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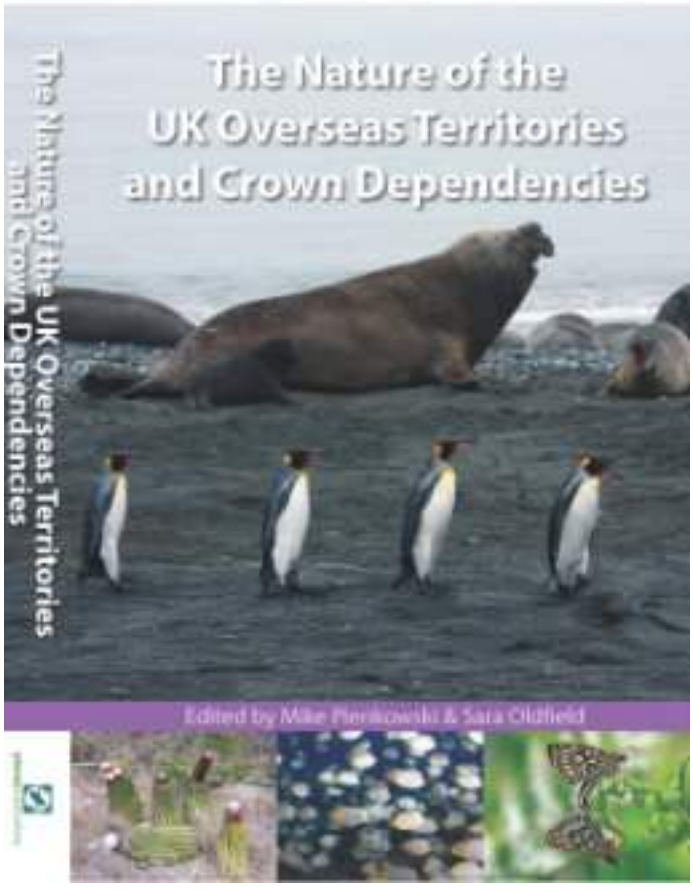
# New Book celebrating *The Nature of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies*

More than three decades ago, *Fragments of Paradise* opened a window on to a remarkable but little-known part of Britain's natural heritage. Published in 1987, Sara Oldfield's pioneering review of wildlife in the UK Overseas Territories helped reveal the extraordinary diversity of life found far beyond the shores of Britain – but for whch UK is responsible – and played an important part in the story that led to the formation of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum.

Much has changed since then. Knowledge has expanded; species have been rediscovered; and new conservation successes have been achieved. Yet many of the pressures identified in *Fragments of Paradise* remain, alongside new challenges from climate change, invasive species and development.

Our new book, *The Nature of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies*, revisits that earlier topic for a new generation. Bringing together contributions from specialists across the Territories and elsewhere, it combines accessible, referenced science with a wealth of photographs and illustrations. It explores the landscapes, wildlife and people of these extraordinary places, while asking essential questions: what have we learned?; what have we achieved? - and what still needs to be done?

This book is being published around the start of the 40th year since the publication of the seminal review *Fragments of Paradise* by Sara Oldfield, and the consequent formation in the same year of what became the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum.




*Front cover and spine of* The Nature of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies

From the icy wilderness of the South Atlantic and Antarctic to tropical forests, coral reefs and remote islands, the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies contain an astonishing concentration of biodiversity. Many species occur nowhere else on Earth, making these places not simply distant fragments of Britain, but globally important centres of natural heritage.

This book is therefore both a celebration and a call to action. By looking back to *Fragments of Paradise*, we can see how far conservation has come — and how much remains at stake. These are fragments of paradise still, but their future depends on the choices we make today.

**Pre-publication discount offer**

UKOTCF is delighted to announce its new book, *The Nature of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies*, published in November 2026 by NatureBureau/Pisces Publications. This is the result of over five years of work by a UKOTCF editorial team, authors and those providing superb images – all of whom contributed without payment, in order to keep the price of the book reasonable.

For a period, there is in addition a pre-publication discount of over 20%. We are grateful also to the sponsors who helped offset costs to UKOTCF. These are: the British Association of Nature Conservationists (BANC); Garfield Weston Foundation; M&G Peel Inc., in memory of Lady Dace McCoy Ground; HM Government of Gibraltar; Oceanwide Expeditions; the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management; and Dr Mike & Mrs Ann Pienkowski.

The result is a book of over 400 pages, about half of the space

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# Why We Need Your Support

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) works to protect some of the most diverse and fragile environments under the UK's responsibility. The UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and Crown Dependencies hold over 90% of the UK's unique species, wetlands, and island habitats of global importance, and vast areas of ocean and reefs.

Yet, despite this global significance, many territories have very limited resources for conservation. Small human populations, geographic isolation, and competing pressures mean that funding, specialist skills, and long-term capacity are often in short supply. At the same time, these territories face some of the most urgent challenges such as: habitat-loss, invasive species, and the accelerating impacts of climate-change.

UKOTCF exists to help bridge this gap. We bring together conservation bodies, local communities and governments across the territories to share expertise, coordinate action, and provide practical support, through regional and thematic working groups and other meetings. We have helped develop conservation strategies and projects, deliver training, promote environmental education, and ensure that the voices of the territories are heard in UK and international policy discussions.

We play a key role also in connecting people and stories across the network, including through our twice-yearly newsletters which highlight conservation action, challenges, and successes across the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies, and through our website www.ukotcf.org.uk.

The UKOTCF is the only environmental charity dedicated solely to conservation across all the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies. As a small, independent charity, we rely on donations, project grants and a lot of volunteer time! Even modest contributions make a real difference — helping us to sustain collaboration, build capacity in the territories, and protect wildlife and habitats that form the majority of the UK's natural heritage. Our small team is supported and enhanced with a wonderful wider network of volunteers. If you are able to support us, through either regular donations or one-off payments, this will help us keep supporting all the heroes of conservation around the world in the UKOTs and CDs: https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/donate/.

We also have a range of tasks that you can help with if you have some time to spare as well! Please contact us on hello@ukotcf.org if you want to know more about volunteering.



*Above: A purple throated carib* Eulampis jugularis *taken on Montserrat by visiting MSc student Zachary Billot*

# Thanks...


for help with this issue to those writing articles or contributing images and their colleagues, as well as the core editing and production team of Dr Jodey Peyton, Catherine Wensink, Ann Pienkowski, Daniel Hendry and Dr Mike Pienkowski.


If you would like to contribute to future issues please get in touch with Dr Jodey Peyton jpeyton@ukotcf.org

being taken up by high-quality colour photographs. Each territory also has a specially prepared map drawn to mark important nature features. Editors and authors were drawn from 16 of the 21 UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, UK and a few other countries, with examples, photographs and input from the other UKOTs and Crown Dependencies as well. The book was edited by Mike Pienkowski and Sara Oldfield, assisted by Catherine Wensink, Ann Pienkowski, Keith Bensusan, Adam Riggs and Jodey Peyton.

The Contents (and lead authors) include:

- Acknowledgements
- Foreword, by Professor John Cortés MP (Minister for Education, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate, Heritage, Technical Services and Transport, HM Government of Gibraltar; and Chair of the Council of Environment Ministers of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies)
- Chapter 1 Introduction (Dr Mike Pienkowski & Catherine Wensink)
- Chapter 2 Flora – diversity, endemism, rarity and threats (Sara Oldfield)
- Chapter 3 Terrestrial invertebrate diversity and endemism (Vicky Wilkins & Liza Fowler)
- Chapter 4 Reptiles and Amphibians (Paul Edgar, with Frederick J Burton & Cerys Joshua)
- Chapter 5 Birds – flagships for global conservation (Dr Mike Pienkowski)
- Chapter 6 Marine Diversity (Adam Riggs & Dr Kathleen McNary)
- Chapter 7 Conservation arrangements and mechanisms (Dr Mike Pienkowski & Catherine Wensink)
- Chapter 8 Human Communities in the UKOTs (Catherine Wensink & John Pinel)
- Chapter 9 Tackling invasive non-native species & restoring ecosystems (Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks, Dr Jodey Peyton & Dr Alan Gray)
- Chapter 10 Managing Marine Resources (Adam Riggs & Alizée Zimmermann)
- Chapter 11 Global Connectivity & Global Climate Change (Sara Oldfield & Dr Keith Bensusan)



*Above: Invertebrates make up a high percentage of all life on earth; sample pages from the chapter led by Vicky Wilkins, Species Recovery Trust, and Liza Fowler, St Helena National Trust.*

- Chapter 12 Looking ahead (Catherine Wensink, with contributions by younger persons)
- References
- Appendix 1. Conservation and related organisations in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies
- Appendix 2. Visiting the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies
- Appendix 3. Glossary of abbreviations and terms
- Index

It is clear that huge progress has been made by the efforts for conservation since then – but equally many challenges remain. In his Foreword, Professor Cortés highlights the importance of sharing and collaboration, which are contributing to overcoming these challenges and helping progress conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. Indeed, a huge number of people and organisations listed in two full pages of the book's Acknowledgements demonstrate the amazing depth and cooperative working of the cross-territory input to the content of the book. Many thanks to the whole UKOTCF network.



*Stunning images of nudibranchs in the chapter on marine biodiversity (by Adam Riggs & Dr Kathleen McNary); several species are found only in the UKOTs*

*To purchase a copy (and for a short time at pre-publication price) visit: [https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/nature-of-the-uk-overseas-territories-and-crown-dependencies/)](https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/nature-of-the-uk-overseas-territories-and-crown-dependencies/)*

# A New Partnership for Nature

Some partnerships begin with a single meeting. Others grow over many years, through shared projects, conversations, friendships and a common commitment to nature. The new partnership between The Wildlife Trusts and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) is very much in the second category.

