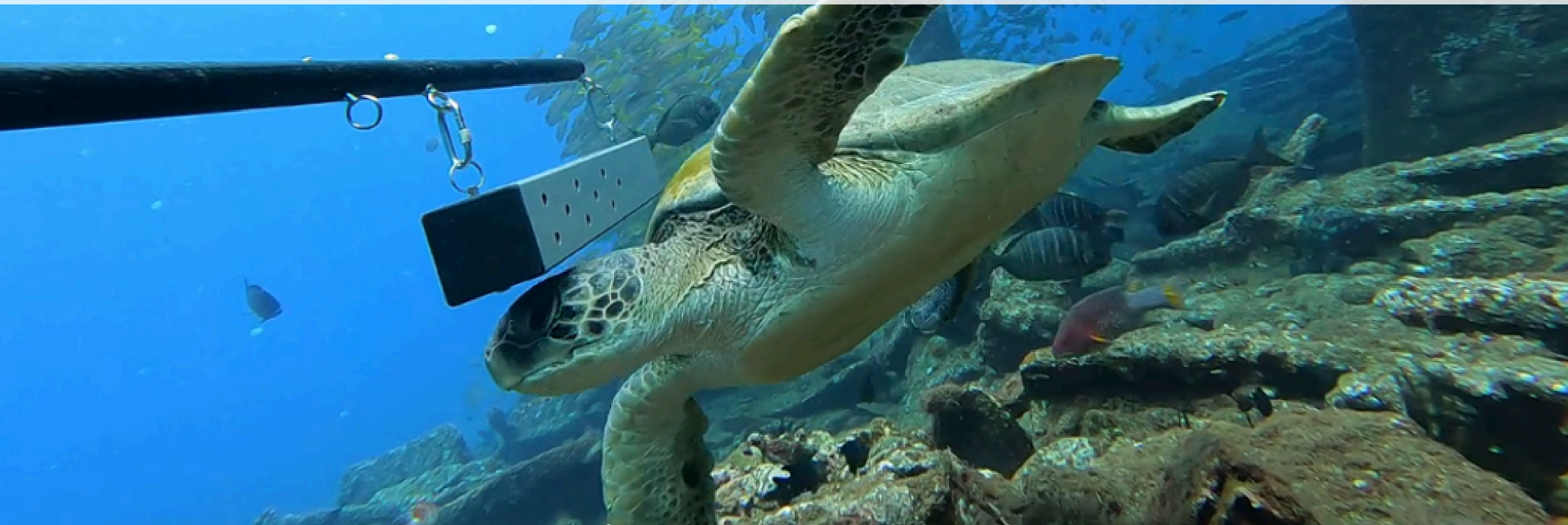




# THE MARINE AND FISHERIES CONSERVATION SECTION QUARTERLY CATCH

JANUARY - MARCH 2025

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Welcome to the very first edition of the Marine and Fisheries Conservation Section **QUARTERLY CATCH** for **JANUARY TO MARCH 2025!**

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

**Some of the highlights from the MFCS active work areas, this quarter, include:**

In January, the use of Baited Remote Underwater Video Systems (BRUVS), for monitoring marine species and their habitats. The team also received valuable training on oceanographic equipment, which will help track important environmental data of our ocean.

During February, we bid farewell to Kirsty Jones, our dedicated Marine and Fisheries Conservation Officer and we wish her the best in her next endeavours. Additionally, the team underwent training in tuna satellite tagging, which will help collect more detailed data on tuna movements, growth, and behaviour. As well as training in planning and completing zooplankton surveys to improve our understanding of key marine species, which are critical to local fisheries.

March was a very exciting month as, Marine Awareness Week 2025 (MAW25), with a focus on climate change and its impact on St Helena's marine species, was a great success, engaging the local community and raising awareness of the importance of marine conservation.

Lastly, on-going projects including, the grouper tagging project continues to monitor the population and movement of this vital species, while lobster tagging surveys are helping track the abundance and breeding cycles of the brown spiny lobster and red slipper lobster. St Helena's commitment to sustainable fishing practices also remains strong through the fisheries observer programme, which ensures that all fishing activities comply with international regulations to safeguard our marine resources for future generations.

