

FORUM NEWS 25

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Seabird Restoration on Ascension

In global terms, Ascension is very important for its breeding seabird populations, especially the endemic Frigatebird, scarce species such as the Red-footed Booby and the concentrations of Sooty Terns. Before the arrival of people, Ascension was home to an estimated 20 million seabirds. Today, the seabird population has been dramatically reduced to a mere 400,000.



Masked Booby chick: becoming a familiar sight on Ascension mainland again

They are confined mainly to the small offshore Boatswainbird Island, off-shore stacks and a few inaccessible cliffs.

Since 2001, the RSPB has been helping the Ascension Island Government to implement a Foreign and Commonwealth Office funded project to restore seabirds to the mainland of Ascension. Already, in a short space of time, significant results have been achieved. The Forum had been pressing for many years for action in this regard, and was delighted to facilitate the funding of this project via its member organisation, RSPB.

A vital part of the project was the removal of feral cats, carried out by Wildlife Management International Limited. No feral cats have been found since February and, to date, 77 pairs of breeding seabirds from five species have returned. There was no predation of Sooty Terns during the last breeding season. The returning seabirds provide a unique opportunity to develop tourism and thus support Ascension's emerging economy.

The project also supported the establishment of a Conservation Centre. It has been so successful that the Ascension Island Government now funds two posts, and it continues to attract funding for further conservation projects. A programme is in place to detect and monitor the progress of all mainland nesting

birds. A process to designate National Protected Areas has begun to ensure the habitats needed by many species, including seabirds, are maintained.

It was the intention of the project to prepare for the eradication of rats from Ascension. However, a review conducted in 2002 concluded Ascension was not ready. There were a number of issues that needed to be addressed before rat eradication could take place successfully. These included the strengthening of 'biosafety' legislation, operational systems and border control. As a result, RSPB has supported the development of an improved rat control programme.

It is critical that the main partners in the project all continue to be vigilant and build on the project's success. RSPB funds and a grant from the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) will support the position of two local cat-monitoring persons to monitor closely the feral cat situation for the next couple of years.

Finally, the project marks a tremendous achievement in conservation history, as Ascension is the largest inhabited island where feral cat removal has been attempted. Enormous credit goes to the Conservation Centre whose liaison work continues to maintain the support of the Ascension Islanders. Also to the Ascension Island Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, without whose backing and advice the project would have had immense problems.

Sarah Sanders, Country Programmes Manager (Overseas Territories), RSPB

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Local cat monitor, Darin Roberts setting up a cat monitoring line

A guide to the birds of St Helena and Ascension Island

By Neil McCulloch, illustrated by Dan Powell.

In a recent catalogue of books on islands in the South Atlantic, there are 87 listings for St Helena! However, this new one is the only one where the catalogue states “essential for any visitor”. I couldn’t agree more. It is a pocket sized, well-illustrated book written by an ornithologist who knows these islands well, especially St Helena. Neil McCulloch has been studying the ecology of the Wirebird for several years, filling in his time improving his knowledge of the other birds of the islands. The book is careful and systematic. The initial chapters deal with the island environments, both historical and contemporary, and with recommended places to observe birds. Then each resident species and regular visitor has a full page of attractive water colour illustrations by Dan Powell, and a page of clearly laid out information. The extinct birds, accidental visitors and failed introductions are listed in appendices. This is a well timed book, published when there is a focus on conservation on both islands and removal of the feral cats from Ascension is leading to the return of seabirds breeding on the main island. Yes, this really is an essential purchase for any visitor to these islands. This book is published on behalf of The St Helena Nature Conservation Group and The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds. RSPB ref: 92-511-01-02; ISBN 1 90190 46 7. Price £10 + p&p. Copies are available from RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire SG19 2DL. Tel: +44 1767 680551.

Myrtle Ashmole

First Insect Guide to the Falkland Islands Published

Falklands Conservation has just published the first guide to identification of insects in the Falkland Islands. The author of *Insects of the Falkland Islands* is Dr Alexander Jones who has been studying the insects of South Atlantic Islands for the past six years. He is an honorary research fellow in the School of Biological Sciences of the University of Wales, Bangor.

Insects of the Falkland Islands is beautifully illustrated by Richard Lewington, renowned entomological artist. The booklet is intended to raise awareness of the unique insects found in this remote part of the South Atlantic, and to stimulate an interest in finding those yet to be discovered.

Over 250 insect species have been recorded in the Islands and most are closely related to those found in mainland Patagonia and Tierra del Fuego. But it has been estimated that nearly three quarters of all insects in the Falklands are endemic – i.e. this is the only place in the world where they are found. A reduction in wing size, and indeed

absence of wings, is a feature of many of them - probably an adaptation to the windy weather. Several common beetles are flightless, including Darwin’s black beetle first recorded by Charles Darwin on his famous voyage here with the Beagle in 1834.

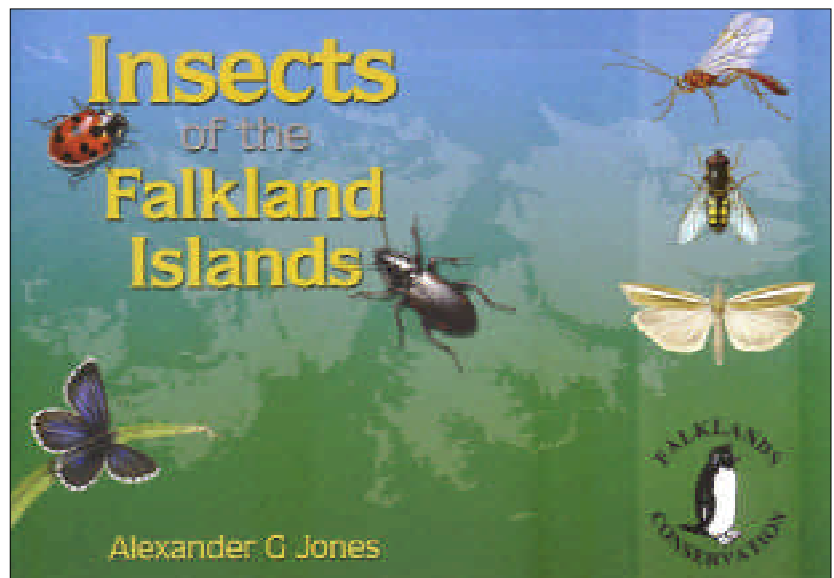
There are also many introduced species, mostly of European origin. These relatively recent arrivals to the Islands have colonised as a direct result of human activities. The eleven spot ladybird came from Britain in the 1960s. The bluebottle, the most noticeable fly in the Falklands (locally known as the ‘blue buzzer’), is reputed to have been accidentally introduced in 1886 on a ship visiting Port Howard, West Falkland, taking frozen mutton to the UK.

The book is part of a larger programme on invertebrate biodiversity being conducted by Falklands Conservation to investigate their populations, distribution and threats to survival. In a land without native trees, reptiles or amphibians, insect life forms a very important part of the Island’s ecology.

In launching the publication, on 29 April 2004, Dick Vane-Wright, Head of Entomology Department at the Natural History Museum said: ‘In helping us all focus on the ideas that small is beautiful, and that small things, in an ecological sense, make the world go round, this book will provide an essential entry point for all those who wish to, or need to, understand how the Islands work in a biological sense. This book will surely stimulate discovery of the next 250 insect species for the Falkland Islands – because for sure there are still many left to find, many of which will be new to science.’

Insects of the Falkland Islands has been produced with financial support from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Environment Fund, the Peter Scott Trust for Education and Research in Conservation and the Ernest Cook Trust.