We are delighted to announce that the two organisations have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to deepen collaboration in support of nature across the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.

The agreement builds on a relationship that has been developing for many years, including through Leigh Morris, now Director of International at The Wildlife Trusts and a member of the UKOTCF Council. Leigh's connection with UKOTCF goes back to his time as Chief Executive of the Manx Wildlife Trust, when he was already actively engaged with the Forum and its work across the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. That longstanding relationship has provided a strong foundation for today's partnership.

**From the Isle of Man to the wider UKOT community**

Links between Manx Wildlife Trust and the wider UKOT conservation community have continued to develop over time, including support for the IIEM last year, UKOTCF's 2025 conference and the launch of an internship hoping to support UKOTs in the near future. Those connections have demonstrated the value of sharing experience between places that may be geographically very different but face remarkably similar practical challenges – something that has been fundamental in UKOTCF's approach for decades.

They have also helped reinforce an important principle: conservation knowledge does not only flow from large organisations to smaller ones. Everyone has something to contribute.

That relationship was reflected again in June, when UKOTCF Executive Director Catherine Wensink attended The Wildlife Trusts' Big Wildlife Gathering. The Gathering provided another opportunity to connect with colleagues from across the wider conservation movement, and to explore how existing relationships could develop into new opportunities for collaboration.



*The MOU was signed by Patience Thody, Deputy Chief Executive Officer of The Wildlife Trusts, and Dr Mike Pienkowski, Chairman of UKOTCF, supported by Leigh Morris, Director of International at The Wildlife Trusts, and Catherine Wensink, Executive Director of UKOTCF.*

The new MoU signed in August 2026 provides a framework for taking those longstanding connections further and creating more opportunities to work together for nature across the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.

Conservation organisations in the Territories may be working with small teams, limited resources, difficult access, high costs and gaps in baseline-data, while at the same time facing increasingly rapid environmental change. Networks therefore matter enormously. UKOTCF's Jodey Peyton gave a presentation on this subject at an anniversary event of the MPA creation on Ascension in September.

The Wildlife Trusts bring decades of experience supporting local action for nature, community engagement, education, volunteering and practical conservation across the UK. Together with UKOTCF, complementary strengths create opportunities to do more. The organisations are looking for opportunities to work together to:

- raise awareness of the extraordinary wildlife, habitats and landscapes of the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies;
- support education and public engagement;
- build conservation capacity through shared expertise;
- share experience and best practice;
- develop innovative solutions to conservation challenges;
- create stronger connections between people working for nature across the UK and the Territories.

The UK Overseas Territories have enormous experience to share. Conservationists working in small and remote communities often have to develop innovative approaches to problems that are becoming increasingly relevant elsewhere – from invasive species and biosecurity to climate-change, biodiversity-monitoring and working with limited resources. There is much that the wider UK conservation community can learn from that experience. Equally, the Wildlife Trusts' extensive experience of community-based conservation, education, volunteering and public engagement offers valuable opportunities for adaptation within the Territories. The aim is to create a genuine exchange which connects people and ideas, and allows approaches to be adapted to local circumstances, rather than simply replicated.

For UKOTCF, the MoU represents the strengthening of a relationship that has already delivered opportunities for collaboration and knowledge exchange over many years. The Wildlife Trusts are keen to explore a structured opportunity to deepen engagement with some of the world's most important places for biodiversity that are connected to the UK.

And for the people and wildlife of the Territories, the hope is simple: that stronger relationships will lead to more knowledge, greater capacity, new opportunities and better conservation outcomes.

It is a new chapter in a relationship that has been in the making for some time. And, as with all good conservation partnerships, the most important part is what happens next…



-

# The Digital Biodiversity Revolution: 2026 Kew Symposium

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBGK) demonstrated its global leadership in plant and fungal science with the *State of the World's Plants & Fungi Symposium*, held from 29 June to 1 July 2026. Bringing together experts from more than 170 institutions worldwide, the symposium focused on the digital transformation of biological collections and the opportunities this presents for research, conservation and public engagement. The event accompanied the launch of Kew's sixth *State of the World's Plants & Fungi* report, subtitled *The Digital Biodiversity Revolution*, which examines how digitisation and artificial intelligence are reshaping our understanding of the natural world.

For those interested in UKOTs, the symposium highlighted themes that extend well beyond botany. It demonstrated how digital technologies are revolutionising the way scientists collect, manage and interpret biological information, offering valuable lessons for all organisations involved in taxonomy, natural history and conservation. The report itself includes a section on the work on Montserrat with partners including the Montserrat Department of Environment, Montserrat National Trust, Meise Botanic Gardens and RBGK, supported by UKOTCF. The full publication is available to download here: https://www.kew.org/sites/default/files/2026-07/SOTWPF-2026-web-version-09-July-2026.pdf.

One of the symposium's principal messages was that biodiversity-collections are no longer simply archives of preserved specimens. Millions of herbarium and fungarium specimens are now being digitised, creating accessible global datasets that can be analysed using powerful computational tools. These digital resources enable researchers to investigate species distributions, monitor environmental change and identify conservation priorities with unprecedented speed and accuracy. Artificial Intelligence is increasingly able to extract information from specimens, accelerating species identification and revealing patterns that would previously have taken decades to uncover.

Equally significant was the symposium's emphasis on collaboration. Speakers from across the world demonstrated that solving the biodiversity crisis requires international partnerships, open data-sharing and equitable access to scientific resources. Workshops considered how digitisation programmes can be expanded, particularly within biodiversity-rich but resource-limited countries, ensuring that the benefits of the digital revolution are shared globally, rather than concentrated within a small number of institutions. Dr Quentin Groom from Meise Botanic Gardens (and a close partner of UKOTCF) took part in a discussion panel on mobilising data and equitable sharing of data.

These developments have clear relevance across the UKOTs. Whether working with taxonomy, biodiversity-recording, museum-collections or conservation-policy, UKOTs increasingly rely upon accurate, accessible and interoperable data. The technologies presented at RBGK's symposium illustrate how digital collections can strengthen research, improve evidence-based decision-making and encourage greater collaboration between institutions. They demonstrate also that advances in artificial intelligence should complement, rather than replace, expert taxonomic knowledge. The human expertise required to identify, interpret and validate biological information remains indispensable.

The symposium also reinforced the importance of engaging the next generation of scientists. For organisations such as UKOTCF, supporting these future specialists will be essential as biodiversity science becomes increasingly interdisciplinary and data-driven. Perhaps the most important message from the event was one of cautious optimism. The combination of digitised collections, open science and artificial intelligence offers powerful new tools to document species, understand ecological change and guide conservation action. These innovations cannot solve biodiversity loss alone, but they provide a scientific foundation on which effective policy and conservation decisions can be built.

The 2026 Kew Symposium served as both an inspiration and a challenge. It illustrated how embracing digital innovation, fostering international collaboration and maintaining rigorous taxonomic expertise will be fundamental to protecting the world's plant and fungal diversity.

For more information: https://www.kew.org/science/engage/get-involved/conferences/sotwpf-symposium







*Above: Royal Botanic Garden Kew's Professor Alexandre Antonelli gives the opening address at the symposim. Below: Meise Botanic Garden's Dr Quentin Groom takes part in a session on digital data, open access and sovereign rights*

# Funding for conservation

The Darwin Plus funding calls in 2026 provide an important opportunity to reflect on the vital role of conservation funding across the UKOTs. The Darwin Plus Main call and new rounds of Darwin Plus Local support projects to protect unique biodiversity, strengthen local capacity and build resilience to climate-change.

Darwin Plus is an essential source of funding, but the wider funding environment continues to be challenging. The importance of this support is clear throughout this issue, which highlights the breadth of conservation work taking place across the Territories and the difference that targeted funding can make.

Alongside Darwin, other funders also play a crucial role. Support from organisations including the Garfield Weston Foundation and the John Ellerman Foundation helps sustain valuable conservation initiatives and partnerships. Opportunities through UKRI and other funding programmes are also important in supporting research, collaboration and new approaches to conservation relevant to the UKOTs.

# Pitcairn Botanic Garden and Nursery Update

***Leigh Morris (UKOTCF Council and The Wildlife Trusts) and Torika Christian (Pitkern Islen Enterprises)***

UKOTCF's Conservation Horticulture Working Group (CHWG) continues to support the development of a small botanic garden and native plant nursery on Pitcairn Island under DPL00195 *Conserving Pitcairn endemics through creation of a Native Plant Nursery.* A smaller working group of the CHWG has been established, including: Torika Christian (Pitcairn Island), Bryan Naqqi Manco (Turks & Caicos Islands), Alison Copeland, PhD Candidate (Durham University), Sara Barrios (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew), Quentin Groom (Meise Botanic Garden), Noeleen Smyth (National Botanic Gardens of Ireland), Keith Bensusan (Gibraltar Botanic Garden), Sarah Cathcart (Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh), and Jodey Peyton and Leigh Morris (UKOTCF).

This group has worked with Torika and other Pitcairn Islanders to write the outline Living Collections Policy and is now creating the first Plant Production List for the nursery. The group contributed to writing a successful Darwin Plus Local application for funding to support the programme.

The flora of Pitcairn Islands has not been recently studied, but there are around 100 native plant species, 19 of which are considered endemic. Many of which are at risk because of invasive non-native species and climate-change. This project will support the conservation of these species by developing a toolkit of resources to help Pitcairn's rare native plants by: producing a plant production list, designing a nursery and botanical garden, developing propagation protocols and upskilling Pitcairn Islanders in plant-propagation techniques.

