

Alba García Rodríguez, Master of Marine Management Gold Award Recipient, 2016



Alba graduated from the University of Granada, in Andalucía (Spain) with a BSc in Biology in 2013. During her studies, Alba collaborated with the Zoology department, focusing on the marine fauna of Granada's coast, mainly sponges and kinorhynchs. She also obtained diving certifications up to Dive Master, which allowed her to better understand the marine environment and to be able to conduct underwater research. During this time, Alba also obtained experience on marine mammal and seabird identification as a whale watching guide and researcher.

After the completion of her degree, Alba moved to Washington D.C., where she worked as an intern with Ocean Conservancy. During her internship placement, Alba conducted research and meta-analyses on multiple topics including the impact of climate change on fish species and populations, the impact of plastic pollution in the marine environment, and the current situation of waste management in developing countries. After completing the internship, Alba continued working from Spain for Ocean Conservancy as a consultant, conducting research on plastic pollution, coastal ecosystem resilience, and other marine management issues.

During her Master of Marine Management degree, Alba pursued her interests on learning what actions and processes are needed to achieve marine conservation, and how human behaviour could be changed to achieve the sustainable use of marine resources. In the summer of 2016, Alba conducted an internship with Sustainable Grenadines Inc. (SusGren) in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The purpose was to study the density of an economically important marine species in Union Island and the Tobago Cays Marine Park (TCMP), the queen conch (*Lobatus gigas*), and the effectiveness of the TCMP on the conservation of this species.

Due to the limited information on this species in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the project aimed to (1) provide more insights on the current density of the queen conch, which has been overfished in many Caribbean countries; (2) create a queen conch monitoring protocol for the continuous monitoring of this species in St. Vincent and the Grenadines; and (3) propose future management measures needed to achieve the sustainable use of this species in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. Alba conducted participatory mapping sessions with local

fishermen to establish suitable areas to find conch and conduct underwater surveys. Underwater surveys were undertaken in a joint effort with the SusGren Marine Protected Areas Coordinator, and three TCMP Rangers in June 2016 to obtain data regarding the density of this species in the study area. She also collaborated with local fishermen to discover more information regarding queen conch distribution and density in the area. In addition, Alba conducted multiple presentations at schools, as well as at the TCMP interpretation centre to raise interest among the community on the project. The results of the research were presented at an information session where all the community, including the fishermen, were invited to participate. At the session, management measures were proposed that could contribute to the conservation of this species, while reducing negative impacts to local fishermen and the community. Alba learned how to develop a marine management plan where consultation, data gathering, analysis, community engagement, and proposing recommendations are needed to achieve successful results. Alba's graduate project research paper, supervised by Dr. Lucia Fanning, MAP professor, [*Queen conch in the Grenadines islands: A preliminary assessment on its abundance and current management needs*](#) is available on the Marine Affairs Program DalSpace site.

Alba attended the [69th Gulf and Caribbean Fisheries Institute](#) annual conference in November 2016 on Grand Cayman Island. At the conference, she presented her graduate project research which gave her the opportunity to share insights and information with other scientists and researchers in the field of queen conch management.

Alba is the recipient of the Sobey Fund for Oceans Scholarship in Marine Affairs. She was presented with the Interdisciplinarian of the year Award at the annual MAP Making Waves: Graduate Project Presentations held in December 2016. She was the creator and director of the [Into the Blue video](#) that was developed to raise interest and awareness about our oceans to the general public, and to promote the [Sustainable Oceans 2016 student led conference](#) that was held on September 30th - October 1st, 2016. At SO2016, Alba received the People's choice Award for her presentation at the 2016 Sustainable Oceans conference "*Queen conch in the Grenadines islands: A preliminary assessment on its abundance and current management needs*".