

## Waitt Institute team in the water and in the classroom last week on Montserrat

Thursday, 7 May 2015

### *Washington, DC (Waitt Institute)*

WASHINGTON, DC – The [Waitt Institute](#) was on Montserrat last week working on the next steps of [Blue Halo Montserrat](#). The Initiative was formally launched in February 2015 when a Memorandum of Understanding [was signed between the Waitt Institute and government of Montserrat](#).

Andy Estep, Waitt Institute Science Manager, spent the week in and on the water SCUBA diving on reefs around the island. While typical signs of coral reef degradation were present, Estep was pleased to see a high level of biodiversity and signs of growth and recovery among the coral reefs and fish populations of Montserrat. Estep and the Institute's Program Manager, Stephanie Roach, briefed Minister Hogan, the Director of Agriculture, Melissa O'Garro, and Chief Fisheries Officer, Alwyn Ponteen, on their initial findings, and discussed future research needs and plans and next steps for Blue Halo Montserrat.

Estep was joined by the Institute's Program Manager Stephanie Roach, Dr. Philip Matich of Florida International University, and two graduate students from Scripps Institution of Oceanography (SIO). The five-person dive team collected nearly 100,000 photographs during 50 dives to assess the health of coral reefs around Montserrat. These photographs are part of a larger effort by SIO scientists to [monitor coral reef health around the world](#) utilizing a state of the art technology that creates life-sized photos of coral reefs. The data collection method and photography technology, known as photomosaics, were demonstrated to the Montserrat fisheries staff.

The dive team also removed 43 lionfish from the reefs during their diving activities. A special thanks to Captain Shawn O'Garro for providing a safe and efficient research platform and sharing his local expertise to assist the Waitt divers in identifying dive locations that matched the needs of this research. Also a special thank you to SCUBA Montserrat for coordinating with our team.

In addition to SCUBA diving activities, Stephanie Roach, Waitt Institute Program Manager, met with Permanent Secretary of Education, Philip Chambers, and Director of Education, Glenn Francis, as well as primary and secondary schools to see how the Waitt Institute can be of assistance and support ocean education on Montserrat. This will include both classroom education as well as hands-on experiences in the field.

Roach also coordinated with local education and outdoor groups to explore the possibilities of setting up kids ocean summer camps that will include snorkeling, field trips, games, and many educational activities. Summer opportunities for students would directly connect to efforts already in place on Montserrat, such as Veda Wade and the kids snorkeling program at AQUA Montserrat.

The Waitt Institute's legal team from the [Environmental Law Institute](#) also visited the island recently for meetings with government officials to discuss the legal framework for ocean management.

The Blue Halo Initiative is a collaboration between the Waitt Institute and partner governments to envision, create, and implement comprehensive sustainable ocean policies. Blue Halo Montserrat aims

to develop a plan to manage the waters around Montserrat sustainably, profitably, and enjoyably for this and future generations. For more information, visit [Montserrat.WaittInstitute.org](http://Montserrat.WaittInstitute.org).

**Additional information and resources:**

Twitter: [@waittinstitute](https://twitter.com/waittinstitute)

Instagram: [@waittinstitute](https://www.instagram.com/waittinstitute)

Facebook: [facebook.com/waittinstitute](https://facebook.com/waittinstitute)

YouTube: [youtube.com/waittinstitute](https://youtube.com/waittinstitute)

Facebook album with photos: <http://on.fb.me/1ESMYZa>

**For more information or to set up interviews, contact:**

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**Waitt Institute:** The [Waitt Institute](http://waittinstitute.org) endeavors to ensure ecologically, economically, and culturally sustainable use of ocean resources. The Institute partners with governments committed to developing and implementing comprehensive, science-based, community-driven solutions for sustainable ocean management. Our goal is to benefit coastal communities while restoring fish populations and habitats. Our approach is to engage stakeholders, provide the tools needed to design locally appropriate policies, facilitate the policymaking process, and build capacity for effective implementation and long-term success.