The Darwin funding will cover the purchase of some materials and resources, and the travel costs for B Naqqi Manco (Assistant Director of Research & Development, Turks & Caicos Islands Government) to visit Pitcairn in January 2027. Naqqi will be joined by CHWG Chair, Leigh Morris, who has received a Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Bursary to cover his boat-travel to Pitcairn Island. Both Naqqi and Leigh are donating their time to help with the botanic garden design and development, and deliver horticultural upskilling to a group of Pitcairn islanders in horticultural techniques.

Torika Christian, Founder Pitkern Islen Enterprises said: "Pitcairn's endemic flora is a precious part of our natural heritage, reflecting the uniqueness, beauty, and identity of our island. Recognising their importance, our organisation has taken the initiative to preserve and protect these remarkable plants for future generations, with the long-term vision of establishing a Pitcairn Botanical Garden, a living sanctuary where our native treasures can be safeguarded, celebrated, and shared with the world".

Before Naqqi and Leigh visit in January 2027, support continues with online meetings. The materials and other resources are being ordered to ensure they are on the island in January, and the Pitcairn Islanders are well under way with the construction of the shade house and plant nursery.



*Above: The new nursery takes shape at Pitcairn. This important addition will help nurture young plants, support native plant conservation and make the island's future greener.*





*Top: Funder logos*
*Middle: Construction of the shade house begins with the frame.*
*Lowest: Earthworks and foundations*

# Rewilding the Chagos Archipelago's Northeast Peros Banhos, a Darwin-funded (DPLUS221) project

***Sarah Puntan-Galea, Director, Chagos Conservation Trust***

CCT was awarded nearly £1million in Darwin funding for a three-year project starting in 2025 led by Pete Haverson as part of their *Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs* (HIHR) programme. This article is a summary of the project as it reaches the end of year one,

**Rewilding the Chagos Archipelago's Northeast Peros Banhos**

Island habitats represent approximately 5% of the world's land area, yet disproportionately contribute to the total global biodiversity (Tershy *et al.* 2015). Research conducted in the Chagos Archipelago shows healthy terrestrial tropical habitats support the health of surrounding reefs. the basis of HIHR (Benkwitt *et al.* 2021; Appoo *et al.* 2024). Consequently, tropical island restoration projects play a disproportionately significant role in the reversal of global biodiversity loss.

terrestrial and marine biodiversity (Harper & Bunbury 2015). Furthermore, it will build resilience to climate-change in the surrounding marine environs (Benkwitt *et al.* 2021) and potentially secure these tropical islands against future sea-level rise (Steibl *et al.* 2023).

The three-year project is being delivered via a Darwin Plus main award, DPLUS221. It follows a successful Darwin-funded pilot rat-eradication project which ran between May 2013 and September 2015 (DPLUS011 Ile Vache Marine Restoration Project). If successful, this project will create the longest chain of rat-free islands in the Indian Ocean.

Located in the middle of the Indian Ocean the Chagos Archipelago (6° South, 72° East) comprises the largest living coral atoll in the world, the Great Chagos Bank, alongside four additional islanded atolls (Carr 2012). On the atolls' rims about 55 small islands comprise the terrestrial portion of the territory at some 21km² (Harper *et al.* 2019). The unique challenges faced by




*Above: Map of the outer Chagos Islands showing their location within the Indian Ocean and of Peros Banhos Atoll (marked in yellow square). © Biodiversity Restoration Services. Right: Map of Peros Banhos Atoll. The islands and islets within the green box reference the eastern portion of the atoll. Rat-infested islands are shown in red, rat-free islands in green, and the island cleared of rats in 2014, yellow. © Biodiversity Restoration Services*

A multi-disciplinary team of reef and seabird biologists, working together as part of the Bertarelli Foundation's Marine Science Programme, showed the important role seabirds play in HIHR. Seabird guano is a vital component of nutrient-flow from islands out to reef habitats (Benkwitt *et al.* 2021, Graham *et al.* 2024). But invasive mammal predators (e.g. rats, cats) have a devastating effect on seabird populations, which is known to impact the health of surrounding marine life via HIHR (Jones *et al.* 2008, Graham *et al.* 2024).

This project, *Rewilding Northeast Peros Banhos*, led by CCT, aims to eradicate black rats *Rattus rattus* from four isolated islands found inside the boundary of a single Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) in the northern atoll of Peros Banhos, Chagos Archipelago (see above). Removal of the rats will facilitate the return of seabirds to these islands which will improve their environmental quality over time, increasing




*Above:Project partners and delivery 2025-2026 schematic overview for the Rewilding Peros Banos.*

tropical island restoration make the scale of this project not only important, but ground-breaking. Due to the remoteness of the islands, the eradication was based at sea, using aerial bait applications delivered using drones. Alongside the eradication work, a science crew established baseline data to track the success of the eradication in terms of ecological recovery. The primary objectives of the November 2025 expedition were as follows:

***Objective 1: eradicate black rats***
Complete a rat eradication operation on Ile de Passe, Moresby Island, Ile Manoel, and Ile Yeye in Peros Banhos atoll via aerial bait broadcast using heavy-lift drones.

***Objective 2: establish baseline datasets***
Develop a set of standardised sampling techniques to track and document the recovery of terrestrial species and habitats listed (1-3) and create baseline datasets to verify both successful rat eradication and ecological recovery.

1. Nesting seabird population size
2. Plant habitat structure and health
3. Invertebrate diversity

CCT are working with several formal partners to deliver this project: The British Indian Ocean Territories (BIOT) Administration, British Patrol Vessel (BPV) *Grampian Endurance*, Biodiversity Restoration Specialists (BRS), Zoological Society of London (ZSL), Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (Kew), ProVision, and Orion Conservation Services Ltd (OCSL). Because of the number of partners, the schematic overview at the bottom of page 7 provides a brief overview of those partners and their individual contributions or role within the year 2025-2026.

Read more about the project's first expedition and background in *Chagos News* 2026, and CCT will report on the project's progress - and how it supports environmental and climate-change outcomes in the UK Overseas Territories in a future issue of *Forum News*.

Contact Sarah Puntan-Galea director@chagos-trust.org
For more information visit: www.chagos-trust.org



*Above: Bait bola in a mangrove tree in the red-footed booby colony on Moresby Island, Chagos Archipelago*







*Top: British Patrol Vessel (BPV)* Grampian Endurance, *taken by a heavy-lift drone in flight and operated from the stern of the vessel © ProVision*
*Middle:BPV Grampian Endurance with two heavy-lift drones in flight, operated from the stern of the vessel © ProVision*
*Lowest: Dr Grant Harper with a drone on the bow of the ship ready for reloading with fresh buckets of bait - the bait tank and spinner are located on the underside of the drone*

# Together for the Falkland Islands: An evening of conservation and collaboration

Members, supporters and friends of Falklands Conservation UK came together on Saturday 18 July at the Women's University Members Club in Mayfair, for a special membership event, celebrating the organisation's work to protect the unique wildlife and natural environment of the Falkland Islands. The event provided an opportunity to hear the latest conservation updates, reflect on recent achievements, and connect with fellow members who share a passion for safeguarding the islands' remarkable biodiversity. It was also a chance to thank supporters for their continued commitment, which plays a vital role in enabling Falklands Conservation's work both in the UK and the Falkland Islands.

Opening the evening, Esther Bertram, CEO of Falklands Conservation, warmly welcomed members, supporters and guests, expressing her gratitude for the continued commitment shown to Falklands Conservation UK and its mission. She reflected on the challenges facing conservation in the Falkland Islands, while emphasising the strength that comes from working together. Esther thanked members, the Falklands Conservation team and the organisation's wider network of partners and supporters, highlighting that their shared dedication, collaboration and generosity are essential in overcoming challenges and delivering lasting conservation success for the islands' unique wildlife and habitats.

UKOTCF's Executive Director, Catherine Wensink was invited to then give an overview of some of the work of the Forum in the UKOTs and emphasised the importance of funding this work especially through the Darwin Plus.

Ross James, Falklands Conservation's Biosecurity & Invasives Manager, gave an inspiring update on the ambitious plans for New Island, outlining a long-term vision to eradicate invasive species as part of a wider programme of ecological restoration. Rather than focusing on individual species, the project is taking an entire ecosystem approach, recognising the interconnected relationships between seabirds, other native wildlife and their habitats. He highlighted the significance of the island for the endangered slender-billed prion *Pachyptila belcheri*, and the opportunities that successful restoration could create for this and many other native species to thrive. Ross also spoke about the collaborative nature of the project, explaining that Falklands Conservation is engaging with partners, experts and supporters to explore the best ways of turning these restoration ambitions into reality and ensuring the long-term recovery of New Island's unique environment.

For more information and some stunning videos introducing the project's significance Ross has an Instagram account called @bearingsouth.

More information is available on the Falklands Conservation website with a dedicated page to New Island. See https://falklandsconservation.com/newislandrestoration/



*Above: Ross James showcases some of the biodiversity from New Island – here the slender billed prion, a species at risk of local extinction from the impact of rodents.*



*Above: North Island's spectacular scenary;*
*Below: Restoration efforts taking shape. Images @bearingsouth*



# Five years of cloud forest focus on invertebrate conservation continues for another 3 years

***Liza Fowler, Cloud Forest Invertebrate Specialist at St Helena National Trust***

In 2022, funding from the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) UK was awarded to St Helena to implement conservation actions with particular focus on the cloud forest habitat of the Peaks National Park. This 5-year project, *Restoring St Helena's Internationally Important Cloud Forest for Wildlife, Water security & People*, involved multi-partnerships and aimed to restore and enhance water security, and support sustainable development through eco-tourism by delivering the Peak Implementation Plan. Following the completion of this, in 2026 further funding was secured through Darwin Plus project *Recovering St Helena's cloud forest for wildlife & water security* (DPLUS224) to build on to conservation work undertaken through the earlier FCDO project.