Insects of the Falkland Islands (ISBN 0-9538371-3-0, 32 pages), is published by Falklands Conservation price £7 (£5 to members of Falklands Conservation). It is available from Falklands Conservation UK Office: 1 Princes Avenue, Finchley, London N3 2DA or from its web site shop:



Falklands Conservation Celebrates 25 Years of Caring for Falklands Wildlife

Falklands Conservation is celebrating 25 years dedicated to protecting the spectacular wildlife of the Falkland Islands. It has developed into a thriving, successful Falklands-based charity at the heart of the community.

Back in 1979, on one of the first cruise ship visits to the Islands, Sir Peter Scott (also a founder of the World Wildlife Fund) had the idea of setting up a UK charity, the Falkland Islands Foundation, to protect the Islands' natural heritage. Shortly afterwards, the Falkland Island Trust was established in the Islands to actively 'promote an interest in all aspects of flora and fauna'. In 1991 these two organisations merged to form Falklands Conservation.

From a humble beginning with 2 part time staff and no proper office in Stanley, the organisation now employs 10 full time staff, has over 600 members and a thriving junior group, provides support to external researchers and landowners, owns 17 offshore island nature reserves, and gives specialist conservation advice to the Falkland Islands Government. An office in the UK seeks out funds worldwide to support project work.

From the very start, efforts concentrated on seabird research. The population crash of Rockhopper penguins in 1986, combined with arrival of the commercial fishery, emphasized the importance of such work. Today these efforts continue but increasing development across the Islands, changes in agricultural practice and the oil exploration programme add to the necessity of many of the projects Falklands Conservation undertakes.

There are a number of key challenges to Falklands wildlife, which will have to be addressed by the charity over the next 25 years. One of the most important is the continued survival of the Black-browed albatross in the face of illegal, unlicensed, and unregulated fisheries across the Patagonian Shelf. This will be pursued actively, particularly as a Partner within BirdLife International representing the Falkland Islands, and as an active member within the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum. The possible causes of the long-term decline of Rockhopper penguins must also be investigated and action taken to protect what is the largest global concentration of these birds. Eradication of rats from offshore islands has to continue to safeguard the endemic birds of the Islands (Falkland Flightless Steamer Duck and Cobb's Wren). The status and distribution of the Islands' rare plants has to be undertaken and invertebrate studies continue. The charity will remain alert to the impact that exploration for oil in Falkland waters might pose to the Islands wildlife striving to ensure adequate protection on precautionary principles. And, not least, every encouragement will be given to adoption of a Biodiversity Action Plan by the Falkland Islands Government.



*Beauchene Island, Falklands islands
second largest albatross colony*

Falklands Plans to Improve Seabird Conservation

The long-term survival of Falkland Islands seabirds has been boosted by the Government adoption of a National Plan of Action for Seabirds. Drafted by Falklands Conservation, the Plan was funded by the RSPB under the guidelines of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation.

Recent changes in the longline fleet have reduced seabird deaths to negligible levels. Trawl fisheries, however, still have a significant impact. The adoption of a plan to address seabird deaths from trawling is a significant first in global seabird conservation. Also adopted was an assessment directive to investigate seabird interactions with the large squid-jigging fleet that operates in Falkland Island waters. This means that the entire commercial fishing fleet in the Falkland Islands is covered by plans to reduce seabird deaths.

The timing of the adoption of the Falkland Island plans coincides with UK ratification of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels, focusing on reduction of bird deaths through mitigation measures and educating fishers. Falklands Conservation and the Falkland Islands Fisheries Department have been working closely with the local fishing industry to develop mitigation methods for trawlers. Recent experimental trials identified a successful mitigation method that will be used on all trawlers in 2004. It is hoped this will quickly reduce seabird deaths.

The Falklands is the stronghold of the Black-browed Albatross, with over 70% of the global population. In 2001, Falklands

Conservation conducted a complete census, resulting in the re-classification of the species as Endangered in 2003. This study estimated that, between 1995 and 2000, over 87,500 breeding pairs were lost, a rate of 4% per year, or 2 albatrosses per hour. Like other albatross species, which spend the majority of the year foraging in waters distant to their breeding grounds, the Falkland Island Black-browed Albatross feeds predominantly on the Patagonian Shelf and to Brazil.

Falklands Conservation has recently been granted £150,000 by the UK Overseas Territories Environment Programme of the FCO for a two-year albatross and petrel conservation programme. The work, focusing on the Black-browed Albatross, Southern Giant and White-chinned Petrel, will commence in July and will include a full census of breeding pairs of the three species and also cover site management and protection from threats such as fire, rats, cats and disturbance. Six sites will be selected to produce management plans to be used as working examples of best practice. As well as the research and management side of the project, a strong emphasis is on education. A pack for fishermen will be produced in the first year and also one for use in local schools, containing up to date information about bird distribution, status and threats. In addition, the marine element will include some survey and distribution work, observing mitigation measures at sea and ensuring that the number of birds killed through fishing is being reduced effectively.

Falklands Conservation: www.falklandsconservation.com

New Island South Conservation Trust

The Falkland Islands are one of the top world sites for seabirds. They are also important for sea-mammals and endemic plants, amongst other biodiversity. One of the first persons to recognise these exceptional values and potential was Ian Strange, far back in the early sixties. While doing his work as naturalist, artist and photographer in this region, he managed to purchase one of the jewels of the crown of the Falklands, New Island. Years later, he created the New Island South Conservation Trust. This is a small but active organisation, which owns and manages the New Island South Reserve, and whose main mission is to conserve it in perpetuity. The Reserve (with ca. 1,000ha) has, amongst other outstanding values, the largest colony of thin-billed prions in the world, numbering around one million pairs. Other important species include the globally threatened rockhopper penguin and black-browed albatross, two species that nest here in large numbers.



*Rockhopper penguins
on New Island*

The Reserve has seen some of the pioneering work on the Falkland Islands concerning the eradication of large grazers (sheep and cattle), allowing a spectacular recovery of the vegetation. It also pioneered activities such as controlled ecotourism, and it is still one of the favoured stops for Antarctic cruise ships. Recently, the emphasis has been on detailed research projects, such as the ones on introduced rodents, satellite-tracking of penguins, skua migration, prion ecology and behaviour and the population dynamics of albatrosses.

The Falkland Islands, with their small human population and large biodiversity, have many conservation-related issues; there are several organisations and individuals adopting various approaches to address these. We believe in the usefulness of having a diversity of opinions and approaches. As such, the New Island South Conservation Trust will keep on doing its independent management, research and monitoring, improving the knowledge on the Falklands biodiversity, and making a decisive contribution to its conservation.

Paulo Catry: www.newislandtrust.com

Illegal fishing in South Atlantic UKOT waters

Illegal fishing activities off the coast of Ascension Island were highlighted earlier in the year when a desperate request for help to identify the fishing boats concerned was received from the island. One or more illegal fishing boats were operating within a hundred metres of Ascension Island. Ascension personnel managed to recover and confiscate a considerable amount of line. However, three turtles perished on the lines.

Resources are very limited on Ascension, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha. HMG has stated that once the country of origin was established it would pursue the issue with the nation state. If sustainable use of the UKOTs resources is to be met, then it is imperative that such unsustainable activities should cease. In order to achieve this and meet its commitments, HMG needed to find a way to invest in initial enforcement measures so that there is an incentive for licence purchases, which could generate income for future enforcement.

The Forum has made constructive suggestions which use the advantage of coordinating measures across the large sea-areas within the UKOTs in the South Atlantic, and looks forward to HMG's response.



