

Research Cruise (JR15003)- Ascension Island

Day 2

Dr Judith Brown



I had expected an early morning phone call to wake me for the trawl but it was my alarm that went off first. The calm sailing meant a good sleep (though perhaps not as good as Vlad's who when asked if he slept well the reply was "yes like a baby in my early years"!). I headed down to the UIC (Underway Instrumental Control room) which really is like a space ship control centre with tons of monitors and from where the image capture for the underwater camera occurs. I was excited to see the last

of the camera deployments was still underway – this one at 100m and unlike the other four deployments at the deeper depths which were sandy habitat, here we had rock. And wow the diversity was amazing and so interesting to see such life at this depth. When I spoke to Kate about the camera deployments she had done on the graveyard shift she beamed and commented "it's amazing – I got to see parts of the ocean floor that no human eyes have ever seen before". She was delighted to have seen an octopus pass through the camera viewpoint on the seafloor but also loved the anticipation of what you might see as the camera made its way down to the seabed – she'd seen a squid and lots of planktonic life whizzing past. It turned out the delay to the trawl had been an issue with the camera in the dead of night – the cable out and cable speed stopped working making it difficult for the winch man. Several deploy, retrieve, deploys later and a small amount of fiddling found an alternate solution (aka using radios from the working system) which meant the camera deployments could continue– should have called the expert Peter (who designed the whole system) as he fixed it properly in an instant once he was up!



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After the last photo was taken for this survey set it was time to validate what was seen on the images by collecting samples (so we can get accurate identifications of the species seen) and so to the first AGT trawl. The net was lowered over the back of the deck – those involved in steadying it as it was lowered over the side were strapped safely to the deck (so they couldn't fall over) and of course were dressed in their hard hat and safety boots. A pleasant change for those more used to working in the colder far south – people were happy to be wearing shorts rather than padded boiler suits and were enjoying the stable platform with only a gentle rise and fall with the small swells – “we could rename BAS the British Ascension Survey” Peter said smiling as he enjoyed the early morning sun. Once lowered to the seabed the trawl lasts 5 minutes before being winched back to the surface. Like bees round honey an eager crowd rushed to the cod end of the net once it was safely on board to see what delights it held.

Chester undid the end and carefully opened up the net as giant forceps came in from various angles to remove the goodies. Four different species of fish were in the trawl but it wasn't until a wriggly red creature appeared did Chester pronounce “Fantastic!!” as the Ophiuroid expert this brittle star was his speciality and received preferential treatment in the processing lab! Long spine pencil urchins, an intricate cup coral, and anemones were to appear in



the next trawls all to the delight of those crowded round the sorting bench, cameras and sample pots in hand.



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Next came some CTD sampling and a close look at the 3D bathymetric model Elanor had created to choose the next site – heading to the North of the Island (out from English Bay) to see if what appears a similar habitat on the seabed images yields the same species on camera and in the trawls. As we steam between sites we collect some more multibeam data and hope that by the time the night shift commences and we begin the next lots of camera deployments that Oli will have learnt to make Dave a better cup of coffee.....