The St Helena National Trust's Invertebrate Team focused on both endemic invertebrates, and some key invasive invertebrate species which impact them and the habitats they occupy. During the first phase of the 5-year project, numerous conservation, research and monitoring actions were successfully; these provided valuable information that will guide future management and restoration efforts. The following section summarises the key achievements of the endemic invertebrate work.

Ten sites across the Peaks National Park were surveyed annually between Jan-May. The results demonstrated that endemic invertebrates have recolonised restoration areas. These include the Spiky Yellow Woodlouse *Pseudolaureola atlantica*, one of the 32 priority and flagship species used as indicators to assess the health and conditions of the cloud-forest habitat. These surveys have also enhanced ecological knowledge on the plant species that the endemic invertebrates are using. For example, previous records indicate that only a few plant species were inhabited. However, these recent surveys show that some invertebrates occupy a wider range of plant species and otherrs are host-specific.



*The adult* Elachista trifasciata. © *Liza Fowler*

Additionally, comparisons of endemic invertebrate species across the native, restoration and non-native habitat-types showed an overall trend that the restoration sites were the most effective at sustaining endemic invertebrate populations and diversity.

Targeted monitoring programmes for the flagship species St Helena Silver Grass Miner *Elachista trifasciata* and the Golden Sail Spider *Argyrodes mellissi* were also undertaken during the year.

Monitoring of *Elachista trifasciata* was started between June 2022 and June 2023, with repeated monthly visit to 6 sites where the speces was found on its host plant, a sedge *Carex dianae*. This showed that both the adults and pupae were present throughout the year, with 3 months (June, December and January) indicating breeding. Further investigation into the lifecycle of *Elachista trifasciata* began in August 2025 and will conclude August 2026.

The Golden Sail Spider *Argyrodes mellissi* was monitored from February 2024 to February 2025. Although this species is associated with cloud-forest habitat, large populations are found also outside this habitat. Monitoring was conducted at 3 key sites, with monthly visits. The results show that they are active throughout the year, with breeding activities recorded. *Argyrodes mellissi* are predominantly nocturnal and hunt at night, preying primarily on spiders and Diptera, and occupying a wider range of plant species than previous thought, from ground to canopy level.



*An adult male* Argyrodes mellissi. © *Liza Fowler*

If you are interested in learning more about the cloud forest project, please see link here [St Helena's Cloud Forest Project.]

# Royal Botanical Garden Edinburgh Training in Bermuda

***Daniel Batie, Royal Botanic Garden, Edinburgh***

Earlier this year two members of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh delivered a modified version of the Certificate in Practical Horticulture to members of the Bermuda Parks Department.

The course, delivered by Daniel Batie (Horticulture Tutor) and Lucy Baines (Senior Nursery Horticulturalist), focused on developing practical skills in plant cultivation, as well as developing the necessary skills for maintaining a living collection. The importance of record-keeping, collecting and maintaining genetic diversity, and biosecurity were also addressed throughout the training. The Tula Valley nursery, which normally produces the iconic bedding seen around Hamilton, hosted the workshops throughout February 2026.

This delivery was initiated by Danny Simmons as part of the ongoing project of restoring the Bermuda Botanical Collection which has been eroded in recent decades. The students included nursery staff, landscaper, and parks-maintenance staff. When asked for feedback, they said they benefitted greatly from ongoing training, but also the opportunity to share skills internally.





*Above: Classroom-style lessons where theory merges with experience of Bermuda's conditions and unique challenges are considered and discussed. Left: Participants in the course practice skills such as plant cultivation and landscaping. Images: Daniel Baties:*

As well as delivering practical training Dr Quincy Burgess (Nursery Manager) discussed the Bermuda Cedar *Juniperus bermudiana* and the challenges in its propagation. Conifer propagation methods were shared, and advice was given for the development of tissue culture techniques.

Participants were grateful to Danny Simmons, Omari Dill, Qunicy Burgess, and the Botanical Society for enabling the training to take place.

# INTO Bavaria: Places with purpose

The 2026 INTO Conference took place from 1st-4th November 2026 bringing together the global family of National Trusts in Freising and Munich, hosted by Kultur Erbe Bayern. The conference explored how heritage could serve communities, foster connection and help shape a sustainable future, providing opportunities to share experiences, exchange ideas and strengthen international partnerships.

The programme examined how National Trusts protected places that mattered, engaged communities and responded to changing environmental and social challenges. Participants shared approaches to heritage conservation, developed international networks and experienced the work taking place across Germany.

UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) involvement included Dr Jodey Peyton from the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), Helena Bennett, a UKOTCF Council member and Director of the St Helena National Trust, and Cathy Childs from the National Trust for the Cayman Islands. Their contributions brought valuable perspectives on heritage conservation, community engagement and the challenges and opportunities facing the Overseas Territories.

The conference provided an opportunity to share the work of RISE (Re-imagining International Sites of Enslavement), an INTO programme delivered in partnership with the American National Trust for Historic Preservation. RISE connects heritage practitioners working at historic sites linked to transatlantic enslavement. Through the University of Bristol's UKRI-funded *Plants, Enslavement and Public History* research project, it has supported interpretation of these histories.





UKOT projects include work at Richmond Hill in Montserrat, Tucker House in Bermuda and Rupert's Valley in St Helena, demonstrating how plants, gardens and landscapes can bring complex histories to life. www.into.org/rise/

# ECCB 2026: New Technologies, New Partnerships and New Thinking

The European Congress for Conservation Biology (ECCB), held in Leiden on 6-10 July 2026, brought together hundreds of scientists, conservation practitioners and policymakers to discuss how conservation is evolving to meet today's biodiversity challenges.

One of the strongest messages throughout the week was that conservation is becoming increasingly interdisciplinary. Ecologists are now working alongside social scientists, data specialists, geneticists and local communities to develop effective solutions. The opening plenary by Nathalie Pettorelli (Zoological Society of London) highlighted that protecting biodiversity requires expertise from many different disciplines, rather than relying on ecological science alone.

Technology featured prominently across the conference. Artificial intelligence is now being used to identify species from photographs and sound recordings, detect illegal hunting through automated gunshot recognition, and analyse satellite-imagery to monitor ecosystems over large areas. These approaches have enormous potential for remote regions, including many UK Overseas Territories, where regular field-surveys can be difficult and expensive.

Environmental DNA (eDNA) and conservation genomics were another focus. Researchers demonstrated how genetic tools are helping rediscover rare species, identify cryptic biodiversity and improve conservation-planning. As these methods become more affordable, they offer exciting opportunities to strengthen biodiversity-monitoring across island-ecosystems.

Several sessions explored the increasingly important relationship between people and conservation. Key-note speaker Professor Marja Spierenburg emphasised the value of local knowledge, equity and meaningful community participation, while Professor Berta Martín-López discussed the many different ways people relate to nature. These presentations reinforced that conservation succeeds not only through sound science but also through collaboration, trust and understanding of local values.

The conference highlighted also the growing importance of restoring ecological processes, rather than simply recreating historical habitats. Discussions focused on restoring ecosystem-function, resilience and natural dynamics, recognising that ecosystems continue to change under pressures.

Another thought-provoking symposium examined the "Conservation-Invasion Paradox", where species threatened in their native range become invasive elsewhere. These examples illustrated how modern conservation often involves complex decisions requiring ecological evidence, ethical judgement and careful management rather than straightforward solutions.



*UKOTCF's Catherine Wensink takes inspiration from posters displayed during the breaks at the conference. Copyright ECCB, 2026*

For conservation practitioners across the UK Overseas Territories, many of the conference themes were especially relevant. New technologies can improve monitoring in remote locations, while stronger partnerships with local communities remain fundamental to successful conservation. Perhaps the most encouraging message was that conservation continues to evolve, bringing together better science, innovative technology and broader collaboration to help protect biodiversity in an increasingly complex world.

Young researchers were encouraged to present their work either during the poster sessions or the workshops. The European arm holds events every two or three years and the next is said to be in Berlin. In addition, the 33rd International Congress for Conservation Biology (ICCB 2027) will take place in Puebla, Mexico in June 2027




*Delegates photo. Zoological Society London's Professor Nathalie Pettorelli (in the front row) gave the plenary presentation emphasising that solving the problem of biodiversity loss cannot rely on ecological science alone. Conservation increasingly requires collaboration across many disiplines. Copyright ECCB, 2026*

# IIEM 2026, Guernsey: Nature for the next generation

The 26th Inter-Island Environment Meeting (IIEM) took place in Guernsey from 30th September to 1st October 2026, bringing together delegates from across the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and further afield. Hosted by the Guernsey Nature Commission and the States of Guernsey Environment Department, the meeting provided an opportunity for conservationists, researchers, government representatives and environmental organisations to share experience, explore common challenges and build partnerships. This year's theme, *Nature for the Next Generation*, put a particular emphasis on the future of island environments and the role young people can play in protecting them.

**Presentations and discussion**

The main conference was held at Les Rocquettes Hotel over two days, combining presentations with opportunities for discussion, networking and field visits. Topics ranged from island biodiversity and invasive species to habitat restoration, citizen science and the wider challenges facing island communities.

Highlights included *Rat eradication for seabird conservation on Alderney and Sark*, exploring work involving Ørsted and Alderney Wildlife Trust to protect seabird colonies; *Lessons from Island Conservation in Aotearoa, New Zealand*, examining ambitions to eliminate non-native mammalian predators; and *From Passion to Data: A Mother and Daughter's Butterfly Monitoring Journey on Sark*, showcasing community-led monitoring. Other presentations covered restoring the Isle of Man's lost temperate rainforests and promoting Guernsey's native plants through the *Grow Guernsey* initiative.

