

News story: Rehabilitated veterans and microplastics clean-up receive military conservation award

Other winners at the 2018 Sanctuary Awards included efforts to clean up microplastics from an MOD-owned beach in Cornwall.

The annual Sanctuary Awards, now in its 28th year, showcases remarkable conservation and environmental initiatives across MOD-owned land, known as the defence estate.

Held in central London, the awards recognise groups or individuals and their commitment to sustainability, energy saving, wildlife, archaeology, environmental protection and improvement.

The winner of the top prize, The Silver Otter, was a group of veterans conducting 'Exercise Magwitch', which excavated and recovered skeletons of those who died on 18th and 19th century prison ships on Rat Island in Portsmouth. Once recovered, the skeletons were forensically examined at the Cranfield Forensics Institute and facial reconstruction was carried out by Liverpool John Moors University.

Exercise Magwitch is an Operation Nightingale project, that aims to rehabilitate wounded, injured and sick service personnel through archaeology. To date the programme has helped several hundred serving and former personnel get involved in the archaeological digs.

The programme encourages serving or former personnel to participate in the archaeological digs in a variety of ways to promote wellbeing and develop their employment opportunities and encourages them to open up about their experiences.

Minister for Defence People and Veterans, Tobias Ellwood said:

I was honoured to present the Sanctuary Awards this year and it's been a pleasure to meet the unsung heroes working hard to preserve and protect a defence estate that covers almost 2% of UK land.

I am immensely proud that the hard work of these men and women has been celebrated. All of the projects were excellent and showcased the variety of work that goes into defence to ensure we preserve the environment across our estate, wildlife can thrive and our heritage endure.

Graham Dalton, Chief Executive of DIO commented:

The MOD and DIO are committed to implementing Defence sustainability principles across the whole MOD estate and promoting the Government's vision of long-term climate resilience.

Therefore, it's great to see so many innovative projects taking place that demonstrate the positive impact we can have across the Defence estate, both in the UK and Overseas. Thank you to all the teams and individuals for their enthusiasm and commitment in helping MOD towards achieving its sustainability agenda.

The other top prize was the Sustainable Business Award, won by the 29 Regiment, The Royal Logistics Corps' energy management project. Other project winners included work by the Rame Peninsula Beach Care group to help clean the MOD-owned Tregantle beach from plastic. Due to the tides and currents, Tregantle is one of just a few beaches around Cornwall that acts as a magnet to microplastics.

The group worked with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation to help remove around nine million microplastic pellets from the beach in a year, as well as hundreds of sacks of larger plastic waste.

The winner of the Sustainability project was Operation Marmat that conducted Humanitarian Disaster Relief in Nepal after a series of earthquakes in April 2015.

Personnel from 36 Engineer Regiment & Queen's Gurkha Engineers were deployed for 20 months and helped reinforce water supplies to Kathmandu, assisted with clearing the damage and built camps to help those who had lost their homes.

The ceremony also marked the launch of the 47th edition of Sanctuary magazine, the MOD's longstanding annual sustainability magazine, which demonstrates how the MOD is protecting and maintaining the defence estate throughout the UK and overseas. [The Sanctuary magazine is available online on GOV.UK](#)

This year's award winners and runners up represented areas of the defence estate from the UK and overseas.