



Australian Government

Department of Defence

Quail Island Air Weapons Range Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) Hazard Reduction Project

WELCOME

Welcome to the second newsletter for the Quail Island Air Weapons Range Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) Hazard Reduction Project.

This edition includes a project update and describes details of what we've uncovered so far. Unexploded ordnance is not the only thing that needs removing from these beautiful islands – people have been leaving rubbish here for years and we are doing what we can to remove it. We also talk to the scientist in charge of the Charles Darwin University Turtle research project and introduce you to another of our project team members. Please remember, if you have any information you would like to put forward for our next newsletter or if there is any part of the project you would like to read more about, please send your contribution or query through to David Pembroke at 02 6273 0232 or david.pembroke@contentgroup.com.au



Betty Franklin (think N Ink 2011)



PROJECT UPDATE

The visual and shallow search for unexploded ordnance has now concluded on Bare Sand and Djadjalbit islands, with four significant findings of UXO on Bare Sand Island. The search went smoothly and was concluded, without incident, within the agreed time frames.

These two islands are now ready for the second stage of the project, involving deeper ground examination, which may begin before September this year.

Our next task is to complete the first stage of the Quail Island work, before the start of the wet season in October. A physical walkover of Quail Island has been conducted, with the visual and shallow search to begin in early August.

Since the commencement of the hazard reduction project, G-tek Australia Pty Ltd, the contractors for Defence, have conducted briefings about the project for several hundred people who have visited the islands as part of research groups or turtle tours. Participants have welcomed the opportunity to hear about the project and are very supportive of our aims and objectives.

G-tek Australia Pty Ltd has also successfully facilitated trips to the islands for school groups, who have turtle study excursions included in their syllabus.

BOMB DISCOVERY

The shallow and visual search of Bare Sand and Djadjalbit islands, have uncovered four large bombs on Bare Sand Island.

Three 250 pound Aircraft Bombs and a 120 pound Aircraft Bomb were uncovered at depths ranging from 200 millimetres to 700 millimetres.

All four were high explosive bombs and were in fair condition.

The search also uncovered an abundance of empty cartridge cases and projectiles across the islands.

This stage of the operation has confirmed the presence of highly dangerous unexploded ordnance and the need for the hazard reduction project and safety precautions.

RUBBISH CLEARANCE

In addition to their search for unexploded ordnance, the contractors have spent time clearing both Bare Sand and Djadjalbit islands of rubbish and litter. The islands were littered with cans, bottles, plastic wrappers and tent pegs, amongst other things.

Each day, the contractors have loaded full garbage bags onto the helicopter and taken the rubbish back to the mainland with them for proper disposal.

Over the course of the project to date, several cubic metres of rubbish have been removed from the island.



BARE SAND ISLAND SEA TURTLE RESEARCH PROJECT

Bare Sand Island is home to a large population of flatback sea turtles, which nest during the winter months. The waters around Bare Sand Island also support significant numbers of foraging green and hawksbill turtles. All species of sea turtles in Australian waters are listed as either endangered or vulnerable to extinction under the Commonwealth Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999.

Charles Darwin University has been conducting a long term monitoring project on Bare Sand Island since 1990. Researchers and volunteers gather data on the nesting turtles to estimate population size, monitor abundance over time and to determine any threats to survival.

Natural seasonal fluctuations occur amongst the nesting turtles. In high nesting seasons up to 30,000 turtle eggs are laid on Bare Sand Island.

Dr Michael Guinea, Austurtle Zoologist and head of the research project, said he welcomes the unexploded ordnance hazard reduction project.

"I didn't envision that there would be any disruption to the nesting patterns during the reduction project and there has been no impact on the turtles at all," Dr Guinea said. "The preliminary report provided to me by Defence was most receptive and thorough, as was the level of consultation."

Dr Guinea said he was very satisfied with the way the G-tek contractors were working with the researchers and, more importantly, with the turtles.

"I have found the G-tek group to be extremely environmentally sensitive. They are very aware and supportive of our research and are concerned about the welfare of the turtles," Dr Guinea said. "There have been numerous occasions where the guys have returned hatchlings that have lost their way."

"I have nothing but praise for the professional approach from Defence and G-tek. There has been no impact on our research project and the whole experience so far has been very positive," Dr Guinea said.

More information about the Bare Sand Island Sea Turtle Research Project can be found at the AusTurtle website <http://www.austurtle.org.au>

MEET THE TEAM

David Thomas is the surface and sub-surface search technical adviser for the Quail Island Air Weapons Range unexploded ordnance hazard reduction project. A former Army officer, David has been working in the UXO speciality for more than 20 years. He has developed regulatory documentation and guidance material on UXO management for the Department of Defence and is a consultant adviser to the management team of the Defence National UXO Office. As part of a Defence team, David recently undertook an assessment of ordnance contamination on the Kokoda Track for AusAID. David is married with one adult daughter and lives at Port Stephens on the lower north coast of NSW.



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