## IN THIS ISSUE

BRUVS (BAITED REMOTE UNDERWATER VIDEO SYSTEMS)

OCEANOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT TRAINING

FAREWELL AND BEST WISHES TO KIRSTY JONES

TUNA SATELLITE TAGGING TRAINING

ZOOPLANKTON (FISH EGGS AND LARVAE) SURVEYS

MARINE AWARENESS WEEK 2025 #MAW25

GROUPE TAGGING

LOBSTER MONITORING

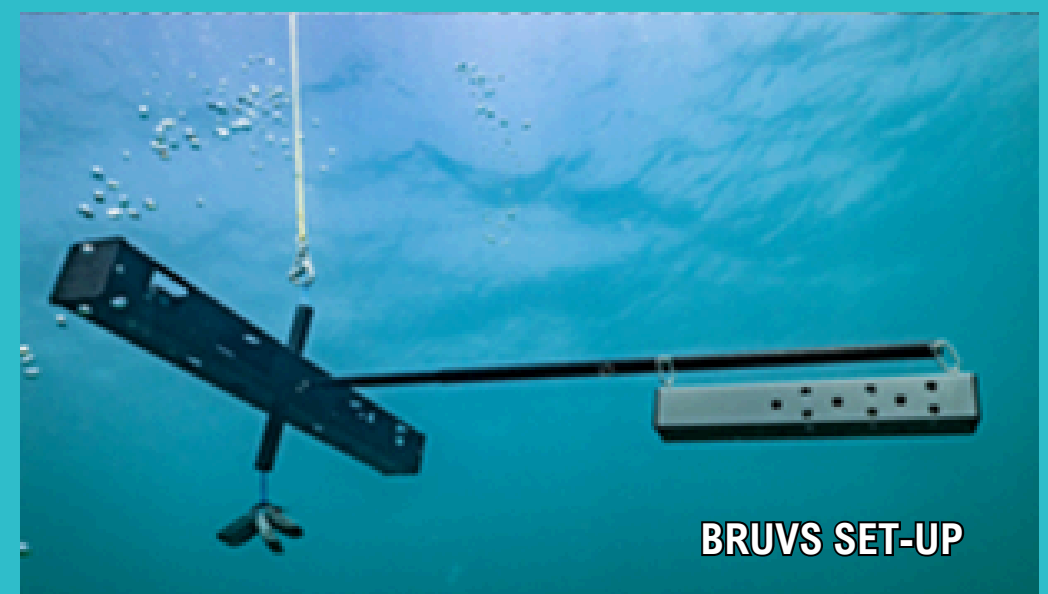
FISHERIES OBSERVER PROGRAMME



## BRUVS (BAITED REMOTE UNDERWATER VIDEO SYSTEMS)

BRUVS are stationary camera stations deployed on the seafloor (benthic) or suspended in open water (pelagic). They use bait to attract fish, recording species that pass by the camera. This non-invasive tool allows scientists to study marine life without human interference, providing reliable, repeatable data on species presence, numbers, and habitat use. BRUVS are especially useful for large-scale studies, offering a lasting visual record of marine species while minimising environmental impact.

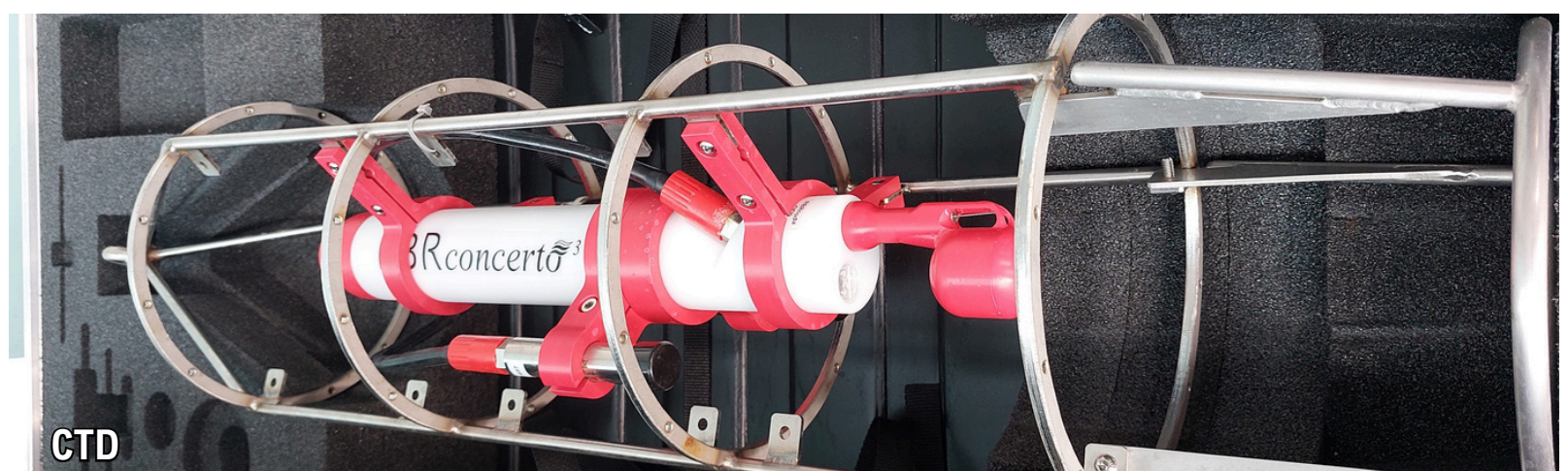
In St Helena, BRUVS surveys are used to monitor inshore waters, focusing on key semi-pelagic species e.g. and their population, movement, and habitat. These studies support the management of our MPA.