Field visits brought delegates into direct contact with Guernsey's natural environment. One group visited Lihou Island, an important Ramsar wetland site, exploring its habitats and heritage before taking part in a beach-clean with the Clean Earth Trust and Guernsey Conservation Volunteers. The Lieutenant Governor of Guernsey, Sir Richard Cripwell, hosted an evening reception, providing further opportunities to strengthen connections across the islands.

**Youth Day: Nature for the Next Generation**

On Friday 2 October, a dedicated Sixth Form Environment Meeting gave students from Guernsey's schools the opportunity to participate in the conference theme. Organised by Angela Salmon, included an opening presentation by Leigh Morris, Director International at The Wildlife Trusts, encouraging young people to become champions for nature and connect with wider youth networks.

Students from the Sixth Form Centre and The Ladies' College delivered presentations, including *Protecting Our Island, Nurturing Our Future*, *Investing in Youth* and *The Magnificent Marine World*. Their contributions explored youth engagement, environmental action and marine conservation.

A practical marine spatial planning exercise challenged students to negotiate competing priorities, taking on roles such as fishers, conservationists, government representatives and offshore wind developers. The exercise connected directly with Guernsey's forthcoming marine spatial planning work and demonstrated the value of involving young people in real-world environmental decisions.

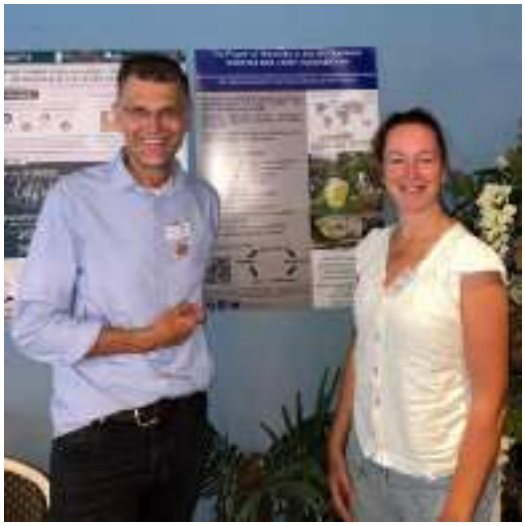
The meeting reinforced the importance of collaboration between islands, sharing practical conservation experience and ensuring that the next generation has a meaningful voice in shaping environmental policy.

Further information and links

- IIEM 2026 programme and event details
- IIEM conference proceedings
- YouTube: Guernsey Nature Commission



*Above: Delegates gather for the group photo outside the venue. They remarked that, at events such as the IIEM, the informal conversations are as valuable for making connections as the content of presentations and discussions. The next IIEM will take place in Alderney in 2027. More images on the following page, including the field trip and session in progress*





*Above left: Leigh Morris, Director International for the Wildlife Trusts, with UKOTCF's Dr Jodey Peyton, presenting a poster at the IIEM on the importance of conservation networks. Abve right: Session in progress.*



*Above: Delegates visited the L'Eree Headland in southwest Guernsey, where – after a briefing and a wait for the tide to go out – they were able to walk across the exposed causeway to Lihou Island to experience some of the natural and historical heritage of the island (inset).*

# Ascension MPA symposium

The Ascension Island Marine Protected Area (AI-MPA) held its Five-Year Review Science Symposium and Management Plan Drafting Workshop on 15–16 September 2026. The virtual event brought together conservation practitioners, researchers and partners to review progress since the MPA's establishment and help shape priorities for the next five years.

Led by the Ascension Island Government's Conservation and Fisheries Directorate, the symposium focused on turning scientific evidence into practical action. Discussions considered progress against the existing Management Plan and Monitoring, Evaluation and Research Strategy, alongside the evidence needed to strengthen future management.

The programme showcased a wide range of research. Presentations covered oceanography and seabed-mapping, shallow and deeper-water habitats, green turtle monitoring, ocean climate, fisheries research and satellite surveillance. Other sessions explored seabird-productivity, drone-surveys, satellite-tracking, plastic pollution and environmental DNA (eDNA) monitoring. Together, these topics demonstrated how varied scientific approaches can improve understanding of the MPA's ecosystems and the pressures affecting them.

An important feature was the involvement of partners from across the UK Overseas Territories. Roundtable discussions, including UKOTCF's Dr Jodey Peyton, explored fisheries monitoring, research collaboration, capacity-building and the role of research-stations. Contributions from representatives of St Helena, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, Bermuda and the Cayman Islands highlighted opportunities to share experience across territories.

Interactive workshops invited participants to identify priorities, assess strengths and gaps, and agree actions for improving monitoring and research. Further discussions considered future partnerships, climate-change research, the Ascension Research Hub and opportunities for international collaboration.

The symposium marked an important step in the MPA's five-year review, helping ensure that future management is informed by robust evidence, collaborative research and local conservation priorities.

Find out more: Ascension MPA Five-Year Review Symposium and the Ascension Island MPA website: https://ascension-mpa-review-demo.qbear-asi.chatgpt.site/symposium

# Thinking about Global Biodiversity at COP17

The 17th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (COP17) took place in Yerevan, Armenia, in October 2026. It marked the first global review of collective progress towards the Kunming–Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, providing an important opportunity to assess the challenges of delivering global biodiversity targets and the practical action needed to address them.

Across discussions, side-events and exhibitions, a common message emerged: delivering the Global Biodiversity Framework will require stronger implementation, greater mobilisation of resources and meaningful engagement with the people and communities closest to nature.

This is particularly important for the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs), which are home to globally significant biodiversity and possess invaluable local knowledge, practical experience and innovative approaches to conservation. Their contribution extends beyond protecting unique ecosystems: island communities also offer important lessons in locally led conservation that can inform biodiversity action worldwide.

Leigh Morris, Director - International & Evidence, representing both the Wildlife Trusts and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), participated in several COP17 events, including three panel events focused on small islands, coordinated by BESTLIFE2030, the UK Centre for Ecology &




*Above: Leigh Morris takes part in the BESTLIFE2030 event.*
*Below: Panelists at the side-event included: Leigh Morris, Director International & Evidence, Wildlife Trusts; Professor Helen Roy, UKCEH; Dr Gemma Harper OBE, CEO of JNCC; Aileen Mill, Newcastle Univeristy and Kevin Smith, Head of Programme Invasive Species and Wildlife Health, IUCN*






*Above: Leigh Morris takes part in the event hosted by Global Island Partnership (GLISPA), 20 years of the island biodiversity programme of work, and the solutions that made commitments last.*
*Below: BESTLIFE2030 event with representatives of IUCN, Small Islands Organisation (SMILO), The Wildlife Trusts and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States.*





*Above and Below: Snapshots taken around the venue by Leigh Morris including a plenary session and artwork displayed in the hall*



# Thinking about Global Biodiversity at COP17 (cont)

Hydrology (UKCEH) and the Global Island Partnership (GLISPA).

These discussions provided opportunities to highlight the experience of the UKOTs and explore how island-led approaches can contribute to wider global conservation objectives. One event showcased BESTLIFE2030 and the European Union's support for locally driven conservation across EU Overseas Territories, including accessible funding and regional support to help translate local priorities into practical action. Another discussion, *From Islands to Impact: What Can the World Learn from Island Leadership on Target 3?*, explored how island experience can help advance global commitments to conserve biodiversity.

UKCEH, working with UKOTCF and other partners, organised a side-event entitled *Strengthening Small Islands Biodiversity Decision-Making: Lessons from UK Overseas Territories on Invasive Species, OECMs and Conservation Action*. This highlighted how scientific knowledge, practical experience and effective decision-making can support more successful conservation, including action on invasive species and the recognition of Other Effective Area-based Conservation Measures (OECMs).

An encouraging outcome of the meetings was the enthusiasm shown by other international island and conservation networks for developing closer links and joint working with UKOTCF and its network of conservation bodies in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. Organisations expressing interest included GLISPA, the Small Islands Organisation (SMILO), the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), BESTLIFE2030, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Partnerships offer valuable opportunities to share experience, strengthen collaboration and ensure that the particular needs and achievements of the UKOTs are better represented in international discussions.



*The COP17 venue at night by Leigh Morris*

COP17 provided also opportunities for wider engagement through its two exhibition areas, the Blue Zone and the Green Zone. These brought together governments, businesses, NGOs and other organisations, including Armenian organisations, showcasing innovation and the collaboration needed to address shared environmental challenges.

For UKOTCF, participation in COP17 was valuable for contributing to discussions on global biodiversity commitments, but also for building relationships and identifying opportunities for future cooperation. The strong interest from international island networks reinforces the importance of ensuring that the experience and knowledge of the UKOTs contribute to global conservation efforts.

The official COP17 website is at https://cop17yerevan.am/en.

# APPG launches report on Strenthening Biodiversity




There was a strong showing from UK Parliament at the COP17, with members of the All Party Parliamentary Group on International Conservation there to launch their report titled *Strengthening Biodiversity Conservation in the UK Overseas Territories*. A press event was held with Barry Gardiner MP (Chair of the APPG on International Conservation), Kerry McCarthy MP (Vice-Chair) and Mary Creagh CBE MP (former Minister for Nature), who answered questions from attendees on international biodiversity and conservation issues.

The Inquiry concluded: "The Inquiry found that the Overseas Territories already possess the expertise, commitment and partnerships necessary to deliver world-leading biodiversity conservation. The challenge now is not to develop entirely new approaches, but to build upon what has already been shown to work.

By strengthening long-term funding, investing in science and local capacity, improving coordination across the Government, and supporting effective partnerships, the United Kingdom can ensure that the Overseas Territories continue to play a leading role in conserving biodiversity of global importance, and delivering the UK's international environmental commitments."