*Team of volunteers who removed long line from the
coast of Ascension*

Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels

Defra and FCO officers are to be congratulated for finding a way through the administrative obstacles so that UK was able to ratify the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels on behalf of itself, British Antarctic Territory, South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands, and the Falkland Islands. In the Falkland Islands, the coincidence in timing with the adoption by Falkland Island Government of a National Plan of Action for Seabirds is mutually supportive.

The Forum is still urging HMG to make the necessary adjustments to legislation, if this is required, for Tristan da Cunha to be added to the ratification. Also the Forum would like to encourage HMG to take steps to implement the Agreement involving all the relevant UKOTs in Conferences of the Parties.

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum: www.ukotcf.org

Tristan da Cunha penguins

In April 2003, 73 pairs of rockhopper penguins, IUCN red-listed as a vulnerable species, were captured in Tristan da Cunha. The birds were captured by a South African businessman, who then shipped the birds to various zoos in Malaysia, China and Japan. The Forum had contacted FCO at the time, but as no international law was being broken, once the decision had been made it could not be rescinded. Tristan had decided to sell the penguins in order to help fund the restoration work needed after a hurricane had hit the island in 2002.

This incident has highlighted the necessity to seek wider-ranging advice on matters relating to wildlife and conservation issues. In addition, it has underlined the need for this advice to take into account the general commitments, such as under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Environment Charters, and not simply those, such as CITES, covering restricted aspects in lists. There have been no accurate counts done on the rockhopper populations on Tristan da Cunha since the 1970s and, since rockhoppers are showing a serious decline in other areas, it could not be assumed that the Tristan population was stable. This was among the issues currently being addressed by the RSPB-run Darwin Initiative project on Tristan da Cunha.

The Forum is seeking assurances that such an issue will not happen again, and that a procedure is in place for adequate consultation in the decision-making process as this incident has highlighted the lack of an established system of contacts and consultations. HMG recognises the concern this event has caused. As far as the UK was aware, the decision did not breach any international or domestic legislation. Nonetheless, it is important to learn from the incident to make sure that any future decisions are based on the best advice and information available. To this end a set of guidelines is being prepared. Tristan da Cunha is aware of the concerns surrounding this incident and wishes to avoid such actions in the future.

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum: www.ukotcf.org

The Herpetological Conservation Trust

The Herpetological Conservation Trust (HCT), which has recently joined the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, is a registered charity specialising in the conservation of threatened amphibians and reptiles and their habitats. Established in 1989 in Bournemouth, on the south coast of England, the HCT's primary focus has been the protection and management of lowland heathland and sand dunes, two of the most valuable habitats for rare British herpetofauna. The HCT currently owns or leases 81 reserves in the UK that incorporate significant areas of these habitats, along with their nationally important reptile and amphibian populations, and also conducts extensive surveys, research and habitat management elsewhere in the country.

The HCT is lead or joint partner on all UK Biodiversity Action Plans for rare herpetofauna species, including marine turtles. Working closely with the statutory bodies English Nature, the Countryside Council for Wales and Scottish Natural Heritage, and in partnership with many other wildlife NGOs, the HCT therefore plays a significant role in influencing UK Government conservation policies.

The HCT has long been involved in Europe through its work on the European Habitats Forum, the Societas Europaea Herpetologica Conservation Committee and the IUCN Species Survival Group for European Herpetofauna. These activities have enabled the Trust to participate in the workings of international agreements and legislation, including the Bern Convention and the EU Habitats Directive. HCT's specialist knowledge and expertise have also led to increasingly important contracts in Europe and these include the writing of various Species Action Plans commissioned by the Council of Europe, as well as a major book on the Important Herpetofaunal Areas of Europe for the Dutch Government (to coincide with its forthcoming European Union presidency).

More recently, the HCT has become associated with projects in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. The main involvement to date has been on Jersey, where the Trust has been working on conservation projects for the agile frog *Rana dalmatina* and the western green lizard *Lacerta bilineata* for several years. Jersey is the only natural location for these species in the British Isles and HCT work has included practical habitat management, input into action plans and regular surveys and monitoring.

Following the Conservation Forum's 2003 Bermuda conference, which the author was fortunate enough to attend, the Trust has also been assisting with the production of a Species Action Plan for the Bermuda skink *Eumeces longirostris*, one of the most endangered endemic species in the UK Overseas Territories. As a new member of the Conservation Forum, the HCT will no doubt become more heavily involved with the conservation of threatened amphibians and reptiles in the UK Overseas Territories and is always happy to



Bermuda skink Eumeces longirostris

give advice on herpetological matters to other organisations and Forum members.

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The HCT web site is at: www.herpconstrust.org.uk

Review of existing and potential Ramsar sites in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies

This important review was announced in *Forum News 24*. It follows many years of voluntary work by the Forum in promoting the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance in the UK Overseas Territories.

The project has a very tight schedule, from the beginning of January to the final report in November. In developing a timetable to fulfil the project requirements, particular attention was given to the fact that the work depends on the voluntary co-operation of many busy people throughout the Territories and UK. Securing these responses depends strongly on the long history of mutual respect built up between the Forum and its partners in the Territories.

The Forum was anxious to start the first round of consultations. Therefore, in the last 8 days of December, after the contract invitation had been received from Defra (the UK Government Department

which leads on Ramsar matters), a background note was prepared to introduce the project. To accompany this, a separate first consultation document was prepared for each of the 18 UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies involved. Each document summarised existing information on priority wetland types and other principal features of interest in the relevant territory, as well as the coverage of these insofar as known, in the designated sites and others which have been proposed at various times. Consultation lists (including governmental, NGO and other personnel) were compiled from the Forum network, and

consultees invited to comment on the initial draft documents, by the end of January. The draft documents were checked with colleagues in Defra and FCO. The latter requested that the consultation be used also to advise Governors, Administrators or Commissioners, as appropriate. The consultations were despatched by email on 31 December 2003.

The responses to the initial round and other discussions suggested that the timing of the detailed second round should be varied greatly for different territories, bearing in mind the nature of initial responses, opportunities for visits for other reasons, the degree of novelty in some of the issues raised and needs to investigate approaches to these in other parts of the world, amongst others.

Although the specification (and funding!) for the project did not include visits to the UKOTs, the Forum is taking the opportunity of visits for other work, to strengthen this project. Visits to the Falkland Islands and the Turks & Caicos, as well as the Forum's 2003 conference in Bermuda and follow-on contacts from there, have allowed the bringing together of several of the key governmental and NGO personnel to discuss the range of sites and information on them, as well as addressing particular issues. This proved invaluable in making rapid progress in three of the

territories with the largest areas of wetlands or most potential sites. Other opportunities will be taken to pursue such an approach during the year, for St Helena and Ascension, as well as some of the Crown Dependencies.

The second and later stages of the review use the Ramsar Information Sheet (RIS) format, as an efficient way of collating information. A major activity has been to collate, analyse and edit the material from the various sources into RIS format for the majority of the potential sites and the updates for existing sites, to identify gaps in information and to consult partners, especially in territories. By late May, draft RIS had been assembled (with many gaps for further information to be collated) for all presently identified sites for all but one territory. Linkage was achieved with the Important Bird Areas exercise (for which the Ramsar project leader

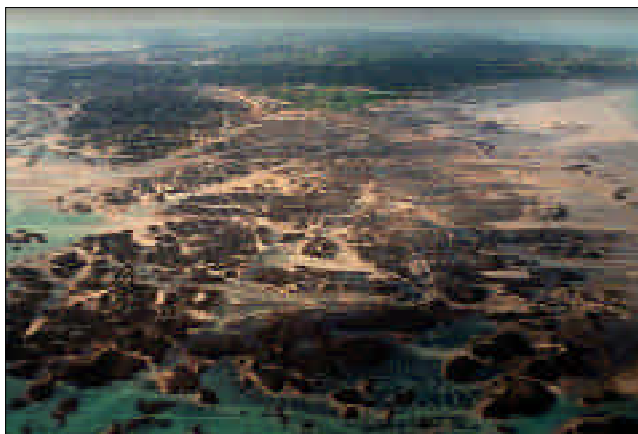
is a voluntary author for one Territory), and information is being exchanged for several territories.