## OCEANOGRAPHIC EQUIPMENT TRAINING

MFCS recently received training from the Centre for Environment, Fisheries, and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) on new oceanographic equipment. This included a CTD (Conductivity, Temperature, and Depth), Mini DOT (Dissolved Oxygen and Temperature) loggers, and HOBO loggers, which monitor ocean conditions of water temperature, salinity, dissolved oxygen, and chlorophyll-a levels around our MPA.

These tools support long-term monitoring stations that track environmental changes around St Helena, with in situ temperature data recorded since 2015. The information gathered helps scientists understand how the marine environment is changing over time, providing valuable data to guide future climate change resilience strategies.



## FAREWELL AND BEST WISHES TO KIRSTY JONES

It is with mixed emotions that we say goodbye to Kirsty Jones, our Marine and Fisheries Conservation Officer. While we are sad to see her go, we are incredibly grateful for her leadership, guidance, and dedication. Her contributions have left a lasting impact on the team, and we truly appreciate everything she has done.

As she moves on to new endeavours, we wish her all the best and have no doubt she will continue to achieve great things. Though she will be missed, we look forward to welcoming a new Conservation Officer who will help lead us into the future.

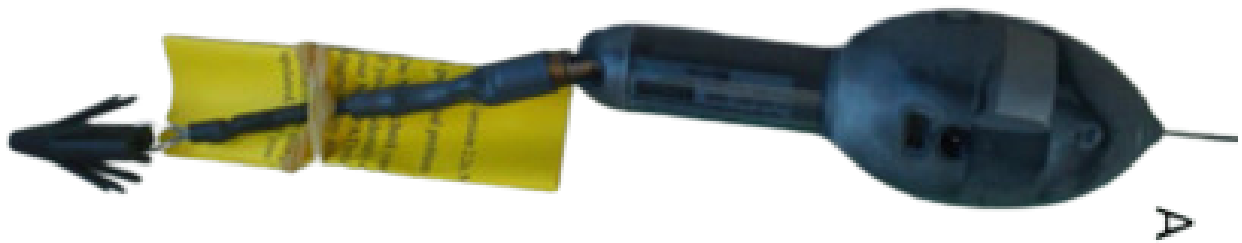




# TUNA SATELLITE TAGGING TRAINING

Satellite tags provide a major improvement over conventional tags, offering detailed insights into tuna movements and behaviour. While conventional tags only provide basic data, such as tagging and retrieval locations and growth information, satellite tags offer much more precise tracking, including:

- Estimated coordinates: Where the fish has travelled
- Depth information: How deep the fish is swimming
- Speed patterns: How fast the fish is moving
- Behavioural insights: Activity levels, by combining other data with the above information, we can determine how and why the fish is using the water column



It is essential that the MFCS team have the skills and knowledge to deploy these valuable tags. For future fisheries research, having the in-house capability to deploy this equipment efficiently and effectively is crucial. To support this, Cefas provided specialised training, ensuring the MFCS team is fully equipped to use this technology for successful tagging and data collection.



TAG IMPLANT



SUTURING THE INCISION



PREPPING THE TUNA FOR RELEASE

## ZOOPLANKTON (FISH EGGS & LARVAE) SURVEYS



COLLECTED ZOOPLANKTON SAMPLE

Zooplankton are small animals in the ocean that serve as a crucial food source for many fish species. They include the eggs and larvae (also known as ichthyoplankton) of commercially important fish, which are early stages in their life cycle. As such, zooplankton play a key role in the growth and survival of fish populations vital to fisheries.