The report makes several recommendations aimed at improving how support is provided to UKOTs grouped into themes which cover funding, science and capacity and governance and international. The full report here : https://internationalconservation.org/publications/appg-inquiry-report-2026.pdf




*Above: Press Conference launching the report. From left to right:: Mary Creagh CBE MP, Barry Gardiney MP and Kerry McCarthy MP*

# Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs); Why Recorders Matter

*This article is adapted from the original published in the National Forum for Biological Recording*

Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) are an emerging area-based conservation mechanism which aims to achieve long-term, effective *in-situ* biodiversity conservation outside traditional protected areas. The term '30 by 30' is now used widely to reflect the vision to protect 30% of the planet by 2030, and it comes from the UN Convention on Biological Diversity's Global Biodiversity Framework Target 3. Unlike protected areas, where conservation is a primary objective, OECM sites may have primary conservation aims, conservation may be a secondary benefit, or there may even be unintended conservation outcomes. Examples include: alpine refuges, airspace-corridors, subterranean habitats, sacred sites, marine parks, surf-breaks and deep-sea thermal vents.

Protected areas alone are considered insufficient to reverse or halt the accelerating loss of global biodiversity. Many designated 'paper-park' (protected areas that exist legally but are not effectively enforced) are located in areas where little or no management occurs. It has been demonstrated that many important ecosystems and species of conservation concern are found outside formally designated protected areas. As various forms of governance have shown, communities and biodiversity can co-exist. The difference is that the potential for OECMs to recognise this co-existence, in international targets, has the potential for shifting power-imbalances and historic colonial approaches – if used correctly.



*Common sieve tortoise beetle* Chelymorpha cribraria*, Montserrat. Image by Chris Malumphy.*

Two challenges that OECMs face are: how to demonstrate an area is of conservation importance, and that long-term positive conservation outcomes can be achieved. This is where biological recorders are critical for identification, establishment and verification of OECMs as effective mechanisms for achieving positive outcomes for biodiversity. Biological recorders and citizen-scientists, using tools such as camera traps, drones, acoustic monitors and recording apps such as iNaturalist can increase the coverage and frequency of biodiversity-data collected.

The increasing recognition of OECM sites internationally has been rapid and is now documented by the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) through the Protected Planet platform (https://www.protectedplanet.net/en). In 2026, the platform was renamed as the World Database on Protected and Conservation Areas (WDPCA). As of October 2026, the total number of OECMs recorded around the world is 7,749. It remains to be seen how the United Kingdom as a whole, including the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, will approach the use of OECMs in area-based conservation.

Biological recorders all over the world are fundamental pieces in the puzzle to protect globally important biodiversity. From OECM creation built on evidence of the presence of important species, to the evidence required to justify their effectiveness, all records can count, whether through iRecord, iNaturalist or other platforms. Their role cannot be overstated for recognising current sites, to finding out more about them. For example, recording under-surveyed areas could lead to candidate OECMs being identified and proposed. This in turn could contribute towards global targets. for reducing biodiversity loss.

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# More on OECMs in Global Policy

A comprehensive paper on OECMs has now been pubished in the *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* by researchers from the University of Exeter, Jersey International Centre for Advanced Studies (JICAS), the University of Kent, Manchester Metropolitan University and the University of Gibraltar. The paper reviews the emerging role of OECMs in global conservation policy. Their analysis explores how these areas can support biodiversity while recognising local stewardship, livelihoods and cultural values.

Lead author Catherine Wensink, Executive Director, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, and a PhD researcher at the University of Exeter and Jersey International Centre for Advanced Studies, said: "Countries have not waited for the global debate on OECMs to be settled; they have already started putting them into practice. What has been fascinating about this research is tracing their development through a rapidly evolving global debate and down to the practical realities of a small, biodiverse Caribbean island. It shows how a global conservation idea can look very different in the places where it actually has to work."

Wensink, C. M., Ingram, D. J., Dissanayake, A., Weber, N., Fa, J.E. 2026. *Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs) in Global Area-Based Conservation.* Annual Review of Environment and Resources 51:521-549. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-121124-060839

The OECM Platform (see www.oecm.info) has officially launched, providing a dedicated hub for guidance, resources, case studies, national policies and opportunities to learn more about OECMs and their contribution to global biodiversity conservation. The recent WWF report, available on the platform, documents the progress made on OECMs in South America and the Caribbean: https://assets.worldwildlife.org/www-prd/documents/WWF_OECM_FINAL.pdf

# RIPCORD: Pulling the Ripcord on parachute science

***Prof. Phil Hosegood, Professor of Physical Oceanography, School of Biological & Marine Science, University of Plymouth; Programme Leader: BSc Ocean Science***

Following a four-year project addressing marine ecosystem challenges in the Chagos Archipelago, researchers from the University of Plymouth and Marine Conservation Society (MCS) have embarked on a new project, supported by the Garfield Weston Foundation, to address knowledge and capacity gaps in Caribbean Overseas Territories (OTs).

RIPCORD, which began in April 2025, brings together research in physical oceanography, mesophotic coral ecosystem (MCE) ecology, fisheries acoustics and seafloor-mapping. However, its defining feature is its commitment to avoiding 'parachute science'. Rather than arriving with predetermined research questions, the project works with local authorities to identify the challenges that matter most to them and determine where scientific support can have the greatest impact.

This collaborative approach recognises that many OTs have limited access to specialist expertise and scientific instrumentation, despite having responsibility for managing extensive and environmentally important marine areas. RIPCORD therefore combines research with training, equipment and knowledge transfer, with the aim of enabling local teams to continue monitoring their marine environments long after the Plymouth researchers have left.

Led by Amdeep Sanghera from MCS, the project includes also a community engagement programme designed to share the science with schoolchildren, inspiring interest in marine conservation and demonstrating its relevance to everyday life.

**From deep reefs to fisheries**

A major focus is improving understanding of MCEs, fish-communities and the oceanographic processes that influence them around the British Virgin Islands (BVI) and Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI). Initial fieldwork took place during a six-week expedition to the two UKOTs in November 2025.

In BVI, the Plymouth team conducted the first surveys of MCEs and fisheries in the territory. In TCI, surveys were undertaken in partnership with the Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR), combining observations of deep-water coral habitats and fish communities with measurements of the surrounding physical environment.

An important outcome of the fieldwork has been the transfer of capability to local teams. Following the Plymouth surveys, DECR retained a Deep Trekker remotely operated vehicle, allowing coral habitats to be surveyed to depths of approximately 300 m, while a Simrad EK80 fisheries echosounder is now available for ongoing fisheries surveys. DECR colleagues were trained in the operation of both systems during the expedition, enabling surveys to continue independently after the Plymouth team's departure.

Oceanographic moorings have also been deployed and recovered in partnership with DECR since November 2025. These instruments continuously record conditions over the deeper reefs surrounding Providenciales, providing essential environmental context for interpreting changes in coral and fish communities.




**Building resilience for the future**

RIPCORD is progressing at a critical time for marine ecosystems. As large-scale climate variability and warming oceans continue to place increasing pressure on coral reefs and fisheries, sustained observations are essential for understanding how these ecosystems are changing and identifying emerging threats.

The project therefore has a dual purpose: to generate new scientific understanding of the marine environments of Caribbean UKOTs, while simultaneously giving local authorities the expertise, equipment and confidence to undertake their own observations.

Ultimately, RIPCORD aims to replace a model in which scientists periodically arrive to collect data with one in which local teams are equipped to determine their own priorities and maintain long-term monitoring. In doing so, it hopes to demonstrate how collaborative science can provide lasting benefits for both researchers and the communities responsible for protecting these globally important marine ecosystems.

For more information see:[https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/c-cope/ripcord](https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/research/c-cope/ripcord)

# Winter Whale Monitoring Continues at South Georgia

***Stephanie Martin, South Georgia Whale Project Manager, British Antarctic Survey, Cambridge***

Even during the long austral winter, research teams at South Georgia's two science stations have been hard at work collecting information for the project *Creating a Sustainable Framework for Monitoring Whales at South Georgia,* supprted by Darwin Plus, South Georgia Heritage Trust and Friends of South Georgia. Staff at both Bird Island and King Edward Point are helping to build a clearer picture of how recovering whale populations use South Georgia's waters throughout the year.

**Whale Sightings Around Bird Island**

At Bird Island, Zoological Field Assistants Katherine Thomas, Jamie Latimer and Hannah Greetham have continued monitoring whales from shore-based observation points throughout the winter months. Their efforts have provided valuable insights into whale activity during a time of year when observations can be challenging.

Between April and June, humpback and southern right whales were recorded on at least 11 separate days, highlighting the importance of the waters around Bird Island for these recovering species.

Whale activity was particularly noticeable in June. Katherine recorded whale sightings on nine days within a ten-day period between 5 and 14 June, suggesting a significant increase in whale presence around the island.

Some memorable sightings included:

**June**

A whale blow was first spotted at 12:10, followed by observations of at least three whales feeding between Bird Island and the South Georgia mainland. The group included two southern right whales and one humpback whale, offering a rare opportunity to watch feeding behaviour in action.



*Above: Katherine Thomas looking for whales. Photo Hannah Greetham*



*Above Southern Right Whales* Eubalaena australis *near Bird Island Station during a wild winter day. Photo Katherine Thomas*

**12 June**

One of the most exciting encounters occurred when a southern right whale was seen inside Freshwater Bay, close to Iceberg Point. Spotted at 16:17, the whale was unusually close to shore. Katherine described the sighting as "pretty incredible", remarking on the surprise of seeing such a large animal within the bay itself. These observations are an important part of the project. Whenever possible, photographs taken during sightings are compared with images held in the South Georgia Southern Right Whale Catalogue. This helps researchers identify individual whales and track their movements, distribution and recovery over time.

