

# Diego Garcia: Steward of the Chagos Islands

## Volunteers Clean Up Beaches on Diego Garcia in the British Indian Ocean Territory

**TWO-HUNDRED AND** forty U.S. Sailors, Airmen, British Royal Marines Commandos and base contractors volunteered to clean up Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territory beaches on 2 September 2011.

Volunteers collected approximately 5,000 pounds of trash that washed up along six miles of beach in the southeast quadrant of the island. The purpose of the cleanup was to promote energy conservation, environmental and recycling awareness, and to prepare the beaches for seasonal nesting of endangered sea turtles.

“As tenants of a maritime protected island here in the British Indian Ocean Territory, it’s important that we respect and work with our gracious host, the British government, in preserving this environment,” said U.S. Navy Support Activity, Diego Garcia Commanding Officer, Capt. David L. Tidwell. “Although we live here, this isn’t our island—we’re just visitors. Obviously the responsibility falls on us to clean up the trash we produce, but we must also maintain the delicate balance of this environment for its natural inhabitants who rely on this island for their survival. Being stew-

ards of the environment is also one of the Navy’s missions.”

According to Cmdr. Victor Velasco, Diego Garcia Public Works Officer and one of the event coordinators, base residents and USS Emory S. Land (AS 39) Sailors volunteer to clean up different beaches a few times throughout the year.

“Our goal is to ensure local wildlife, such as the great green and hawksbill sea turtles, have the ability to come ashore and nest here,” Velasco said.

Velasco expected volunteers to collect everything from plastic bottles,

containers, fishing buoys and nets, to discarded trash from vessels travelling the sea lanes, and gear and equipment that may have been blown overboard. Due to recent tsunamis in the surrounding regions, Velasco also suspected that volunteers will see a wide variety of trash.

“I was excited to volunteer because this was the first time I was able to see this side of the island,” Master-at-Arms Third Class Petty Officer Sonya L. Parker said. “The beach and the





Two-hundred and forty U.S. Sailors and Airmen, British Royal Marines Commandos and contractors volunteered to clean up Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territory collecting more than 5,000 pounds of trash to promote environmental and recycling awareness, and to prepare the beaches for the seasonal nesting of endangered sea turtles.

*MC3 Benjamin Malvezzi*



A crab uses a hollowed-out golf ball that washed ashore as its shell. The golf ball is just one example of the wide variety of trash collected as part of the 2 September beach cleanup.

*U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 3rd Class Benjamin Malvezzi*

ocean are beautiful, but I was really surprised to see just how much trash was washed ashore, and how far up onto shore we found it.”

“There was definitely more trash than I thought there would be,” Parker continued. “We were briefed on what we could expect to find, but I was still amazed at some of the things we actually found. I found a lot of flip flops, a few light bulbs and even a cat mat. But I was really surprised when we found a bike tire.”

With the completion of this successful cleanup effort, plans have already begun for the next one.

“We had a great turnout and everyone was safety compliant,” Nestor Guzman said. Guzman, a Diego Garcia contractor, was another event coordinator. “We strive to continue the beach cleanup that started back in 1997. We believe island support, coordination, cooperation and safety are the keys to ensuring a successful event for years to come.” 

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