As part of a newly established project, Cefas provided training to the MFCS team on how to process zooplankton samples by extracting and identifying the eggs and larvae of fish. To collect these samples, the MFCS team uses a method called a plankton net tow. This involves towing a 5 micron (0.5 millimeter) size net through the water to capture tiny marine organisms, including zooplankton. The samples are then processed in the lab to identify and study these early life stages.

These zooplankton surveys will provide valuable data to improve our understanding of the marine environment. They will also support fisheries management and stock assessments, ensuring sustainable practices and the long-term health of fish populations.



FISH LARVAE



FISH EGGS



CRUSTACEAN LARVAE



CEPHALOPOD LARVAE



# MARINE AWARENESS WEEK 2025

Marine Awareness Week (#MAW25), a longstanding initiative first launched in 2003, took place at the Museum of St Helena from March 17th to 21st, 2025. This year's theme focused on climate change, with particular emphasis on its impact on St Helena's MPA.



Over 500 students from primary and secondary schools participated in the event, with boat trips being reintroduced this year - an exciting opportunity for many students who had never been on a boat or experienced the marine environment from that perspective.

The event, funded by the UK Government's Blue Belt Programme, featured a presentation by Dr Susana Lincoln of Cefas, who shared findings from a four-year study on the impacts of climate change on key marine species in St Helena. These findings were summarised in the report titled "Climate Projections and Future Thermal Suitability Assessment for Priority Marine Species in St Helena".

Furthermore, in support of the Career Access St Helena (CASH) Careers Fair Day, held during the same week as MAW25, the MFCS team provided visitors with an opportunity to learn more about career pathways in marine conservation, aiming to inform people about various ways to engage in the field.



Additionally, we would like to congratulate all the winners and participants of the competitions held during MAW25. These included the Shop Window Decorating Competition, where displays highlighted the critical issue of climate change and its impact on the Earth. The winners were Solomons, DIY in first place, followed by Solomons, The Star in second place, and Solomons, Greenlands in third.

With 101 total entries in the MAW25 Poster Competition, we are thrilled to announce that we had 12 winners! Each of the entries showcased incredible creativity and highlighted what the children had learned from MAW25 about climate change and the actions they can take to lessen their carbon footprint.

From St Paul's Primary, the winners were Halle Herne, Sharna Henry, and Tiago Benjamin.

From Pilling Primary, the winners were the Reception Class, Rutendo Nayoto, and Hari Stead.

From Harford Primary, the winners were Olivia Williams, O'Maine Murawu, Maribel Francis, Ella-Rose Isaac, Isabella Donovan, and Hollie Benjamin



Finally, we would like to extend a huge thank you to everyone who made this week a success - to the MFCS team for all their hard work, the museum staff for allowing their venue to host MAW25 and Enchanted Isle Ltd. for providing the incredible marine tour boat trips, as well as all of the attendees.



## GROUPE TAGGING

The rock hind grouper (*Epinephelus adscensionis*), locally known as Jack, is an important species for local fisheries, and it is being continuously studied to better understand its population, growth, reproductive biology, and movement patterns. By using conventional tags; small, visible markers attached to the fish, we can collect valuable data on the grouper's movements and growth. This research focuses on monitoring the population abundance of the species, which will help inform management measures and ensure the long-term sustainability of the grouper stock within St Helena's MPA.



## LOBSTER MONITORING



Long-term lobster monitoring surveys, initiated in 2018 and supported by a previous Darwin project, are being expanded. These surveys focus on two commercially important species: the brown spiny lobster *Panulirus echinatus*, locally known as "crayfish", and the endemic red slipper lobster *Scyllarides obtusus*, locally known as "stump".

The surveys, which take place during the breeding seasons in November, January, and March, aim to gather data on lobster abundance, breeding cycles, movement, and growth.



This data is collected using conventional tags which are small, visible markers attached to the lobsters. The surveys are carried out through a combination of diving and placing lobster pots, circular, baited traps used to catch lobsters, in relation to lobster densities, habitat type and depth.

## FISHERIES OBSERVER PROGRAMME

As part of the commitment to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT), all UK Overseas territories are required to maintain at least 5% observer coverage on all fishing activities.

This means that a trained marine vessel observer is present on fishing boats to monitor fishing operations. The observers are responsible for recording important data, such as the species and quantity of fish caught, the methods and effort used for fishing, and biological sampling such as length, sex and maturity stage.



Their work helps ensure compliance with ICCAT's recommendations on sustainable fishing practices and contributes to better fisheries management.