This work continues. Integrated with this will be the pursuing of information, relating mainly to existing Ramsar sites, needed in 2004 for UK's report to the Ramsar Conference of the Parties 2005.

The project is progressing well for most territories, and the Forum is grateful to the many people who have helped. For a few territories, responses have been slower, and we urge those with information for these (as well as some organisations

holding specialist information for several territories) to find time to contribute. Experience throughout the world has found the Ramsar Convention to be an effective mechanism for successful conservation and sustainable use – but it is important to do this preparatory work so that these tools are available when threats appear to the sites.

Any offers of information please to Mike Pienkowski: pienkowski@cix.co.uk



The Southeast Coast of Jersey is designated as a Ramsar Convention Wetland of International Importance

World Heritage Issues

As *Forum News* goes to press, confirmation was received that Gough Island World Heritage Site in Tristan da Cunha has been expanded and renamed as the Gough and Inaccessible Islands WHS.

The Management Plan for Henderson Island World Heritage Site, in the Pitcairn group has been published and is now available on the Forum's web-site www.ukotcf.org

Overseas Territories Environment Programme

The Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) is a joint programme of the Department for International Development (DFID) and Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to support implementation of the Environment Charters and environmental management more generally in all the UK's Overseas Territories. The Charters were signed jointly by the UK and UKOT governments in September 2001. They set out (in a common format) a range of policy objectives and undertakings entered into by the UKOTs and HMG, with emphasis on the effective implementation of the Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEA) to enable HMG and the UKOTs to meet their respective obligations.

This programme will provide £3m up to March 2007. Bids against the programme budget for project funding will be accepted from Overseas Territories' governments, NGOs, community-based organisations, individuals, educational institutions and the private sector. Bids may also be submitted by UK-based organisations, NGOs and academic institutions provided that they have been developed in collaboration with partners in the territories. Bids will be assessed on a competitive basis, against published selection criteria, by a panel of independent specialists. Technical support may be provided for project preparation, where needed.

The goal of the programme is to enhance the quality of life and livelihood opportunities for the inhabitants of all of the UKOTs through the sustainable use (or protection, where necessary) of environmental and natural resources, whilst securing global environmental benefits within the scope of the core principles of the relevant multilateral environmental agreements (MEA). It will assist the island communities in taking ownership of and responsibility for the issues, by helping them to assess problems and to promote sustainable solutions to them through national strategic planning processes and action at the local level.

By the end of the current programme in March 2007, both HMG and most, if not all, of the UKOTs should be able to demonstrate that measurable progress has been made towards meeting their respective commitments to the Environment Charter process and to achievement of wider environmental goals. OTEP will facilitate this through the provision of advice,

support, and a source of funding for projects.

The programme will build upon and augment the earlier FCO Overseas Territories Environment Fund. It will also activate the DFID commitment in the 1999 White Paper: *Partnerships for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories* to 'provide additional assistance to the poorer territories in addressing global environmental concerns'. It will work within the framework of the UKOT Environmental Charters; and it will benefit from a joint approach between DFID and FCO, with effective pooling of their resources.



Ministers and Councillors from UKOTs with HMG Ministers in FCO at the launch of OTEP

The geographical scope of OTEP will cover all those UKOTs that have signed Environment Charters¹, plus Gibraltar and British Antarctic Territory.

The programme will be managed jointly by DFID Overseas Territories Department and the FCO Environment Policy Department (working closely with FCO Overseas Territories Department) supported by a London-based management committee. This committee will interface with national focal points and steering committees in the UKOTs (including through governors', administrators', or commissioners' offices),

¹ Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks & Caicos Islands, Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, St Helena, Ascension Island, Tristan da Cunha, British Indian Ocean Territory, Pitcairn Islands.

as appropriate. Other government departments will be consulted according to their respective competences and capacity to provide technical input and other resources. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) are involved.

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (an umbrella NGO for a wide range of environmental NGOs, special interest groups, and UK centres of excellence in fields relevant to the programme²) has been closely involved in FCO-funded initiatives to date. The Forum, as well as its member organisations and working groups, will remain actively engaged under the programme. The Forum, for example, was involved closely in the consultation process leading up to the establishment of OTEP. There already is a mechanism for liaison between the Forum and HMG through six-monthly meetings.

OTEP hopes to build on earlier work funded by FCO's Environment Policy Department. The new FCO contribution to OTEP comes from its Global Opportunities Fund. The DFID contribution will be from the DFID UKOT regional budget line.

OTEP was launched by FCO and DFID Ministers in December 2003 at the annual Overseas Territories Consultative Council. Speaking at the launch of the Programme, Gareth Thomas, Parliamentary Under Secretary at DFID, said: "The Overseas Territories embrace a rich and diverse heritage of natural environments. It is the duty of us all to protect and conserve this heritage for the benefit not only of the Territories themselves, but also for future generations and the world as a whole. Good environmental conservation practice brings its own benefits and rewards in terms of sensible and sustainable economic development."

Chief Minister Michael Misick of the Turks and Caicos Islands welcomed the pooling of FCO and DFID resources for the benefit of environmental work in the Overseas Territories, saying "This funding reflects the partnership on the ground between the TCI Department of Environment & Coastal Resources and the TCI National Trust, which has been reaffirmed through the TCI's implementation of the Environment Charters. The Department and the Trust have in the past received project development support from DFID and the Forum. It is hoped that OTEP will continue to

assist the coordination and prioritisation of environment projects in the TCI."

The first OTEP bidding round has now concluded. The OTEP Management Committee received 37 project proposals in the first bidding round, from a wide range of project applicants including UKOT governments, UK and UKOT-based NGOs, community-based organisations in the UKOTs, and UK and UKOT educational institutions. The overall standard of proposal was high, with many demonstrating good local consultation and stakeholder support in the UKOTs, as well as the ability to meet the OTEP criteria, namely:

- implementing the Environment Charter for the Territory, including the development of strategies and action plans where necessary;
- meeting the Territory's obligations under those Multilateral Environment Agreements (MEAs) extended to it, and preparing for possible future extensions;
- building environmental management capacity in the Territory; and
- raising awareness of environmental issues; promoting participation by civil society in decisions affecting the environment; and supporting environmental education in the Territory.

All project proposals received by the OTEP secretariat were assessed by a nine-person selection panel comprising: officials from FCO, DFID, Defra and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee; specialists from UK academic and scientific institutions, and consultancies; and representatives of the NGO community through UKOTCF. A wide range of environmental disciplines was represented on the panel, and all members had specific UKOT expertise and experience.

The following pages summarise the initial batch of successful applications to date. An additional group of applications were invited to undertake further work on their proposals and to resubmit them for consideration by OTEP in June 2004. These include projects in Anguilla, British Indian Ocean Territory, Gibraltar, South Georgia & South Sandwich Islands, and St Helena, together with three cross-territory projects on climate change, marine turtles and the next Overseas Territories Environment Conference proposed for 2006. As we go to press, support for these projects was confirmed, and summaries will appear in the next issue.

UKOTCF is providing a Communication Strategy for OTEP, and this is the first of a series of supplements to *Forum News* as part of this initiative. Although *Forum News* itself is under the editorial control of UKOTCF, the content of this supplement is as agreed by UKOTCF with FCO and DFID.

