A community talk was also given at the museum to introduce the project and included some exciting video footage of the delights of the St Helena underwater world.

Judith Brown
Darwin Marine Biodiversity and Mapping Project Manager

DARWIN INITIATIVE

JNCC Joint Nature Conservation Committee

This beautiful but fragile lace coral was found in caves and crevices

CLOSED SEASON FOR SPEAR FISHING

DURING THE PERIOD FROM THE 1ST OF JANUARY 2013 TO THE 31ST OF MARCH 2013, SPEAR FISHING IS NOT ALLOWED AT ANY TIME OR PLACE IN ST HELENA'S WATERS.

The Spear Guns (Control) Ordinance CAP 91 states that during a closed season, no person shall have a spear gun in his possession on or within twenty metres of any tidal water or upon any beach or foreshore or while swimming or while in any vessel.

During this time most fish are at the spawning stage and it is therefore necessary to put measures in place to allow marine life a chance to breed and to grow into sustainable resources. The aim of the controlled season is not to stop people from enjoying the sea, it is to respect our oceans and it's resources.

Elizabeth Clingham - Marine Conservation Officer

NEW STAFF

This month, EMD welcomed two new staff to the Directorate.

Cherilee Thomas – Environmental Assistant (Policy and Administration) within the Environmental Assessment and Advocacy Division (EAAD)
Shayla Ellick – Species Conservation and Environmental Research

UNUSUAL BIRDS WHICH HAVE BEEN SEEN ON ST HELENA RECENTLY

Dark-backed Tern, Comb Duck, Swift, Moorhen (water hen), Roller, Grey Heron, Purple Heron, Squacco Heron, Cattle Egret, Dwarf Bittern and the White Stork.

EMD keeps records of any unusual bird sightings i.e. birds not normally seen on St Helena. So if you do spot any unusual birds, just remember the date, time, location of your sighting, what type of bird and how many, and if possible get a photograph and send this information to us at Essex House on Telephone No: 2270 or email on env.assist1@environmentalmanagement.gov.sh

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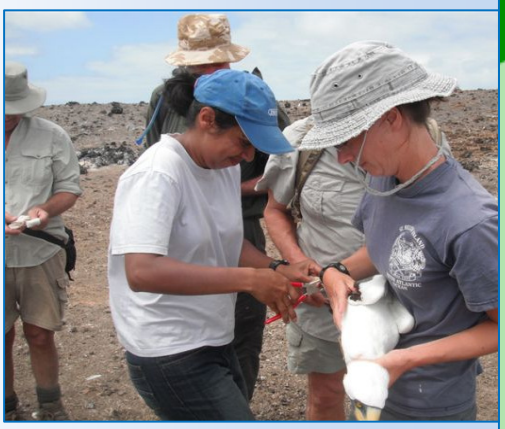
MARINE STAFF TRAINING ON ASCENSION

Between the 25th of November and the 7th of December 2012, Annalea Beard and Leeann Henry from the Marine Section undertook seabird ringing training on Ascension Island. The training was funded by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and training was facilitated by Mr Colin Wearn a British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) ringer from the Army Ornithology Society (AOS). The training has now enabled all of the Marine Section staff to safely handle and ring seabirds in future works.

Leeann has since returned to the island and tells us about her experience on Ascension. *"The training was practically based and involved handling a variety of birds of different sizes and a lot of walking in very hot weather. We visited Mars Bays, Waterside and Letterbox for the training, time was then spent recapturing birds that had previously been ringed and details relating to each of these birds were recorded and added to the BTO record of the bird's life. Catching the birds required a sharp eye and quick hands with a net as the birds liked to fly off when they were approached. In addition, care had to be taken not to crush the birds or its many neighbours' eggs. Once caught the ring number and location would be accurately recorded.*

Work was also done to measure egg densities, a process was used to calculate how many eggs were laid during the Sooty Tern (Widewake) nesting season. Quadrats were also monitored for hatching success at different areas of the colony. To do this, eggs in close proximity to each other are given a number and monitored regularly to see if they hatch. Egg size and hatching success can vary from year to year depending on food availability. The use of muscle scores to check the health of fledgings was also taught as this relates to food availability. We were also able to watch members of the AOS attach tracking devices to Sooty Terns to see where they go when they leave Ascension as very little is known about this.

Most importantly we were trained in the different techniques used to fit rings to the different sized birds. Smaller seabirds like the Sooty Tern can be safely ringed by one person. The larger seabirds like Masked Boobies (Gannetts) require two people, one person to hold the bird and another to fit the ring. Two people are used both for the birds and ringers safety. The point was effectively driven home as various people acquired cuts requiring various degrees of first aid as training progressed. Despite this, we fully enjoyed the training and the experience of working with a group of people who have a very varied skillset. A lot of the skills taught will improve with continuous practice."



Leeann has been advised that she has attained her seabird ringing "T" permits verbally from her instructor and will receive her official permit in due course.

The Environmental Management Directorate would like to thank the Ascension Island Conservation team and other sectors of the Ascension Island Government for supporting this training. Also thanks to JNCC and the trainer Mr Colin Wearn.

Marine Conservation

INTRODUCING THE METEOROLOGICAL STATION

The operational work of the Met Station at Bottom Woods is primarily to collect and record weather related data. This is undertaken at surface level and in the upper atmosphere.

At surface level, various sensors are used with trained staff in observing practices to record basic weather data. Recorded data consists of air temperatures, humidity, rainfall, wind direction & speed, sunshine duration, cloud coverage and visibility conditions.

Data is also collected from the Upper Air, using an instrument called a Radiosonde which is carried into the atmosphere by a balloon filled with hydrogen. The Radiosonde records temperatures, humidity, air pressure, wind direction and speed. This real time data is transmitted back to a ground based processing system, where the data is automatically recorded and processed, with manual intervention for editing and further analytical requirement.

The resulting data messages from these operations are sent to the Met Office for distribution to their customers and researchers who require this type of data. Similarly, some data is used on island by organisations that need this type of data.

Marcos Henry
Meteorological Station Manager

ENVIRONMENTAL NOTICE BOARD AT THE WHARF

The Environmental Management Directorate in partnership with the Fisheries Section of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Directorate has recently placed a **public notice board** near the **Front Steps** at the **Wharf**. This board is dedicated to issues relating to the marine environment and will be updated accordingly to allow all users of the sea to be as fully informed as possible.

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