



THE MARINE AND FISHERIES CONSERVATION SECTION

QUARTERLY CATCH

JULY - SEPTEMBER 2026

www.sainthelena.gov.sh



It's the Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section's third **QUARTERLY CATCH** for **JULY to SEPTEMBER 2026!**

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.

It has been an exciting quarter for MFCS, with the team growing and scientific research and community engagement all progressing well.

- We have recently welcomed a new Data Management Officer, Annabelle Cupidon, to our team, who will be supporting work to organise and improve access to almost two decades of valuable data.
- This period also marks the beginning of an important research programme focused on St Helena's endemic reef fish, looking at their life cycles, their roles in the marine environment and how vulnerable they are to climate change. Working alongside visiting scientists from Brazil, the team has been building practical skills in fish sampling and laboratory work while strengthening international partnerships.
- As part of this visit, one of the scientists also presented a public talk at the Museum, exploring the importance of Atlantic oceanic islands, long-term monitoring of the natural environment and international collaboration in understanding environmental change.
- Alongside this research and knowledge-sharing, MFCS continued its community engagement activities, marking this year's MPA Day with a well-supported quiz night at Ann's Place, held in partnership with the Island Minds Foundation. More than 60 people took part, raising over £230 and reflecting this year's theme, "Ocean protection needs human connection".
- Building on these efforts to encourage wider public involvement in marine conservation, St Helena has joined Happywhale, an online public marine sightings platform where anyone can record their sightings and interactions with some of the megafauna species that visit or call St Helena home. These contributions help scientists identify individual animals and understand their travel routes and changes in population numbers without disturbing them. Our own Senior Marine Fisheries and Conversation Assistant, Leeann Henry, was also featured in Cefas' *Unchatted Waters* podcast, which introduces some of the people behind marine science in the UK Overseas Territories.
- Finally, to round off the quarter, we were also treated to a particularly interesting visitor in St Helena's waters!

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WELCOME TO ANNABELLE!



We recently welcomed Annabelle Cupidon to the Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section team as our Data Management Officer. She will help ensure that information relevant to the Marine Centre and marine conservation is collected, organised, accurate and easy to access. Originally from Mauritius, Annabelle brings a background in marine science and oceanic island ecology. We caught up with her to hear more about her journey to St Helena and how she is settling into her new role.

What interested you in the role, and how did you hear about it?

“I first heard about the opportunity through a friend who already works on St Helena. With my background in marine science and oceanic island ecology, the Data Management Officer position seemed like a great opportunity to contribute to the island’s environmental work while taking on a new professional challenge. So here I am, all the way from Mauritius to St Helena – from one island to another!”

What have you been doing and enjoying so far?

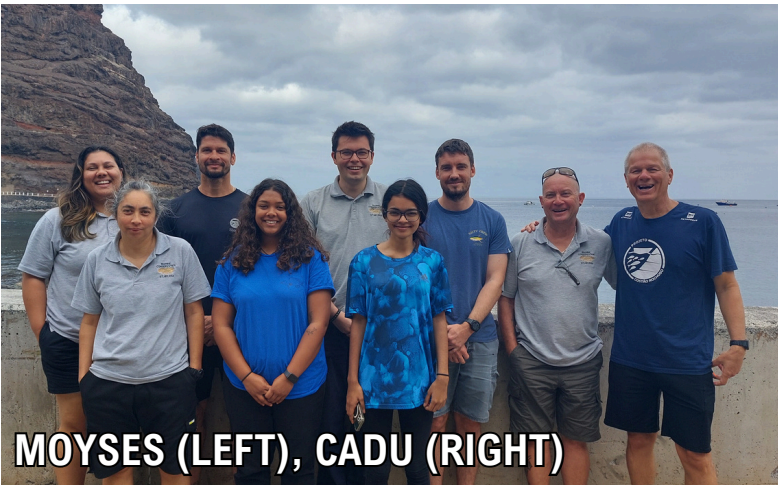
“One of the things that has impressed me is the sheer amount of scientific data collected by the Marine Centre over nearly two decades. This valuable information has supported the management of the Marine Protected Area and helped balance sustainability, conservation and tourism. Outside work, I have been enjoying weekend walks, the island’s scenery, the friendliness of the community and the peaceful way of life.”

What are you looking forward to?

“Professionally, I am looking forward to making progress in organising and streamlining the Marine Centre’s database so that its information can be managed, accessed and used more efficiently. As I settle in, I am also looking forward to exploring more of the island’s hiking trails and underwater world. Snorkelling and diving with whale sharks and devil rays are high on my list of experiences while I am here!”