² For example: Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Zoological Society of London, CAB International, Flora and Fauna International, UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre, National Trust, World Wide Fund for Nature, British Ecological Society, British Ornithologists' Union, member organisations in the UKOTs and various geographical working groups.

Overseas Territories Environment Programme

- Initial Successful Projects 2004

Anguilla: Technical assistance for drafting environmental/conservation legislation that will enable affordable and appropriate Multilateral Environmental Agreements to be extended to Anguilla.

The aim of the project is to develop a comprehensive piece of environmental/conservation legislation for Anguilla while at the same time providing training of local legal professionals in the drafting of environmental legislation that is as consistent as possible with regional and international environmental legal norms.

The information generated will allow Anguilla to assess the appropriateness of existing environmental legislation and steer the path for Anguilla to prioritise legislative drafting according to the needs.

Mr. Karim V.D. Hodge, Director of Environment, Chief Minister's Office, Government of Anguilla, P O Box 60, The Valley, Anguilla BWI Tel: + 1 264-497-2518

Fax: 264-497-3389 karim.hodge@gov.ai



Road Salt Pond, Anguilla

Ascension Island: Developing and initiating the implementation of Ascension's first National Park Management Plan.

This project seeks to develop and initiate the implementation of a management plan for the proposed Green Mountain National Park. It will focus on public awareness and endemic plant protection and restoration, and will be a pilot project for the management of future protected areas on Ascension.

Green Mountain, a site of natural beauty and an important habitat for 5 of Ascension's 6 endemic species of plants will be made more accessible to the public; have its wild endemic plant colonies protected; and have a nursery established. With a complementary public awareness campaign, the management of Green Mountain will assist in promoting the concept of, reasons for, and benefits of Protected Areas on Ascension.

Tara George, Ascension Island Government Conservation Officer, Conservation Office, Georgetown, Ascension ASCN IZZ, South Atlantic Ocean +247 6359 conservation@atlantis.co.uk

Ascension Island: Securing local ownership for long term Seabird Restoration on Ascension

Ascension Island Government, with FCO and RSPB support are concluding the first phase of the most ambitious seabird restoration programme to date. The feral cat eradication programme has a high international profile. It is the first time that such a programme has been attempted on an island with a domestic population of cats. Although there are a few remaining cats to be removed, seabird nesting success on the mainland is already increasing. To date the project has required the expertise of consultants, which has limited the involvement of the local community and hence local ownership on which the long-term success of the project depends.

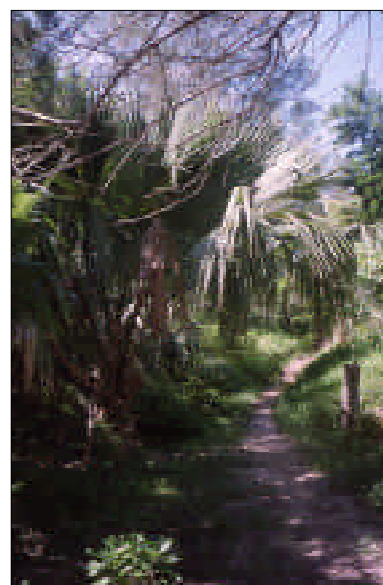
The project will transfer responsibility for the project from external consultants to local staff, and the local community. This will be done by training 2 local people to replace the consultant project staff, and increase the whole community's awareness of the project and the benefits it can bring to the island.

Tara George, Ascension Island Conservation Officer, Conservation Centre, Georgetown, Ascension Island ASCN IZZ, South Atlantic Ocean + 247 6359 conservation@atlantis.co.uk

Bermuda: Management Guidelines for Bermuda's Woodlands: A practical field guide

Produce a practical field guide for the management of private and publicly owned woodland. The field guide will include topics such as; habitat definition; typical problems suffered by woodlands; the planning process; plant propagation; what to plant where; saving damaged trees; planting methods; plant identification and example schemes.

The field guide will be



Bermuda palmetto

produced by the Bermuda Botanical Society and published as a resource for Government departments and promoted from its headquarters in the Botanical Gardens.

Drew Pettit (Secretary), Bermuda Botanical Society (BBS), Parks Office, #169 South Road, Paget, DV04, Tel: +1 (441) 236-4201 ext 211 Fax: +1 (441) 236-3711 apettit@govbm

British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT): Conservation Leaflet

(Covering the geographical area of the Chagos archipelago)

Production, printing and selective distribution of a leaflet which will give information and raise awareness about the importance of BIOT's environment and the need to protect it. The leaflet will be aimed at both people residing in, or visiting, BIOT and at people elsewhere who could contribute to the conservation of the Chagos Archipelago's ecology.

The Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT), 29 Champion Hill, London, SE5 8AC, UK Tel: +44 207 7387712 SimonHughes@hughes-mccomack.co.uk

British Virgin Islands: Mangrove Wetland Interpretive Centre

This proposal will build upon the previously FCO-funded project. This plan will form the centrepiece of the Paraquita Bay Mangrove Wetland Preservation Project. The objective is to educate students, the general public and tourists about the importance of mangrove wetlands and the necessity for their preservation via displays, educational programmes and contact with the environment.

The construction of a Mangrove Wetland Interpretive Centre will serve as the focal point for disseminating information regarding the importance of the habitats. The Centre will house displays and information related to mangrove wetlands and be used for teacher training workshops and other educational activities. The existing boardwalk will be extended and an overlook added to give a panoramic view of the lagoon. Signs and displays will augment the educational experience. Four teacher workshops will launch the educational programmes.

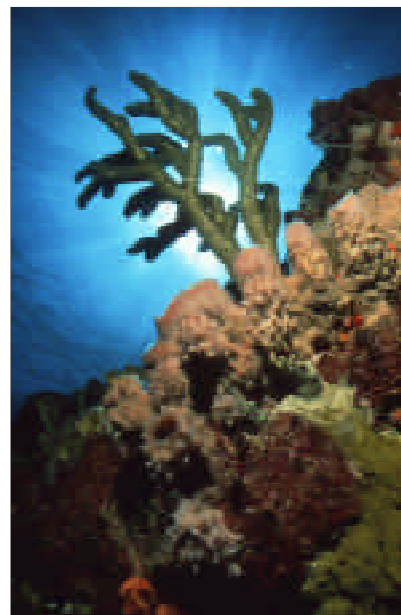
Clive Petrovic, Principal Lecturer, Head of Department, Centre for Applied Marine Studies H. Lavity Stoutt Community College, Paraquita Bay Campus, Road Town, Tortola, British Virgin Islands Phone +1 284-494-4994 Fax + 1 284-494-4996 cpetrovic@hlscc.edu.vg

British Virgin Islands: Assessment & Improved Management of New and Existing Marine Protected Areas in the British Virgin Islands

This proposal will assess the efficacy of the BVI's existing Marine Conservation Programme (MCP), and develop ways to improve it. The BVI National Parks Trust currently has a proposed system of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and aims to determine (a) whether these are representative of all marine habitats within the BVI that

require protection, especially habitats of critical importance, (b) how well are the MPAs performing and their effectiveness on the marine environment and stakeholder use through the acquisition of baseline ecological data and, (c) what adaptive management practices are required to ensure the Trust's ability to conserve, manage or restore these key marine habitats? This will also require the creation of a management plan that will integrate scientific data acquired through monitoring for long-term habitat conservation with the daily management activities required for sustainable stakeholder use.

