

## DARWIN 2

Alternative subtitles:

DIVING WHERE NO WOMAN HAS GONE BEFORE...

DIVERS SURVEY NIGHTINGALE AND INACCESSIBLE.

Between October and December 2007, three divers, Sue Scott, Geoff Fridjhon and Fiona Crouch, surveyed the marine life around Nightingale and Inaccessible, areas which have rarely been dived. During very successful surveys, we took many photographs and completed species lists and community descriptions at each site, and brought back specimens for later identification by experts. All this information will be written up, hopefully in an easily digestible form, and made available for Tristans by the end of the project. After discussions with teachers, we will also be producing appropriate teaching materials for the school.

We were land-based on Nightingale, diving each day from a Zodiac inflatable. Because there is no safe mooring on Nightingale, the boat was hauled up the landing after each dive by 6 strong Tristan men (Trevor, Frankie, Gerry, Matthew, Wayne and Graham), help that was vital to the survey. Dodging winds from all directions, we dived 11 sites all around Nightingale, including some spectacular vertical rock walls covered with jewel anemones and huge barnacles on the very exposed southwest. On dives near the landings we were accompanied by seals and penguins, and the occasional rock shark. Being able to see the coast of Nightingale with its beautiful colours close-up from a small boat is a rare privilege. However the weather was not brilliant for this survey, and after 8 days we were glad to be rescued by the Atlantic Dawn crewed by Neil, Duncan and Leon, escorted by the small RIB.

The only practical way to survey a number of sites around Inaccessible is to work from a live-aboard vessel. The Edinburgh was ideal for this, but we had to fit in with the fishing by being dropped over the side with our small boats and diving gear at 5am each morning, and not returning to the mother-ship until 2-3pm. This meant being up at 4am, then waiting half an hour or so for the sun to rise before it was light enough to dive, a novel experience! After 5 days of this we were all completely exhausted, but thanks to Ovenstones' support and perfect weather we managed 15 sites all around the island, a highly successful result – thanks, Clarence. As well as the Edinburgh as a base, the company gave us use of a launch, complete with crewman Livingstone. His excellent knowledge of the inshore depths around Inaccessible proved invaluable when our hand-held echo sounder packed up. If he said the seabed would be 10 fathoms down, it was! It was also useful talking to the fishermen about the animals that come up in the crayfish traps from deeper water. A highlight of diving Inaccessible was luxuriant beds of beautiful seaweeds in shallow water, and a close (but not too close!) encounter with a large electric ray, only recorded once before on Tristan. As with Nightingale, the most exposed southwest corner provided the most scenic dives, with vertical cliffs dropping into deep water, and small caves encrusted with jewel anemones, trumpet anemones, sponges and young crayfish.

Between surveys on the islands, we dived several sites around Trypot near where the rig stranded in 2006, to look for signs of alien marine life that might have jumped ship from the rig. Fortunately, we found none, but it may take years before any settlers are detected. Tim Andrew, director of Envirofish Africa, joined us on these dives. Neil, Joe, Duncan, Jack and Leon handled the police RIB for us – an ideal diving platform.

An essential part of the Darwin 2 project is to pass on skills in identifying, surveying and recording marine life, so that eventually this work can be done by Tristanians. We brought a considerable amount of diving and survey equipment to leave on Tristan, and an appeal in DIVE magazine produced donations of around 35 wetsuits. We managed a few sessions of snorkelling and try-dives in the pool, for schoolchildren, young people and the Darwin team. We also gave talks to the school and the community, and showed some of the ladies how to press the beautiful Tristan seaweeds, to make cards and pictures, hopefully for sale to tourists. However there was not time to complete the training element of the project during this trip (due to a shortened trip, and further hindered by the dreaded Tristan virus), so we are hoping this can be completed in a final phase next summer.

We are indebted to many Tristans for help contributing to the success of this survey, especially James who has encouraged the project from the start, and Trevor who organised the survey logistics. Thanks to everyone for making us welcome on Tristan – your hospitality is legendary!

## DARWIN 2

‘Darwin 2’ is a follow-up to the original Darwin biodiversity project, concentrating on the sea rather than the land. It is funded by the British government through DEFRA, and administered by the RSPB. Tristan’s sealife is special, with many animals and seaweeds found nowhere else, while the seabed communities are still relatively ‘pristine’ and undamaged from the pollution and damaging fishing methods used in many other parts of the world. Tristan has a lucrative and well-managed crayfish fishery. However background information on species and ecosystems is largely lacking, inaccessible or outdated. The project aims to make existing knowledge accessible to Tristans, and to acquire new data from unsurveyed areas, in order to inform decisions on sustainable use of Tristan’s marine resources.