UNDERSTANDING THE LIFE HISTORY OF ST HELENA’S ENDEMIC REEF FISH



To support this new area of work, MFCS welcomed two scientists from Brazil, building on a working relationship developed through the Mission Atlantic project (read more about this organisation here: <https://missionatlantic.eu/>). St Helena and Brazil’s oceanic islands share important connections as Atlantic oceanic islands, including unique species found nowhere else in the world and similar challenges when it comes to researching and protecting their marine environments.

The project aims to fill important gaps in our knowledge of St Helena’s endemic reef fish, helping us better understand how they live, grow and reproduce, and how they may be affected by changes in the marine environment.



The visiting scientists, Moysés Barbosa and Carlos ‘Cadu’ Ferriera, share more about their research and the importance of working together to better understand and protect St Helena’s marine life.



“As marine scientists, Moysés and I share a deep connection with the ocean, both professionally and personally. I coordinate LECAR (the Laboratory of Reef Ecology and Conservation), while Moysés coordinates the Costão Rochoso Project. Our work focuses on studying and protecting reef environments, particularly the fish found around Atlantic coastlines and islands.

Our research takes place along the Brazilian coast and around its oceanic islands, where we monitor marine life over time. We collect information in the field, study the results and share what we learn. This helps us understand how reef fish populations change in response to human activities and warming seas. By looking at information gathered over many years, we can identify possible future changes and help guide decisions about how best to protect these environments.

We also compare reef fish found around different Atlantic oceanic islands, looking at how many different species live there, how many fish there are and the roles they play in keeping the ecosystem healthy. By studying both the conditions in which fish live and the characteristics of different species, we can better understand why certain fish are found in particular places and how their roles in the marine environment may change because of human activities and climate change.

The Mission Atlantic project gave our team its first opportunity to carry out fieldwork on St Helena in 2023, leading to new partnerships focused on the island’s unique reef fish. This latest visit provided an excellent opportunity to share knowledge and strengthen the skills of St Helena Marine Centre staff through practical training in fish sampling and laboratory techniques.”

With the visiting scientists now back in Brazil, MFCS will continue the research in collaboration with their team. Samples collected during the project will be sent to their laboratory in Brazil for further study, helping us learn more about St Helena’s unique marine life and how best to protect it for future generations.



PUBLIC TALK: ATLANTIC OCEANIC ISLANDS AND LONG-TERM MONITORING

On Thursday 27 August, one of the visiting researchers, Carlos ‘Cadu’ Ferreira, delivered a public talk at the Museum exploring the importance of Atlantic oceanic islands for marine conservation.



ST PAUL’S ARCHIPELAGO
CRÉDIT: WIKIPEDIA



FERNANDO DE NORONHA
ARCHIPELAGO
CREDIT: MISSION BLUE



ROCAS ATOLL
CREDIT: WIKIPEDIA



TRINDADE ISLAND
CREDIT: WIKIPEDIA



ST HELENA ISLAND

The presentation covered how oceanic islands formed, how their distinctive plants and animals evolved, and what makes these ecosystems unique. Using examples from Brazil and St Helena, Carlos introduced Brazil’s long-term ecological monitoring programme (PELD-ILOC) and discussed how research on oceanic islands can help scientists understand changes in biodiversity and the marine environment.

Other topics included the Mid-Atlantic Ridge, endemic wildlife and island ecosystems, as well as current and future research on St Helena’s reefs.

The talk highlighted how oceanic islands provide valuable opportunities to study nature over time, helping scientists understand how species and ecosystems respond to environmental changes, including climate change.



HAPPY MARINE PROTECTED AREAS DAY 2026

Celebrated annually on 1 August, MPA Day raises awareness of Marine Protected Areas and their role in ocean conservation, sustainable development and community well-being. It also highlights the importance of working together to protect our oceans for future generations. Read more about this initiative here: <https://mpaday.org/>

St Helena is home to one of the world’s largest MPAs, so the island was proud to take part in this global observance. MFCS marked the occasion with a quiz night at Ann’s Place, in partnership with the recently established Island Minds Foundation, which raises awareness of mental health on St Helena.

Reflecting the 2026 MPA Day theme, “Ocean protection needs human connection”, the quiz celebrated the connection between St Helena’s community and the ocean. Questions covered St Helena’s MPA, the species found in its marine environment, and the island’s culture and traditions connected to the sea. A bonus round featuring sounds from within St Helena’s MPA proved particularly enjoyable and was very well received by participants.