Joseph Smith Abbott, Director, BVI National Parks Trust, P O Box 860, Road Town, Tortola, British Virgin Islands Tel: +1 284-494-3904 / 2069, Fax: +1 284-494-6383 director@bvinationalparkstrust.org



BVI coral reef

Cayman Islands: Red List assessment of Cayman Islands' native flora for legislation and conservation planning

New environmental legislation being drafted for the Cayman Islands requires lists of species of conservation concern, to benefit from protective measures appropriate to their level of threat. Although extensive information is available on the flora of the Cayman Islands, no assessment of the native species and their conservation status has been performed, so appropriate plant species tabulations for legislative purposes do not exist. This project will generate a comprehensive Red List assessment of the Cayman native flora, mainstreaming existing and new data into local legislation, and also identifying those species in need of urgent conservation management.

Mrs. Gina Ebanks-Petrie, Director, Department of Environment, P.O. Box 486 GT, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands Tel: +1 (345) 949-8469 Fax: +1 (345) 949-4020 Gina.Ebanks-Petrie@gov.ky

Cayman Islands: Development of Coastal Nutrient Monitoring Capacity

The project will implement a coastal water quality monitoring programme that will allow an assessment of the extent of nutrient enrichment in Cayman's coastal environment and an evaluation of the impacts on the surrounding marine environment, in particular coral reefs. In addition, results and insights gained will be used to guide the development of marine water quality standards as well as contribute to an assessment of the effectiveness of current sewage and wastewater disposal and treatment methods. The project will result in the development of a Caribbean Overseas Territories centre of excellence in monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of coastal nutrients.

Mrs. Gina Ebanks-Petrie, Director, Department of Environment, P.O. Box 486 GT, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands Tel: +1 (345) 949-8469 Fax: +1 (345) 949-4020 Gina.Ebanks-Petrie@gov.ky



Cayman Central Mangrove Wetland

Falkland Islands: Falkland Islands Albatross and Petrel Conservation Programme

To achieve compliance as outlined in the Agreement for the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels. This includes conducting censuses, trialing and implementing mitigation devices to reduce at-sea mortality through fishing, international information sharing and implementation of National Plan of Action-Seabirds, management planning for breeding and feeding areas, raising awareness including educating fishers, preventing disturbance by tourist activities and introduced pest eradication from key sites. A long-term demographic study will be initiated to monitor these populations over the long term.

In addition, the project aims to halt or slow the decline of the Black-browed Albatross (Endangered) and increase knowledge of Falklands populations of the Southern Giant Petrel (Vulnerable), White-chinned Petrel (Vulnerable) and other petrels.

Ann Brown, Company Secretary, Falklands Conservation, 1, Princes Avenue, London N3 2DA, UK Phone / Fax +44 208 343 0831 ann@falklands-nature.demon.co.uk

Falklands Conservation, Jetty Centre, Stanley, Falkland Islands, Phone +500 22247 fax +500 22288 conservation@horizon.co.fk

St Helena: Facilitation of the development of a strategy for action to implement the Environment Charter

This project combines the start made locally on St Helena (led by the Environment Planning and Development Section and the Environmental Advisory Consultative Forum, with informal advice from UKOTCF) with the experience gained by UKOTCF in facilitating the strategy development in the pilot study in Turks & Caicos Islands, to achieve a first completed strategy for action to implement the Environment Charter for St Helena. The project has also the wider benefit of providing the first test application to another UK Overseas Territory (in a very different situation) of the guidelines developed by the TCI pilot study.

Implementation will be by the EPD Section of St Helena working with Dr Mike Pienkowski and UKOTCF.

Miss I J Peters, Environmental Co-ordinator, Environment Planning and Development (EPD) Section, Development and Economic Planning Department, 1 Main Street, Jamestown, St Helena Island, STHL 1ZZ Tel/Fax: + 290 2105 isabel@sainthelena.gov.sh

St Helena: A Protected Area Plan for St Helena's Central Peaks

(The Peaks are considered to be Diana's Peak National Park (DPNP) and the ridges outside of the Park, including High Peak, Mt Vesey and the Depot).

The project will result in the formulation and publication of a protected area plan for the Peaks. Communication, consultation and educational campaigns will be carried out to facilitate stakeholder involvement and stimulate public support and participation. Baseline data, essential for decision-making, will be collected for invertebrates and lower plants and for those ferns and flowering plants where gaps in our understanding of their ecology or biology exist. Preliminary remedial action will be taken to prevent the loss of key species within the fragments of tree fern forest and new techniques will be identified

and implemented for controlling alien invasive plants on vertical slopes where it is currently impossible.

The St Helena National Trust is the organisation implementing the project. It will be working in close collaboration with the project stakeholders and principally with the Environmental Conservation Section of the Agriculture and Natural Resources Department, the Government sector responsible for terrestrial habitat & species conservation.

Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks, President, St Helena National Trust, Broadway House, Jamestown, St Helena Island, STHL 1ZZ Tel/fax + 290 2190 sth.natrust@helanta.sh

Turks and Caicos Islands: Completion of the initial implementation stage of the Plan for Biodiversity Management and Sustainable Development around the Turks and Caicos Ramsar Site.

The TCI contains a huge 'Wetland of International Importance' designated under the Ramsar Convention. The TC National Trust and the UKOTCF, working with the local communities, developed a *Plan for Biodiversity Management and Sustainable Development around Turks & Caicos Ramsar Site* which lays out the means to develop an appropriate-scale ecotourism industry to preserve both the environmental resources and the human communities. Residents would run tourism-related businesses and *The Plan* lays out in detail the infrastructure needed to attract visitors.

Work on the first set of guided trails and controlled access to the cave systems is in hand and a building for an Ecocentre has been secured. The present proposal addresses the remaining elements for the initial phase: developing the capacity to establish management of all the Middle Caicos facilities; fitting out the Ecocentre for management, scientific study, interpretation and education; training of local guides, travel and subsistence for unpaid specialist experts and field camps for senior local students.

Turks and Caicos National Trust, with the support of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum. Contact: Dr Mike Pienkowski, UK Overseas Territories Conservation 102 Broadway, Peterborough, PE1 4DG, UK Tel/fax + 44 1 733 569 e-mail pienkowski@cix.co.uk

Turks and Caicos National Trust, Executive Director Ethlyn Gibbs-Williams, PO Box 540, Providenciales, Turks and Caicos Islands Tel + 1 649 941 5710 Fax + 1 449 941 4258 tc.natrust@tcicway.tc

Tristan da Cunha: Assessing the conservation status of the critically threatened spectacled petrel

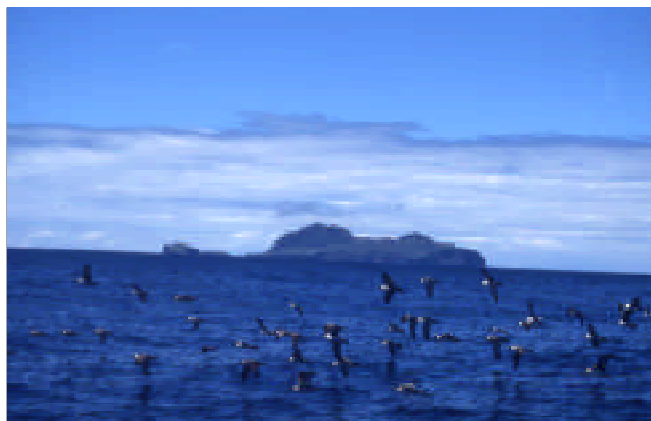
A repeat census of the critically endangered spectacled petrel (SP) on Inaccessible Island will be conducted, and

a monitoring protocol appended to the Inaccessible Management Plan and Biodiversity Action Plan currently under preparation. Censuses and monitoring protocols will be developed for three other globally threatened seabirds on Inaccessible. A search will be made for a potential second population of SPs on Tristan da Cunha. Parallel work will be conducted with Brazilian colleagues on longlining in Brazilian waters, where SPs are at risk. Capacity for biodiversity monitoring on Tristan and local control of the Inaccessible Management Plan will be greatly increased.