**Listening for Whales Beneath the Surface**

While Bird Island staff watch for whales from land, researchers at King Edward Point are monitoring them beneath the waves.

During the final weekend of June, marine biologists Camille De Pasquale and Rhiannon Nicol worked with the captain and crew of the South Georgia Government fisheries patrol vessel to recover and redeploy three acoustic moorings in Cumberland Bay. The moorings are equipped with underwater sound-recorders that capture whale calls as well as vessel noise. Together they form the first acoustic monitoring network established in Cumberland Bay, providing a powerful new way to study whales throughout the year, including during periods when weather and daylight make visual surveys difficult.

One of the moorings carries a specialised multi-channel recorder that can identify not only the sounds being made, but also the direction they are coming from. This allows researchers to build a better understanding of where whales are located and how they move through the bay.

Camille, Rhiannon and Katie Wells have played a key role in the project, supporting the construction, recovery and redeployment of the moorings, often in challenging weather and sea conditions.

(continued on next page)

**Building a Better Understanding of Georgia's Whales**

Running until March 2027, the Darwin Plus project is creating an unprecedented record of whale activity around South Georgia. By

# Winter Whale Monitoring Continues at South Georgia (cont.)

combining acoustic recordings from Cumberland Bay with sightings and photographs collected at Bird Island, researchers are developing a deeper understanding of how whales use these waters and how best to support the conservation of South Georgia's recovering whale populations.
To date, the acoustic recorders have already detected calls from an impressive range of species, including humpback, southern right, blue, sperm and killer whales. The project will continue until March 2027, and the valuable acoustic dataset, plus whale sightings from Bird Island. will help inform the management and conservation of South Georgia's recovering whale populations.

For more infromation visit the project websites: https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/hungry-humpbacks/
https://www.bas.ac.uk/project/sustained-monitoring-of-whales-at-south-georgia/
Instagram: @wildwaterwhales; BlueSky: @wildwaterwhales.bsky.social



*Above: King Edward Point marine biologists Camille De Pasquale and Rhiannon Nicol working with one of the fisheries patrol crew engineers to set up the multi-channel sound trap. Photo: Tracy Cooper, Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands Officer*

# iNaturalist in Action: Revealing Bermuda's Hidden Endemic Invertebrates

***Vicky Wilkins, Programmes Manager, Species Recovery Trust***

Bermuda is home to around 70 endemic terrestrial invertebrate species, from the Lesser and Greater Bermuda Land Snails to unique insects, spiders, cave mites and more – many of which have had few recent records and remain poorly understood. This is changing due to a recent collaborative Darwin Plus project *Supporting Atlantic Territories Invertebrate Conservation*. In this, the Species Recovery Trust and Buglife (The Invertebrate Conservation Trust) have teamed up with the Bermuda National Trust and the Bermuda Government Department of Environment & Natural Resources. This project uses iNaturalist, a global citizen-science platform that allows anyone to photograph wildlife and upload observations. These are then identified by experts. These dated, georeferenced records help this project and its stakeholders to map, monitor and protect endemic species, creating the most comprehensive public dataset ever assembled for the island's invertebrates.
Local naturalist Luke Foster, with over 12,000 iNaturalist records, has already made new observations of endemic flies, the sea snail *Triphora turtlebayensis*, the pseudoscorpion *Pachyolpium atlanticum* (pictured right), and the moth *Eudarcia haliplancta* (pictured right). Records of invasive species, such as the milk snail *Otcea lactea* are equally valuable, helping conservationists understand threats to Bermuda's 14 endemic snails. These data are feeding directly into Buglife's Important Invertebrate Areas (IIAs), as well as guiding the Bermuda National Trust and Government on habitat management and protection. This is demonstrating the role of AI in natural history recording apps in helping to safeguard the extraordinary endemic invertebrates of Bermuda and other Atlantic islands.





*Above: Endemic moth* Eudarcia haliplancta
*Left: endemic pseudoscorpion* Pachyolpium altlanticum
*Credit: Luke Foster*

# Ecosystem Assessment of Tristan da Cunha Fisheries

***Becca Nicholls, PhD Candidate, University of Exeter***

I commenced my PhD in 2024 and have since completed two field-seasons in Tristan da Cunha.

My first visit to Tristan, in February 2025, was a pilot trip, focused on assessing the logistical feasibility of the project and beginning data-collection. We deployed successfully nine Baited Remote Underwater Video (BRUV) systems and tested the environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling and processing equipment, both in the field and the lab. Despite difficult weather limiting further data-collection, the trip provided a strong foundation for future field-seasons. The next trip was significantly longer to ensure sufficient time for expanded sampling across the islands. This second trip spanned four months on island (November 2025 to March 2026). Although difficult weather persisted, we deployed successfully 33 BRUVs; collected 450 eDNA samples across 62 sites; and 329 fish samples (for isotopic and stomach analysis) around all three of the near islands (Tristan, Inaccessible and Nightingale), as well as 43 fish samples from Gough.

The BRUVs and eDNA are central to monitoring the biodiversity of Tristan's nearshore waters, including the tracking of invasive species like the silver porgy *Diplodus argenteus*. BRUVs provide video footage that captures species presence, abundance and behaviour, while eDNA identifies species that may not appear on camera, because they are rare, cryptic, or not attracted to bait. Used together, these complementary methods improve significantly species detection-rates and help establish a robust ecological baseline across different habitats and depths. During this trip, we learned also that there was a new invasive species, the Highfin Klipfish *Clinus superciliosus*, which originates from Africa. *Clinus superciliosus* was first caught in 2023 and is now found all around Tristan but not yet around any of the other islands, as far as we know. This species range is very shallow, maximum 12m, so it is unlikely to appear on the 15-40m cameras. I adjusted the eDNA sampling to survey 10m, 20m and 40m bottom-depths to try to map the locations of this new species, as well as some 2m samples at the North and South of Tristan, as well as the harbour.

To understand how the ecosystem functions, I will use also Stable Isotope Analysis (SIA) and DNA-based Stomach Content Analysis (SCA). These methods will be applied to fish specimens obtained as bycatch from local fishers and the fishery, allowing us to minimise ecological impact while collecting valuable dietary data. Stable isotopes provide a long-term view of what fish are eating and their position in the food web, while DNA analysis of stomach contents gives a more immediate snapshot of recent meals, identifying digested prey that cannot be visually recognised. These data will help determine if invasive fish are altering the food web, either by preying on native species, such as juvenile lobsters, or by competing for the same resources. Now that these samples have been collected, I will be working with CEFAS' Weymouth Laboratory to do the DNA extraction, before sending the extracted samples to an identification laboratory.



*Above: eDNA collection off Inaccessible Island using Niskin bottle method*

*Below: The core survey crew: Larry Swain, Rodney Green, Dean Repetto and Randall Repetto. Other crew included: James Glass, Kieran Glass, Sarah Glass-Green, Tristan Glass, Callum Green, Calvin Green, Raymond Green, Clifton Repetto, Deanna Rogers, Cliff Swain, Steve Swain.*



Together, the use of BRUVs, eDNA, SIA, and SCA will enable a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of Tristan's neritic fish-communities. This includes biodiversity, ecological roles, habitat-associations, and the effects of invasive species. These insights are critical for developing ecosystem-based fisheries management and designing effective, evidence-based conservation and biosecurity policies for this unique and remote marine ecosystem.

Supervisor Nicola Weber N.L.Weber2@exeter.ac.uk





*Abovet: Niskin bottle method close up, Left: BRUV equipment had to be assembled each day due to the space needed on the boat.*

# The RNBWS: 80 Years of Birds, Ships and Science









*RNBWS logos; original (left) and contemporary version (centre). The cover of the first* Sea Swallow *(right), the Society's journal, published December 1947. The seabird on the cover is an Arctic Tern, based on the famous painting from John James Audubon's Birds of America.*

***Phil Boak, Chairman, Royal Naval Birdwatching Society***

2026 marks the 80th Anniversary of the Royal Naval Birdwatching Society (RNBWS). It was launched by an Admiralty Fleet Order dated 25 October 1946, following an application by a group of enthusiasts including Lieutenant Commander Peter Scott, son of the famous Antarctic Explorer Captain Robert Falcon Scott. Since then, its members have included naval personnel, merchant mariners and interested civilians from around the world.

Peter Scott was only two when his father, Captain Robert Falcon Scott, died returning from the South Pole in 1912. In his last letter to his wife, Scott advised her to "make the boy interested in natural history if you can; it is better than games." It clearly worked. Following wartime service in the RNVR, Peter established the Severn Wildfowl Trust at Slimbridge, later the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust, and went on to become a celebrated conservationist and founder of WWF. He even designed its famous panda logo. He was elected as a Vice President of the RNBWS in the inaugural meeting 29 November 1946, and may even have designed the original RNBWS logo.

Another important founder was Captain Gerald Tuck, who chaired the Society for 30 years (1951-1981) and wrote the definitive *Seabirds of the World*, published in 1978 and dedicated to the RNBWS. It is fascinating to imagine how much of the research for that book was conducted from the bridges of Royal Navy ships.

The creation of the Society in 1946 was widely reported in the press, including several national newspapers. The Daily Mirror carried the headline *Like to do Bird watching*? *Navy is asked*. Another article with the headline *The Navy has a new watch – for birds* imagines the conversations on the bridge, with knowledgeable RNBWS members discussing the finer points of gull identification.

From the beginning, the Society has encouraged the recording of seabirds from ships, with a key objective of the society being the encouragement and promotion of Bird Watching in the Royal Navy with Special reference to Bird Watching at sea. Observations from Royal Navy warships were particularly valuable, with warships frequently travelling through waters away from normal shipping routes. The observations were collated, and the data shared with the RSPB and Natural History Museum, and later the United Kingdom Hydrographic Office (UKHO). One such example are the records and photographs from the previous *HMS Protector* (A146), which deployed to Antarctic waters 1966/67, at a time when few vessels ventured into these inhospitable regions.

