
Montserrat Ridge to Reef Conservation Project (MRRCP)

Monthly Project Update

May 2015

Location:

The Taj, Old Towne, Montserrat

Project Scientist: Susan Robertson



MRRCP Project Aim

The Montserrat Ridge to Reef Conservation Project (MRRCP) is a collaborative project to support the sustainable use of Montserrat's natural resources. The programme encompasses scientific surveys of coral reefs and other marine resources, as well as terrestrial species and habitats focussed primarily in the Centre Hills. The MRRCP provides training and conservation education opportunities for local Montserratians, as part of an integrated programme to develop local capacity and ensure the long-term protection and sustainable use of natural resources throughout the country. Coral Cay Conservation (CCC) is working at the invitation of and in partnership with the Government of Montserrat and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. Coral Cay Conservation provides the resources to help sustain livelihoods and alleviate poverty through the protection, restoration and management of coral reefs and tropical forests.

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Latest News



Presentation time! Courtesy of Harry Woodger

CCC opened the doors of the site in Old Towne to the Island of Montserrat this month with an Open Day. The event was to encourage anyone on the island to come along and find out what CCC do on a daily basis both on the terrestrial and the marine side of the project. We were also giving anyone, but particularly prospective scholars, the chance to have a try dive in the onsite pool. The day involved a presentation by the project scientist, Susan Robertson, about what CCC has achieved so far with the project. The

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presentation was followed by an explanation of scuba diving equipment from Claire Ogg. People had a chance to speak to all the members of staff and volunteers on site and the presentation was repeated in the afternoon for some later arrivals. We were also joined by a number of children who, in addition to enjoying some time splashing around in the pool, also had a chance to partake in a craft session.



Try dive in the pool – Courtesy of Susan Robertson

Story of the Month

The 25th May was International Children's Day and CCC were delighted to be asked to be part of the event, which was held at Moose's Place in Little Bay. The event allowed children to try out several different activities organised by different groups and individuals. These included face painting, dancing, music and snorkelling. CCC gave the children an opportunity to breathe underwater from a scuba tank. The children managed to keep their feet on dry land as we used a large tank which they could dunk their heads into. They also had the chance to write and draw whilst breathing underwater



Blowing bubbles and writing underwater!

using a normal pencil and an underwater slate just like the staff and volunteers do on the marine surveys when they record the data. The final event of the day was CCC's puppet show Danny's Dilemma which was enjoyed by adults and children alike. The staff and volunteers, several of whom had only been on Montserrat for a few days, all enjoyed taking part and seeing the enjoyment on the kids' faces. Thanks to everyone for helping to organise the event. CCC hope to be invited to join again next year.

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Children watching *Danny's Dilemma* – Courtesy of Gill Leeder

Survey Update

Survey background: The only comprehensive survey of Montserrat's coral reefs and other marine resources to date was carried out prior to the eruption of the Soufrière Hills volcano. CCC will be conducting enhanced Reef Check surveys around the island to provide an overview of the current status of the coral reefs of Montserrat and map marine habitats. Terrestrial survey work will build on research carried out during the Centre Hills Project (2005-2008) and focus on three main areas: 1) mapping invasive plant species; 2) surveys of resident and migrant birds; 3) reptile and amphibian surveys. If you would like more information on our surveying please contact our Project Scientist.

Marine Surveys

From non-divers to trained surveyors in just three weeks! At CCC we take volunteers who have never dived before and put them through intensive dive and science training. After three weeks of hard work they will be qualified to start surveying the coral reefs around Montserrat. This requires a lot of time, hard work and commitment from both the volunteers and all the staff on site, but everyone enjoys seeing a new team of surveyors at work. The latest team have conducted some surveys at Lime Kiln Bay and have been assisting the science staff in looking for suitable survey sites at Carrs Bay. We have also trained our first ever two person survey team on Montserrat.



The new survey team prepares to go for a dive

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Terrestrial Surveys

The terrestrial project has primarily focused on bird surveys this month but we have also conducted some successful reptile surveys. For the second month in a row we caught a Turnip Tailed Gecko (*Thecadactylus rapicauda*) on a nocturnal survey. It is always great for the volunteers to have a chance to see these beautiful creatures up close. On another nocturnal survey we identified 30 different individuals of a variety of species, including several Montserrat Anoles (*Anolis lividus*), although unfortunately, no Lesser Antillean Tree Frogs (*Eleutherodactylus johnstonei*) were spotted. This particular species is rarely seen at present; probably due to the very dry conditions as we wait for the start of this year's rains. In addition to rare amphibians, we have also had a rare migrant bird sighting on the island, much to SO Sean's delight. Whilst walking the Rendezvous trail with volunteer Astrid he heard a bird song he was unfamiliar with. When he then looked up he was thrilled to discover a clear view of a Black- Throated Green Warbler (*Dendroica virens*)!



