

## Queen Mary Expedition Fund Award Report: Honduras

This summer I supported Operation Wallacea with coral reef conservation research in Utila, a Honduras bay island. The coral reefs in this area are under threat from various human influences, such as tourism, warming sea temperatures, plastic pollution, and ocean acidification. Additionally, the mangroves in this area are hugely degraded from human modification. Both coral reef and mangrove environments are incredibly rare ecosystems, providing a diverse range of biodiversity and habitats. Both systems also contribute to coastal flood management of the connecting communities by diffusing wave power and providing protection against erosion.



**View of mainland Honduras from Utila**

Operation Wallacea has been monitoring the coral reefs in this area for over 10 years to provide data and evidence to support the conservation initiatives that are implemented. The monitoring ranges from sea urchin populations, disease, fish behaviour, and coral distribution.

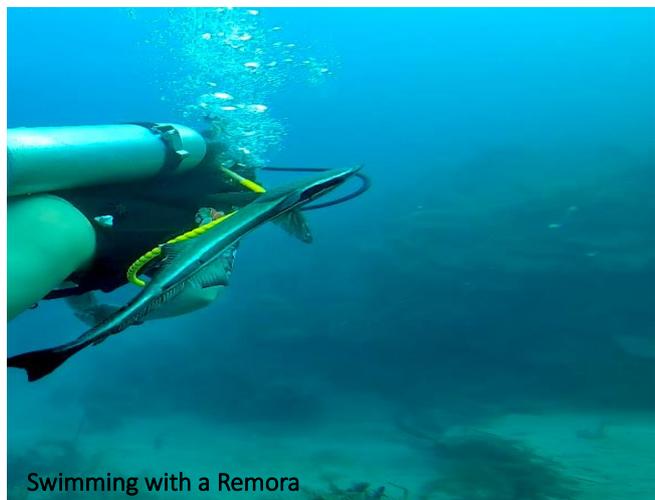
Personally, I spent a month in Utila, and my experience was split into three distinct ventures. The first week I learnt to scuba dive, gaining my PADI open water qualification. This venture opened my mind up to the brilliance and tranquillity that the open ocean offers, enhancing my love for the marine environment. Secondly, I completed a coral reef training course, learning Caribbean fish identification, the pressures facing coral reefs, and key marine research techniques, such as using a quadrat underwater and benthic analysis. The rest of my trip consisted of supporting long-spined sea urchin conservation, which involved measuring urchin populations and habitat at 5, 10, and 15m deep.



### Learning to dive

Overall, the experience provided an invaluable insight into marine conservation and strengthened my appreciation for the natural environment. The expedition supported my degree in water and environmental management by considering a catchment-based approach to water management from source to sea. It also strengthened my field research skills and techniques.

From a non-academic perspective, my time in Honduras allowed me to experience new cultures and people. I also had the chance to learn from industry professionals and discuss topical environmental issues with my peers. I was also fortunate enough to experience diving with some of the most fascinating marine species, such as wild dolphins and eagle rays. A truly unforgettable experience!



As operation Wallacea is a charitable organisation, the trip was fully self-funded. The expedition fund helped reduce the financial strain associated with the expedition, covering the fees for my diving equipment. My time in Honduras was invaluable from both an educational and personal perspective. The expedition provided an opportunity to expand my career prospects whilst also allowing me to engage with a range of unforgettable people. It was truly an experience I will cherish for life.