Dr Geoff M Hilton, The RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Beds, SG19 2DL, UK T: +44 1767 680551; F: +44 1767 683211 geoff.hilton@rspb.org.uk

Tristan da Cunha: Conservation Management of Nightingale Island

Nightingale Island is one of the most important breeding sites for seabirds in the Southern Ocean. The project will produce a management plan for Nightingale and will implement the practical conservation work of the plan.



Shearwaters near Nightingale Island

Nightingale is the main wildlife site visited by tourists to Tristan da Cunha, and the project aims to maximise the income to Tristan from wildlife tourism, at the same time informing and publicising the conservation importance of Nightingale.

A seabird monitoring programme will be established on Nightingale which will help to achieve compliance with the Agreement for the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels. A long term study of key bird species will be initiated to monitor population trends over the long term.

James Glass, Head, Natural Resources Department, Tristan da Cunha, South Atlantic TDCU 1ZZ Tel: + 871 682 087 155 Fax: + 871 682 087 158 hmg@cunha.demon.co.uk

Highs and lows of botanical fieldwork in BVI

A rare plant has become a little less rare as a result of botanical fieldwork recently completed on Anegada in the British Virgin Islands (BVI) as part of the Darwin Initiative Assessment of the Coastal Biodiversity of Anegada. *Malpighia woodburyana* (Malpighiaceae) is a small tree, with nasty irritating hairs, that is endemic to the Puerto Rican Bank and referred to as “bulldog” on Anegada. Prior to the discovery of a thriving population of 74 on Anegada in 2002 during the previous Darwin project, it was known from approximately 50 individuals from scattered populations on 9 islands across the Puerto Rican Bank. Intensive fieldwork across Anegada discovered several clusters of individuals which more than doubled the known

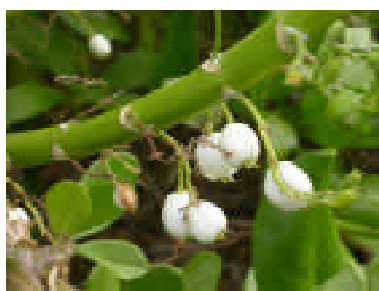


Raymond Walker (BVI National Parks Trust) and Antonia Eastwood (Kew) evaluating Scaevola sericea on the north coast of Anegada.

A n e g a d a population and increased the known world population by approximately 61%. We currently estimate the world population of this species to be 148 individuals which rates it as Endangered

under the IUCN Red List Categories. Anegada supports 79% of the world's population of bulldog, but there may still be more to be found out there.

Disregarding the threats from the irritating hairs, Raymond Walker recently collected a specimen of bulldog and has established it in the JR O'Neal Botanic Garden in Tortola as part of our programme to get all the threatened species into cultivation.



Scaevola sericea, showing characteristic white berries

On the down side a new and worrying invasive alien plant has been identified for the first time on Anegada. *Scaevola sericea* is a vigorous coastal shrub originating from the Indo-Pacific. Thought to have been introduced to Florida and the Caribbean as a landscaping plant, it produces numerous fruits that have long viability in sea water, but germinate only in fresh water such as when washed up on to the shore on a rainy day. Evidence from Florida indicates that it out-competes the native coastal vegetation and may be ousting the native *Scaevola plumieri*, also found on Anegada. So far there are not many individuals; we have documented fewer than 20. We will be monitoring this species and discussing with

the local community and authorities the pros and cons of a control programme.

Colin Clubbe c.clubbe@kew.org

Raymond Walker spiceray@hotmail.com

A voyage of discovery at Chelsea Flower Show



Tim Smit, (right) talking to Peter Crane, Director of Kew, and Colin Clubbe talking to Elliot Morley Minister for the Environment, and David Ingram, Chairman of the Darwin Initiative.

The crowds at this year's Chelsea Flower Show enjoyed a voyage of discovery; getting a glimpse of how a 19th Century explorer might have felt on seeing an undiscovered island for the first time. This silver gilt winning stand by Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and Eden Project was funded by the Millennium Commission Lottery.

The Treasure Islands' exhibit featured a sailing ship alongside a tropical isle, showcasing the unique plants and flowers of the British Virgin Islands and the Seychelles. It highlighted the Darwin Initiative-funded work that Kew and Eden are doing to help conserve them, by looking back into history and forward to the future.

Colin Clubbe, head of conservation and higher education in Kew's herbarium, said "Effective conservation and the Darwin Initiative are all about collaboration and partnership, and that's exactly what is demonstrated in this exhibit and the conservation work that it portrays. Small islands are particularly vulnerable to change and are under great pressure from both natural and man-made activities. Everyone has a role to play and, if we harness this effectively, then the islands' floras exhibited on the exhibit should still be fascinating people in the 22nd Century".

Juliet Rose, Forum Council member, who also helped on the exhibit will be giving a talk on the floral attributes of St Helena later this year at the Eden Project in Cornwall.

Colin Clubbe, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew: c.clubbe@kew.org or visit www.kew.org

Juliet Rose, juliet.rose@reading.ac.uk or Eden Project www.edenproject.com

More detailed information about the Darwin Initiative can be found on their website www.darwin.gov.uk

Guidelines published on developing strategies for action to implement the Environment Charters - and in use already

The guidelines for other UK Overseas Territories, based on the Forum's pilot project (see *Forum News 24*), were published on the Forum's web-site in February (www.ukotcf.org: click "Environment Charter" on the main side-menu, and then "Strategy Devel" on the sub-menu). The guidelines are not a recipe book but a guide for facilitators to use in each Territory in its individual treatment of its Environment Charter, and thereby potentially greatly reduce the work involved.

This project had been part-funded by FCO, and supported by the Government of Turks & Caicos Islands, in co-operation with other local stakeholders. The strategy was locally developed, but guided by Forum facilitators Dace Ground and Mike Pienkowski.

In January, Mike Pienkowski had visited Falkland Islands, which was at an earlier stage in a comparable process, which had itself received earlier informal advice from the UKOTCF/TCI pilot. The purpose of the visit was to compare the approach being adopted in the work starting there, and to advise on this. Staff of the Environment Planning Department and of Falklands Conservation, as well as other conservation and other organisations and individuals, were very helpful. Meetings were held with directors and senior staff of several government departments and the Governor and Deputy Governor. The Governor kindly hosted a dinner to assist further with this. A half-day seminar was held to explain the Forum, the background to the Charters, the TCI pilot strategy development, and the approach getting underway in the Falklands. This was well attended at senior level by government departments, NGO, Councillors, and the Falkland Islands Chief Executive and Economist. Denise Dudgeon of FCO Environment Policy Department, whose brief visit coincided with this, also attended the workshop. The Forum visit was reported on local radio several times, including a fairly lengthy interview.

The Forum and its member organisations have encouraged progress in various UKOTs towards the development of strategies for action to implement the Environment Charters. Bermuda had already developed a Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (see the Proceedings of the Bermuda conference on the Forum's web-site for a summary of this process). Work is in progress also through the Darwin Initiative-funded RSPB project in Tristan da Cunha. UKOTCF had also taken opportunities to make preliminary investigations into the potentials for strategy development in uninhabited UKOTs, such as South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands.

Advice has continued to be given in response to enquiries from other UKOTs, most notably St Helena, who have requested further assistance with their strategy development. This was the subject of St Helena's top priority proposal to OTEP in the current round. This application was successful, and the project will be conducted during the current year. It is being investigated whether some assistance to Ascension

could also be given incidentally to this.

