

MILITARY TEAM WIN THE DUKE OF EDINBURGH'S PRIZE FOR THE BRITISH SUB-AQUA CLUB

The Joint Services Shark Tagging Team (JSSTT) comprising fifteen military personnel representing the Army, Navy and RAF has been awarded the prestigious Duke of Edinburgh's Prize for the British Sub-Aqua Club for their work tagging critically endangered sharks and turtles around Cocos Island, Costa Rica. The team were presented with the Award by HRH The Duke of Edinburgh at Buckingham Palace on 3rd November. When he was President of the British Sub-Aqua Club the Duke offered this annual prize for the best underwater scientific project carried out by members. This is now the premier award made by the Club.

The Cocos Island National Park is a UNESCO World Heritage site, 535km off the Pacific coast of Costa Rica. The expedition which took place last summer was the third of its kind undertaken by the team and was known as Exercise Jurassic Shark 3. The team successfully tagged 15 sharks, bringing the total number of sharks tagged by the team to 50. The tags send signals to underwater acoustic receivers allowing the movements of the sharks to be recorded. During the expedition the team also downloaded data from four existing acoustic receivers and were also able to extend their work to turtles, measuring, weighing and tagging 12 Eastern Pacific green turtles.

The expedition was led by Major Andy Reid AGC(ETS), who has now been to Buckingham Palace a total of five times for his leadership of Joint Service expeditions of this nature – including all 3 shark tagging expeditions. Major Reid said, "It is a great honour to receive this award from HRH The Duke of Edinburgh. I feel that this is real recognition of the importance of this unique and very special project. An expedition such as this is all about experiencing controlled exposure to risk with the aim of developing the kind of leadership, teamwork, courage and co-operation that is vital to military operational capability. The expedition involved two important conservation projects, both of which exploit the skills of a Joint Services team to best effect. Both sharks and turtles are in dramatic decline around the world

and this is our chance to make a difference by establishing those parts of their habitat that most need protection.”

Other members of the expedition team included:

Sqn Ldr Stuart Edmondson (RAF)

Major Mark Foster (Army)

Major Peter Hale (Army)

Major Ian Macfarlane (Army)

Major Ross McLeod (Army)

Major Tom Wood (Army)

Major Caroline Zelaya (Army)

Captain Simon Griffiths (Army)

Colour Sergeant Gareth Thomas (Royal Marines)

Sergeant Jenny Beck (Army)

Sergeant Andrew Jackson (Army)

Corporal Phillip Blake (RAF)

Corporal Aaron Thomas (RAF)

Petty Officer Nurse Nick Ward (Royal Navy)

Dr Alex Antoniou (Civilian Scientist - USA)

Mr Allan Bolaños (Civilian Scientist – Costa Rica)

The next JSSTT expedition will be delayed while Major Reid deploys to Afghanistan but is expected to involve tagging bull sharks in the rivers of the Corcovado National Park, Costa Rica – described by National Geographic as “the most biologically intense places on earth.” Major Reid noted that “bull sharks are one of the most challenging sharks it is possible to work with; however, it is the crocodiles that most concern us at this stage. This will be a remote, demanding and totally unique expedition that will really test the military team.”

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