



THE MARINE AND FISHERIES CONSERVATION SECTION QUARTERLY CATCH

APRIL - JUNE 2026

www.sainthelena.gov.sh

The Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section (MFCS) team, in line with the vision of the Marine Management Plan 2023–27, aims to conserve, protect and restore the rich biodiversity and unique natural ecosystems of St Helena's Marine Protected Area (MPA). The use of natural resources is managed in accordance with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Category 6 sustainable use principles, ensuring benefits both now and for future generations.

Halfway through 2026, and MFCS has had an active and exciting period, with scientific work areas progressing well, new research beginning, and several valuable collaboration opportunities taking place both locally and internationally:

Celebrating 10 Years of the Blue Belt Programme



This year marks an important milestone for marine conservation across St Helena and the wider UK Overseas Territories, as the Blue Belt Programme celebrates its 10-year anniversary.

Since its establishment, the Blue Belt Programme has supported UK Overseas Territories in protecting

and sustainably managing their marine environments. For St Helena, this support has contributed to the continued development of a strong MPA, helping to safeguard healthy, productive marine ecosystems for both current and future generations.

To mark the occasion locally, MFCS hosted a World Oceans Day celebration at Ann's Place on Monday 8 June. The event provided an opportunity to celebrate St Helena's ocean, recognise the importance of the island's MPA, and reflect on a decade of Blue Belt Programme support.



The 2026 World Oceans Day theme, "Strong Marine Protected Areas for Our Blue Planet", was especially fitting for St Helena, reflecting the ongoing work to conserve, protect and sustainably manage the island's marine environment.

Guests heard speeches from His Excellency the Governor, Minister for Economic Development and Environment, Natural Resources and Planning Portfolios Karl Thrower, and Head of Nature Conservation Elizabeth Clingham.

Displays showcased areas of work supported through the Blue Belt Programme since St Helena's MPA was designated in 2016, alongside a 10-year impact report highlighting achievements across the UK Overseas Territories.

BLUE BELT PROGRAMME

The celebration also included the unveiling of the new Blue Belt logo, a cake-cutting ceremony, and the announcement of our World Oceans Day photo competition winners. The competition captured the relationship between St Helena, its people, and the ocean, while highlighting the importance of maintaining a strong MPA.

The competition winners were Megan Young in first place, Tyanne Williams in second place, and Colby Thomas in third place. Honourable mentions were awarded to Danni Thomas, Terri Clingham, Jolene Thomas, Tracey Williams, and Damian Stevens.

The event was a fitting way to mark 10 years of the Blue Belt Programme and to recognise the collective effort behind St Helena's marine conservation work. MFCS would like to thank everyone who attended and all those who continue to support the protection and sustainable management of St Helena's MPA.



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Zooplankton (Fish Eggs and Larvae) Sampling



The ichthyoplankton sampling programme has now completed its field collection phase, marking an important milestone for this work area. Across the sampling period, the team collected 415 samples from 18 stations around the island, supported by 501 plankton net deployments and 389 Conductivity, Temperature and Depth sensor deployments.

This work involved an impressive field effort, including more than 104,135 metres of rope pulled and coiled, and approximately 408,698 cubic metres of water filtered through the plankton net. The next stage will focus on laboratory processing and analysis, with the results contributing to a better understanding of fish eggs and larvae in St Helena's waters.



New Endemic Reef Fish Project



A new ecological study will soon begin, focusing on four endemic reef fish species found around St Helena: the St Helena butterflyfish (cunningfish), St Helena wrasse (greenfish), St Helena gregory, and St Helena parrotfish. The project will help address important knowledge gaps, as there is currently limited information available on areas such as fecundity, diet, age estimation, and spawning for these species.

Monthly collections will be undertaken over the course of one year from four sites around the island. Fish of different sizes will be collected using spears and hand nets and preserved on ice before laboratory processing. Samples collected will include stomach contents, dorsal muscle tissue, otoliths, and gonad tissue, providing valuable data to improve understanding of these important endemic species.

MV Hondius Visit



In April, the MFCS team had the privilege of presenting aboard the MV Hondius during its visit to St Helena. The vessel, part of the Oceanwide Expeditions fleet, is a regular visitor to the island and provided a valuable opportunity to showcase St Helena's unique marine environment and the conservation work taking place within the MPA.

During the visit, the team delivered a presentation on St Helena's marine environment, fieldwork programmes, and education and outreach activities. The presentation was well received and created an excellent opportunity for knowledge exchange with scientists and visitors on board.

The team also met with marine mammal specialist Marijke de Boer, who is working on marine mammal sightings in the South Atlantic, including Tristan, St Helena, and Ascension. This was a productive exchange and may lead to further collaboration as the evidence base develops.



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Red-tailed Tropicbird Sighting



During the MV Hondius visit, one of the guests, Emin Yoğurtcuoğlu, photographed a red-tailed tropicbird near St Helena. This is understood to be the first recorded sighting of this species for the island, making it an exciting observation for local biodiversity records.

The red-tailed tropicbird is distinctive, with its red tail and lack of the mottled black pattern seen in St Helena's resident red-billed tropicbird. The species is mainly distributed in the Indian Ocean, and this individual is likely to represent a rare vagrant record for the island.

Any further sightings should be recorded through St Helena iRecord to help strengthen local species records and support future monitoring.

Two Oceans Aquarium Turtle Tracking Feature



Credit: Two Oceans Aquarium

St Helena also had a recent feature in the Two Oceans Aquarium turtle

tracking blog, following the journey of Nori, a rehabilitated green turtle, as she travelled past our MPA.

The Two Oceans Turtle Conservation Centre works to rescue, rehabilitate, and release vulnerable sea turtles, supported by its Turtle Rescue Network along the Western Cape coastline. The centre has achieved an impressive 85% release rate, with many turtles requiring specialist care after stranding, injury, dehydration, cold shock, entanglement, or plastic ingestion.

Larger rehabilitated turtles are often fitted with satellite tags before release, allowing their movements to be tracked and contributing valuable data to global research on turtle migration and post-release survival. This is how Nori's route past St Helena's MPA was recorded and shared through the blog.



Credit: Two Oceans Aquarium

"Nori's journey is a reminder that St Helena's MPA forms part of a much wider ocean network used by migratory species. It also highlights how one turtle's recovery and release can help build scientific understanding while strengthening connections between conservation organisations, including the Two Oceans Turtle

Conservation Centre and the Government of St Helena."

Read the full blog here: <https://www.aquarium.co.za/foundation/news/tracking-our-turtles-nori-visits-the-waters-near-st-helena-island>

Thank you and Good luck to Shelby



MFCS would like to take this opportunity to extend a heartfelt thank you to Shelby Bargo, who joined the section as a Graduate Management Trainee and has worked with the team over the past two years. During this time, Shelby has made a valuable contribution across a range of work areas, bringing enthusiasm, dedication, and a willingness to get involved wherever support was needed. Her help has been greatly appreciated by the whole team. Shelby will be very much missed, and we wish her every success and happiness as she moves on to her future endeavours.