Another significant example of records are the two albatross photos at bottom left of p. 23, taken in May 1982. They were taken by Eddie Bairstow, deep in the South Atlantic onboard *RFA Sir Percivale*. Eddie describes the encounter as 'a magical


Seadog with an eye for birds




*Above: Gerald Tuck and his book.*
*Below:Clipping with an article calling for bird-watchers to join the Society decades ago.*



"LIKE TO DO BIRD WATCHING?" NAVY IS ASKED

OUT from the Admiralty to all the Navy's ships yesterday went a Fleet Order.

About bird-watching.

It said a Royal Navy Bird-Watching Society would be formed if there were enough support for one.

The objects would be "to encourage and develop the art of bird-watching among RN and RM personnel, with special emphasis on bird-watching at sea, and to carry out investigations on ornithological matters connected with bird behaviour and movement at sea, for outside societies and individuals."

moment watching an enormous albatross swooping around the stern of the ship', a moment of grace and peace during the Falklands War.

A database of some 80 years of observations now exists, providing a unique resource for researchers. The length of the record makes it increasingly valuable for studying changes in seabird populations and climate. The recording and photography of birds which land on ships at sea has also been a fascinating avenue which the Society continues to explore. Often, the watches at sea are made less dull by the sighting of a land-bird, blown astray, or resting during migration, on the decks of a warship. Bats, large moths and other insects are also encountered! (a small selection at bottom right of this page).

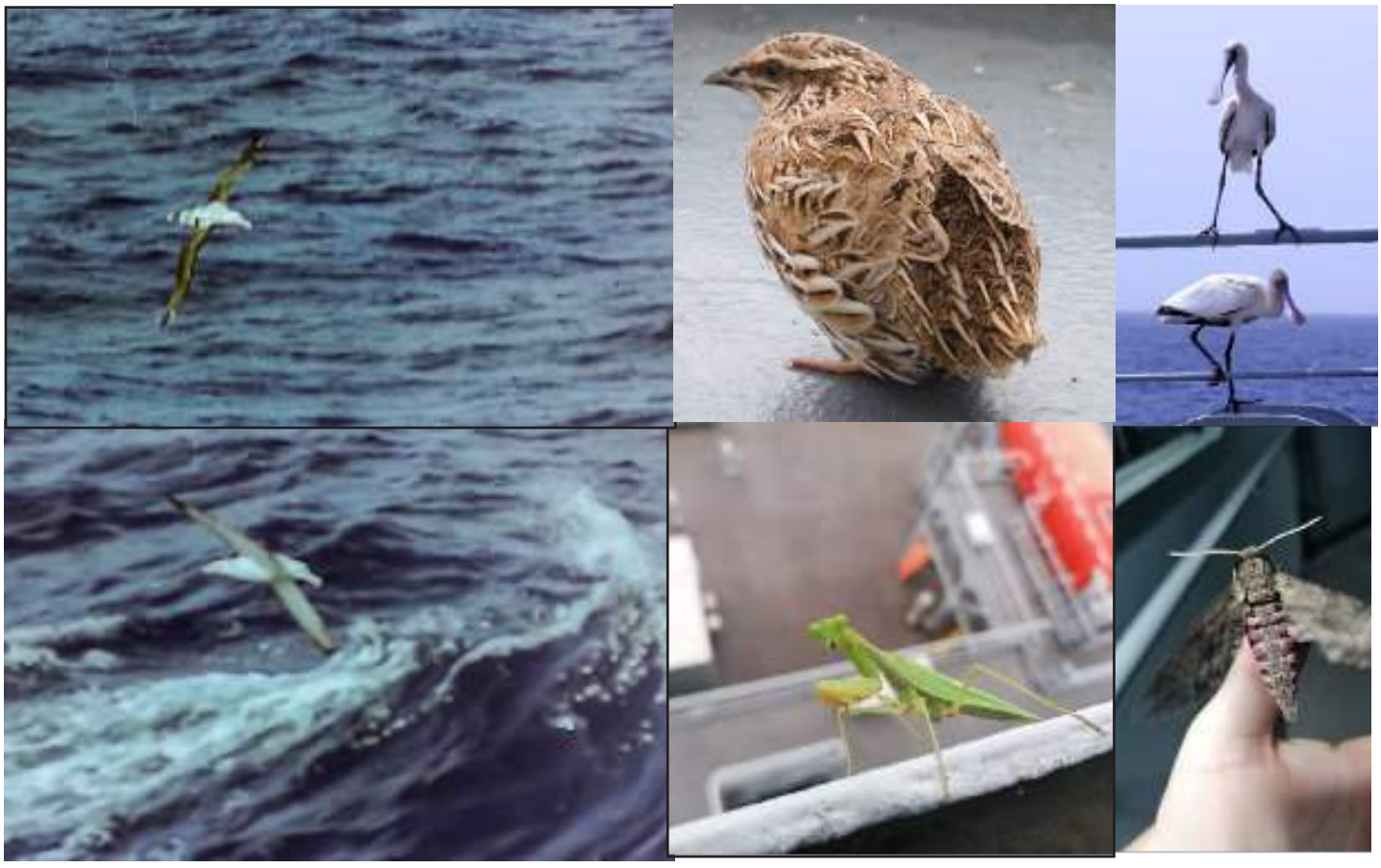
Eighty years later, whilst there are fewer warships in the Royal Navy, the internet and various apps such as eBird make it easier than ever to record bird sightings across the world. This is facilitated also the huge boom in the cruise industry, with amateur birdwatchers submitting large numbers of records while on their travels – a great example of citizen-science. The RNBWS has therefore shifted its focus away from the creation of its own records and database, to encouraging a healthy interest in wildlife and conservation, and the recording via other means including the new online platforms. The RNBWS also supports specific surveys, such as the Seabirds Count, a major census of breeding seabirds in Britain and Ireland 2015-2021.

Today, the Society continues to encourage and promote conservation, and support scientific research through grants. Recent projects supported include the conservation of Zino's Petrel, the Curlew Country Project, purchase of recording devices to monitor the South Georgia Pipit and a grant to support seabird conservation in Peru. Many of these projects are covered in depth in the Society's annual journal *Sea Swallow*, which is posted to members, with a full library of past editions available online for all to access at www.rnbws.org.uk.



*Above left and right: Images from the RNBWS archives taken during the* Protector*'s 1966/67 deployment. Here at Beauchene Island we see a mix of albatross and penguins including chinstraps. Beauchene is t the southernmost of the Falkland Islands.*

The RNBWS has continued to forge relationships with other like-minded societies, charities and organisations. The database of 80 years of seabird sightings was recently submitted to the UK Hydrographic Office (UKHO) who are extremely interested in ornithological sightings in the maritime domain. It has also been great working with the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), who promote conservation across the world in locations such as Bermuda, the Pitcairn Islands and Montserrat. In the last couple of years, the RNBWS has established a close link with Pacific Rim Conservation (PRC), an organisation which carries out invaluable work regarding seabird conservation across the Pacific. The RNBWS was delighted to provide a grant to the PRC to help purchase a camera to monitor petrels in their nest burrows.



*Above: (Left) Albatross from onboard the* RFA Sir Percivale*, May 1982. (Right) Some of the birds and insects that make their way on board or come close to the ships during passages .*







To celebrate the 80th anniversary of the RNBWS the Society is hosting two events, a celebratory dinner 4 December 2026, and a combined event at Slimbridge WWT 18 November 2026 (more to be reported in future editions of *Navy News*!). It is sincerely hoped that the RNBWS will thrive for another 80 years. Key to this is a membership base of passionate and interested people, who have an interest in seabirds, wildlife and conservation.

If you would like to join, or are interested in finding out more, please email the RNBWS Chairman, Philip Boak, – chairman@rnbws.org.uk or swordfish200@aol.com







*Birds and People*
*Top row: Onboard warships at sea, including (left) a petrel; (right) an albatross from onboard the* RFA Sir Percivale*, May 1982.*
*2nd Row: (left) The RNBWS were proud to support the Curlew Country Project during 2021. The Curlew Country project is based in the Shropshire Hills and Powys borders, with the aim to reverse the decline in the local population of curlew. RNBWS member and Chairman Phil Boak pictured (left) in a curlew pen helping rear curlew chicks (middle). Waved albatross (right) under the care of Luis Delgado and Yovana Murillo Vega, in Callao, Peru, 2024. The RNBWS provided a small grant to help purchase medicines and other supplies to look after injured seabirds in Peru.*
*Third row: Lauren Pederson (left) working with Pacific Rim Conservation is pictured in 2022 at James Campbell National Wildlife Refuge on the north shore of O'ahu. Lauren is holding a Tristram's storm-petrel chick that was translocated to the site and hand raised by PRC staff until fledging. During translocations, PRC staff conduct daily behavioural and health assessments, as well as regular feedings.*
*Jeremy Madeiros (right) with one of the first Cahow (Bermuda Petrel) chicks bred in the wild by adults which, as chicks, had been translocated to the ecologically restored Nonsuch Island (Photo © Dr Mike Pienkowski).*
*Fourth row: RNBWS member Jack Crowe (left) is pictured holding a Zino's Petrel during licensed ringing operations near the top of Pico do Arieiro, Madeira, July 2024. The Zino's Petrel is a small seabird endemic to the island of Madeira, with the accolade of being Europe's rarest breeding seabird. Torika Christian (right), a conservationist based on the Pitcairn Islands, holding a Murphy's Petrel.*
*Last row: Murphy's Petrel takes flight.*