The Forum has been a driving force in the Environment Charter process. This stage of adoption of a strategy by a UKOT government, and the production of general guidelines to widen the reaching of this position, mark a major achievement in this important exercise.

Further information from Mike Pienkowski:

pienkowski@cix.co.uk

The Eagle Owl returns

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society has given details of the highlights of the spring 2004 season in relation to bird migration as it draws to a close and summer sets in.

The bird ringing station at Jews' Gate has been manned throughout the spring and interesting birds ringed have included an African Chaffinch. Also caught and subsequently released was an Indigo Bunting, a North American species.

The monitoring of soaring prey passage has resulted in a



Eagle Owl

total of 22921, of which 14386 were Honey Buzzards.

On land the presence of a Common Magpie for a few days at Catalan Bay was an interesting curiosity, while the first recorded successful nesting in Gibraltar of the White Wagtail was also noteworthy. These birds, common here in winter, nested in the area of West View Park, confirming the importance of creating new green areas in our developments.

But the absolute highlight has been the re-establishment in Gibraltar, after an absence of at least one hundred years, of the Eagle Owl. A male has been present throughout the spring, and there is a possibility that the species nested at an undisclosed location on the Upper Rock. Earlier this week, GONHS released a female Eagle Owl that had been rehabilitated in an attempt to increase the local population and aid the re-establishment of this fascinating species.

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society PO Box 843, Gibraltar Tel +350 72639 Fax +350 74022 press@gonhs.org

Turks & Caicos National Trust opens its first set of field-roads

As this issue of *Forum News* goes to press (July 2004), the Turks & Caicos National Trust opened the first set of field-roads developed in a joint project with the Forum, and supported by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office. A "field-road" is a trail or path cut through the bush, traditionally used to reach fields of crops, fishing areas, wells, or other important sites. We are keeping this local term in use for the heritage trails.

This forms part of the *Plan for Biodiversity Management and Sustainable Development around Turks & Caicos Ramsar Site* (available at www.ukotcf.org), developed by the Trust, the Forum and Forum member organisation CABI, with part-funding from the Darwin Initiative. The background to this programme was most recently outlined in *Forum News* 24. This reported also the decision of Turks & Caicos Government to support this programme by the transfer to the Trust, to safeguard for the country, of lands on which these field-roads are situated and a building for an environmental centre.

The field-roads are intended to provide the part of the infrastructure to underlie the development by the local community of low-intensity tourism, which is based on the globally important wildlife and other aspects of the heritage – but also provide the means to conserve these for future generations.

The first two field-roads, on Middle Caicos, were opened by the Hon Jeffrey Hall (Member of the Legislative Assembly for Middle Caicos and Minister in the Government). He said "As we celebrate today, I wish to remind you to enjoy the plants and animal life that are indigenous to Middle Caicos. We want to share these with many more generations of people – islanders and visitors alike. I wish publicly to thank the National Trust – all persons connected, past and present – for the work they have put into making this a reality. Middle Caicos will not forget your act of love to us and we pledge not to destroy or compromise your efforts. Neither would we allow any person to destroy what we have worked hard to achieve all these years."

The trails have been carefully cleared of obstacles without damaging the natural vegetation or losing their character. Numbered markers are keyed to the laminated booklets with interpretative information. The programme has throughout worked with the local community, and local guides are being

trained to take visitors along the field-roads.

Haulover Plantation Field-Road is a short (less than 1 km) walk through recovering tropical dry forest full of wildlife, to the foundations of the largest plantation buildings on Middle Caicos. Viewing platforms, built by local craftsmen, allow views over the structures, to mangrove ponds and along the coast to neighbouring East Caicos.

The Conch Bar to Indian Cave Field-Road interprets part of the traditional Crossing Place Trail. This was the old foot route linking the Caicos Islands before modern transport. This is in an open coastal habitat with spectacular views northwestward towards North Caicos. Again, a wide variety of wildlife can be seen, including endemic plants as well as many range-restricted butterflies and birds. The

trail visits also a remarkable cave.

A third field-road, on North Caicos, is due to open soon. It will show the ruins of Wade's Green Plantation, formerly the most successful TCI plantation and now set in recovering dry tropical forest. The next round of field-roads, due to open later in 2004 and 2005, are well in preparation. Others will follow later.



TCNT Conservation Officer, Bryan Naqqi Manco, explains features of the vegetation to Governor's wife, Mrs Romey Poston, and Hon Jeffrey Hall, while TCNT Chairman, Norman Hamilton, uses the field-road booklet.



Forum Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski, speaks at the opening ceremony.

Mike Pienkowski, Chairman UKOTCF and Plan editor:
pienkowski@cix.co.uk

Ethlyn Gibbs Williams, Executive Director, Turks & Caicos National Trust: tc.natrust@tcitway.tc

Bryan Naqqi Manco, Conservation Officer, Turks & Caicos National Trust: naqqi@aol.com

Dace Ground, UKOTCF Council and guide-booklet designer:
dace@logic.bm

New Initiative to Protect Biodiversity in Europe's Overseas Territories and Regions



Attendees at the Brussels Meeting

The value of Europe's overseas territories and regions is extremely high in terms of biodiversity. In addition to the statistics the Forum frequently quotes for UKOTs, the number of endemic species in the Netherlands Antilles exceeds two hundred, in contrast to only one found in the Netherlands of mainland Europe. More endemic species are found in New Caledonia, a French Territory, than in the entire area of continental Europe. However, the natural ecosystems within these areas are facing considerable threats: rapid population growth and related development, climate change, invasive species, etc. Additionally, they are not well protected due to a lack of coherence between local, national and European policies.

For a long time there has been a lack of concern at a European level for environmental issues in the overseas territories. However, following initial discussions between the Forum and the French National Committee for IUCN, the latter body convened a meeting with partners in the five main countries that have overseas regions and territories: France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and the UK. A new initiative to protect biodiversity in Europe's overseas territories and regions began on 19 May 2004 at the IUCN Regional Office for Europe in Brussels, with representatives from the IUCN French, Spanish and Dutch National Committees as well as the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, Falklands Conservation and the Dutch-Caribbean Nature Alliance.

The participants agreed to develop a common declaration, with the aim of raising awareness of the European Union and relevant countries of their responsibilities towards these territories. They also wished to develop a project proposal for the European Union and its Member States and to establish a strong partnership to influence the integration of Overseas Territories in European policies. This initiative will be presented during the 3rd IUCN World Conservation Congress in Bangkok, in order to secure wider participation from civil society, local authorities and EU institutions. The participants of the meeting also wish to incorporate this initiative under the umbrella of the Countdown 2010. Countdown 2010 is aimed at

raising awareness among the general public and European decision makers on measures that must be taken to achieve the Gothenburg and Kiev commitments "to halt the loss of biodiversity in Europe by 2010".

Useful Links:

IUCN Regional office for Europe: www.iucneurope.org

Netherlands National Committee: www.iucn.nl

UK National Committee: www.iucn-uk.org

French National Committee: www.uicn.fr

Falklands Conservation: www.falklandsconservation.com

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Correspondence to: Frances Marks, Forum Co-ordinator, 15 Insall Road, Chipping Norton, OX7 5LF, UK, Tel: +44(0) 1608644425

WEB-SITE: <http://www.ukotcf.org>

Photographs courtesy of: Brian Baldwin, Fred Burton, Colin Clubbe, Kew, Paul Edgar, FCO Press Office, Tara George Ascension Island Government, Nic Huin Falklands Conservation, IUCN Europe Office, Bryan Naqqu Manco, Frances Marks, Mike Pienkowski, Juliet Rose, Jim Scheiner, Rainbow Visions Photography, Ian Strange and Andrew Syvret

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