

# Preserving the Alacranes Reef in the Gulf of Mexico

## DigitalGlobe's satellite Imagery provides insight for photographic expedition to preserve Alacranes Reef

Working with the International League of Conservation Photographers, Ben Horton utilized DigitalGlobe imagery to photograph the threatened ecosystem of the Alacranes reef in the Gulf of Mexico as part of the league's Rapid Assessment Visual Expedition (RAVE) projects. The largest reef system in the Gulf of Mexico, the Alacranes reef is threatened by overfishing and illegal conch gathering. Also, the coral is dying from the toxins released into the water from the boats. Before the trip, Ben spent over two months searching for information on the Alacranes reef. However, information on the reef, particularly imagery, was limited or outdated. Without any photographs of the reef or nearby island, Ben was unable to conduct the necessary preliminary research in advance of his photographic mission.

Fortunately for Ben, the DigitalGlobe Foundation was more than willing to assist him and the international league with their mission. Within days, the Foundation had provided Ben and the international league with the imagery they needed to prepare for their expedition to the Alacranes Reef. DigitalGlobe's imagery provided their only insight into the island and reef system ahead of their expedition. The imagery revealed a wealth of information: they were able to distinguish the island's structure, the individual reefs, bird colonies, important dive sites and more. With the imagery provided by the DigitalGlobe Foundation, Ben and the international league were able to determine which areas of the massive reef system needed the most attention. It also allowed Ben to navigate the treacherous reef, which was littered with shipwrecks. DigitalGlobe's satellite imagery provided an unparalleled level of detail that made the mission to the Alacranes Reef possible. The imagery was not only used by the International League of Conservation Photographers, but it was also key to the Mexican government's understanding of the Alacranes Reef system. The personnel assigned to protect the reef from illegal conch fishing used the imagery to identify better ways to patrol the massive reef. They had never viewed the reef from space, and the knowledge gained was invaluable to those who spend every day navigating around the dangerous coral heads.

The end of the expedition coincided with the beginning of Wild 9, a conference in Merida, Mexico focusing on conservation. Ben's photos, along with the imagery from DigitalGlobe, were chosen to be a part of the "12 Shots" presentation. The 12 Shots presentation is a photographic presentation that tells a story through 12 photographs. The DigitalGlobe imagery of the Alacranes Reef was also chosen to be displayed during the Wild 9 conference.

*"To protect a place, sometimes it is necessary to produce more than just data to describe whatever it is that is happening. Photography, whether from a few feet away, or from a satellite in space, helps people feel as if they know the place itself and not just something about it."* – Ben Horton

With the DigitalGlobe imagery, the International League of Conservation Photographers managed to pull a lost world into the public's eye and conscience. Hopefully, now that people know it exists, they may fight to save it.



DigitalGlobe satellite image of the Alacranes Reef



Threatened ecosystem in the reef