The event attracted 12 teams, bringing together more than 60 people, and raised over £230 for the Island Minds Foundation. It was a great opportunity to bring people together, celebrate St Helena’s marine environment and recognise the important role the ocean plays in the physical and mental well-being of the island’s community.



ST HELENA JOINS HAPPYWHALE: CITIZEN SCIENCE FOR MARINE MAMMALS



St Helena has joined Happywhale, a global citizen science project that connects members of the public with marine mammal researchers. The project turns photographs and sighting records submitted by the public into valuable information that helps scientists better understand and protect marine mammals. Read more about this project here: <https://happywhale.com/home>

St Helena has been recording marine sightings for a long time, with an established database that has been used by the island since 1999. This database has now transitioned to the online platform iRecord St Helena, making it easier to record and share observations of the island’s wildlife. Joining Happywhale provides another opportunity to contribute to marine research, with a particular focus on identifying and tracking individual marine mammals.

Happywhale started with focusing on identifying individual humpback whales using photographs of the undersides of their tails, which have distinctive patterns, much like fingerprints. By matching photographs over time, researchers can track where individual whales travel and identify areas they regularly visit.

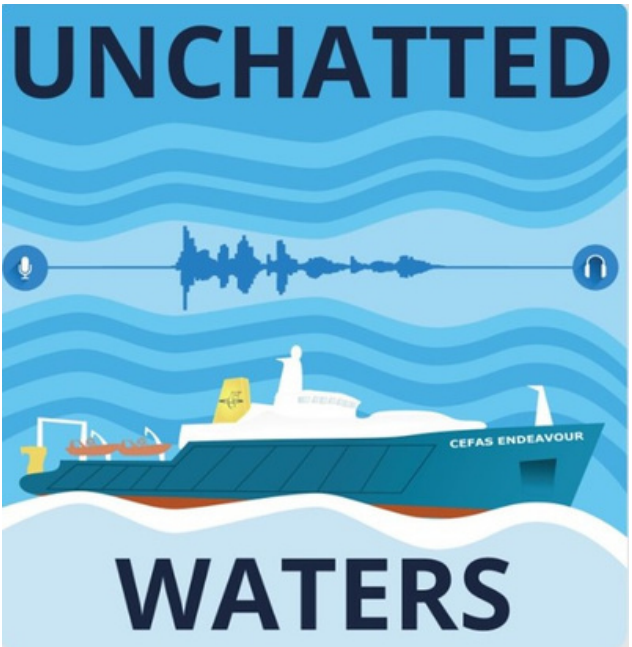


The project has since expanded to include photographs and sightings of many marine mammal species, sharing this information with scientists around the world. Repeated sightings can help researchers understand migration patterns, identify important habitats, monitor population trends and learn more about marine mammal survival, all without disturbing or handling the animals.

St Helena’s waters are visited by a variety of marine mammals, and islanders and visitors can help contribute to a wider understanding of these animals by sharing photographs of whale and dolphin sightings through Happywhale. Together, these efforts help turn local observations into valuable information for marine research and conservation.

UNCHATTED WATERS PODCAST

Cefas’ ‘Unchatted Waters’ podcast explores a range of marine science topics, from fisheries and the deep sea to marine biodiversity, food security and ecosystem health. Hosted by fisheries scientist and science communicator Kirsty Bradley, the podcast uses accessible conversations, personal stories and practical examples to make complex scientific topics engaging and understandable for a wider audience. A recent episode shines a spotlight on the people behind marine science in St Helena and the Cayman Islands, exploring why understanding remote island environments matters to local communities and the wider marine environment.





Representing St Helena in the episode was Leeann Henry, our Senior Marine and Fisheries Conservation Assistant, who has worked within the Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section for 17 years!

Listen to the episode to hear Leeann share more about St Helena’s marine environment and the work being done to understand and protect it:
<https://www.cefas.co.uk/news-and-resources/podcasts/unchatted-waters/>
(Episode 23)

A RARE VISITOR TO ST HELENA’S WATERS



ATLANTIC MANTA RAY
CREDIT: SHARKSANDRAYS.COM

St Helena recently welcomed a very special visitor to its waters: a manta ray! The exact species has yet to be confirmed, and further identification is needed to determine whether it was an oceanic or atlantic manta ray.

While Chilean devil rays are seen around St Helena throughout the year, manta rays are much less commonly encountered. As generally shy animals, they are rarely spotted around the island, making this a particularly exciting and unusual observation.

Sightings like this highlight just how much there is still to discover about the marine life in St Helena’s waters.



OCEANIC MANTA RAY
CREDIT: SHARKSANDRAYS.COM



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