Black-Throated Green Warbler (Dendroica virens)

Education and Community Projects

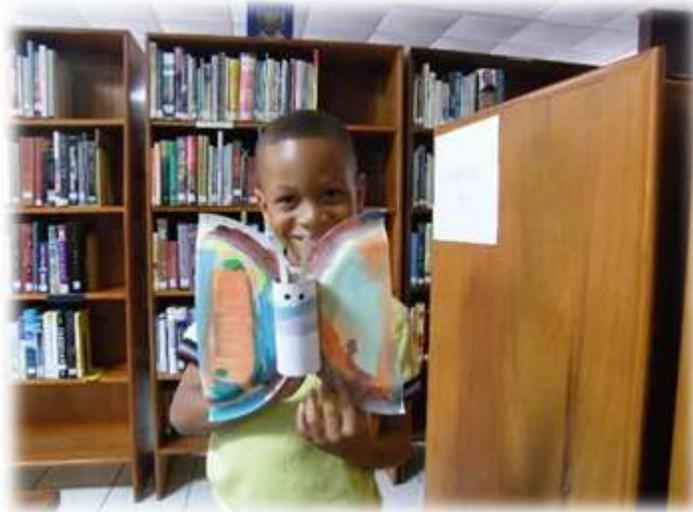
The library sessions this month have been terrestrial focused with the team teaching the children about the amazing world of plants and a group of organisms with a close relationship to the flora of the island – the wonderful world of creepy crawlies – insects!

Science Officer Sean Smith initially had a tough time convincing the children about how interesting plants were, but by the end of the session they somewhat reluctantly agreed that some plants were cool! The event was held the day before Mother's Day, so following the presentation the children made flower bracelets that they could give as gifts to their mothers.



Girls at the library session show off their flower bracelets with SO Sean

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The next session was taken by Science Officer Mike Soltysiak who got things kicked off with a whirlwind definition of what an insect actually is – among other things showing the kids that those bugs with too many legs (spiders, centipedes) or too few (worms) are not actually insects (which have 6). The kids were perplexed by the question of whether caterpillars (many legs) were part of the group until they remembered that they become butterflies which do have 6! Following this Mike tried to combat some of little ones distaste of insects

by showing them the incredibly useful products that we can gain from insects such as honey and silk – evidently unsuccessfully when one girl announced she would never wear silk again. Once the presentation was over the children went on to their favourite part – craft time! This time they were making cardboard butterflies – both as larger toys and as clips and badges. With a smaller than usual cohort due to the Bank Holiday Weekend, the staff and volunteers of Coral Cay had the chance to make some of their own – though they were definitely eclipsed by the kids’ magnificent efforts!

Scholarship News

Each month CCC offers Montserratian nationals who display an ambition to study and protect the vital natural ecosystems of Montserrat an opportunity to take part in one of our Conservation Scholarships. The programmes last for one month and involve training the student in SCUBA diving or jungle skills. They then take part in an intensive Skills Development Programme giving them the knowledge and expertise to conduct ecological surveys.

Creature of the Month!

The Coral Cay Creature of the Month for May 2015 is the American Kestrel, *Falco sparverius*. This Falcon is the smallest in the northern hemisphere and is found throughout North and South America. The bird is relatively common throughout Montserrat, preferring the drier open areas where it can hunt small reptiles, amphibians and young Agouti (a type of rodent). Regularly spotted perching on wires or poles the Kestrel will commonly hover in place before folding its wings and rapidly swooping down on unlucky prey. Kestrels hide any surplus food in trees or bushes, saving the meat for times when hunting is more difficult. To help with hunting Kestrel's can see UV light, they regularly use this skill to track small rodents by the trail of urine they leave behind (YUCK!).

CCC terrestrial volunteers identify the Kestrel from its distinct facial patterning and beautiful colouration. We are lucky to share Montserrat with this predatory bird year round and they are always a delight to watch!!!



Learn More!

To learn more about the MRRCP, to join the expedition, or to find out about local Scholarships, visit www.coralcay.org.

For news and updates from our projects around the world visit us on Facebook:
www.facebook.com/pages/Coral-Cay-Conservation-The-Official-Site/274436156676