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FORUM NEWS

CONSERVATION NEWS 12. UK DEPENDENT TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM OCTOBER 1995

From the Co-ordinator

After two years compiling, researching and editing, the Forum is publishing *UK Dependent Territories: A Conservation Review* early in the new year. The Conservation Review will be widely distributed and a launch is planned at Kew Gardens. It is hoped that the Review will raise the profile of both the Forum and of conservation issues in the Dependent Territories over the next two to three years. Between publication of the Review and the end of the Darwin Initiative project in March 1996, the Forum will attempt to address some core developmental issues, in order to increase its effectiveness as an active, co-ordinating body. A major task for next year is to maintain our revenue after the Darwin Initiative funding ends, in order to sustain the level of work we have been doing over the first two years. In addition to co-ordinating and liaising with conservation groups, projects and government agencies, we have been increasingly involved in project initiation and development and we are looking at ways to continue and expand this activity. As a contribution towards increasing our regular core support, the Forum Sponsor organizations agreed an increase in subscriptions this year. In addition, it is hoped that additional conservation organizations will join the Forum in 1996.

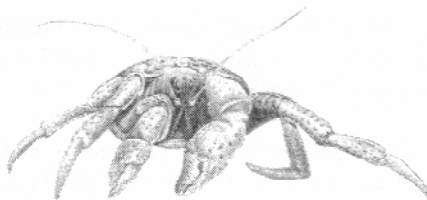
An important and frequently used resource is our unique library information about the UK Dependent Territories. Some of this information was computerized in 1993, with the aid of a small grant from the foreign and Commonwealth

Office (FCO). Another, more substantial FCO grant at the end of last year has enabled us to research how we can expand and improve this database so that it is of more value to its users. We are now in the process of buying a computer for the Forum and will be developing software in the new year.

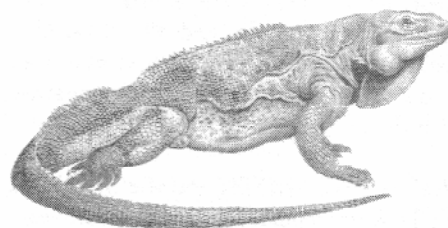
Good news for Grand Cayman blue iguana

The last few days of August saw the hatching of 16 baby iguanas in the National Trust of the Cayman Islands captive-breeding programme – twice the number hatched in any previous year. Most of the hatchlings will be released into the wild when they have grown large enough to be safe from snakes, feral cats and predatory birds.

The Trust has received \$US14,700 from the Foundation for Wildlife Conservation Inc. and the Zoological Society of Milwaukee County for the construction of a new iguana breeding facility at the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park.



Coconut crab, BIOT

Anegada rock iguana *Cyclura pinguis* (BVI)

New Ramsar site approved

The National Trust for the Cayman Islands and the Department of the Environment have proposed protection for the Central Mangrove Wetland as a wetland of international importance under the Ramsar Convention.

The Central Mangrove Wetland contributes to rainfall, underground freshwater supplies, agricultural ground-water, marine life and tourism in Grand Cayman's North Sound and affords protection against rising sea levels. It is the breeding and feeding ground for a wide range of Cayman wildlife, including gaudins, bald-pates, whistling ducks and white crabs.

The proposal for what is often referred to as the 'ecological heart of Grand Cayman' was submitted in July to the Ministry of Agriculture, Environment, Communications and Works. The latest news is that the government have approved the proposal, and the Trust is now going through a public consultation phase. This will be the second Ramsar Site in the Cayman Islands, after the Booby Pond Nature Reserve on Little Cayman was placed on the Ramsar list last year.

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Volcano erupting in Monserrat

Montserrat Biodiversity Project

Working in conjunction with the Montserrat National Trust and the Forestry and Environment Divisions, an eight-person zoological and photographic team from Fauna & Flora International (FFI), spent 8 weeks on this island in the north-eastern Caribbean. Status assessments of the island's amphibians, reptiles and bats were made, and the team also provided technical training and prepared conservation education materials together with the project partners.

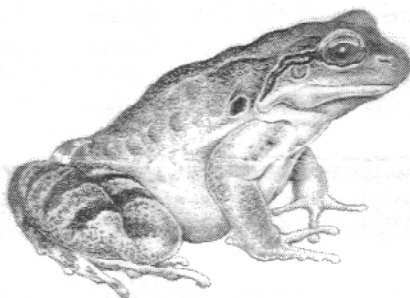
Field research, training and the island as a whole were repeatedly thrown into turmoil with the advent of significant volcanic activity in the southern portion of the island. During the same period, Montserrat was also severely effected by Tropical Storm Iris, Hurricane Luis and Hurricane Marilyn.

Despite this, the distributions, relative abundances and habitat requirements for 11 of the 12 species of amphibians and reptiles were studied. The elusive species was the endemic galliwasplizard. Research focused particularly upon the mountain chicken, a large edible frog restricted to Montserrat and Dominica. For the first time, juvenile mountain chickens were located and were found to be using 'nursery pools'. The habitat selection study yielded valuable recommendations for future species and habitat management.

Bat research incorporated mist netting,

radio-tracking and roost searches. Two hundred and eighteen bats representing 8 of the 10 species of bats were caught using mist nets and hand nets at sites throughout the island. The regionally endemic leaf-nosed bat and the locally rare *Myotis nigriceps* were not captured or observed. Individual bats captured were fitted with radio-transmitters and tracked to their roost sites. Additionally other known roosts were visited with Forestry staff and 13 roosts for seven species were successfully located, including a number of significant nursery roosts.

This project was funded by the British and Commonwealth Office, FFI and the British Council. Equipment used during the study has remained in Montserrat with trained personnel in order to permit future monitoring of key species' populations.



Mountain Chicken in Montserrat
Leptodactylus fallax

Falklands penguin survey

Falklands Conservation will be embarking on an historic survey of Falkland penguins in November. A complete census of the Falklands' population of gentoo and rockhopper penguins was conducted in 1932/33 and this survey is to be repeated after more than 60 years. It is being funded by money raised in 1994 during the Penguin Appeal.

There has been a large decline in the rockhopper penguin population recently. This survey will provide the additional information on the species to help determine causes of its decline. The data will also be part of the Islands' environmental 'stocktake' prior to the start of any oil exploration.

Two teams will be covering East and West Falkland by Landrover, visiting gentoo, rockhopper and king penguin colonies, while a third team will visit the island colonies via *MV Penelope*. The numbers of breeding birds will be counted and where possible a photographic record of the colonies made.

The survey is being assisted by military personnel in the Islands and an expedition from the RAF Ornithological Society, as well as by landowners and local enthusiasts. The counting of so many sites in one season is certainly a major undertaking, but the results will give a clearer insight into the changes occurring in the penguin populations.

New practical conservation course

The United Kingdom Government, under the Darwin Initiative, has made a grant available to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew to establish a new course in plant propagation and cultivation techniques aimed at those who have the practical responsibility of managing threatened plant species. This new course, a collaborative venture between the UK Dependent Territories Conservation Forum and RBG, Kew, will be available as a priority to United Kingdom Dependent Territories.

The major objectives of the course are to develop and advance practical horticulture and botanical skills within the UK Dependent Territories conservation teams. The course will cover plant propagation techniques, designing and managing

propagation facilities and establishing the role of horticulture in plant- and habitat-conservation planning.

In line with our commitment to Agenda 21 and the Convention on Biological Diversity, we are seeking help in formulating a course that addresses the real needs on the ground. A training-needs survey has been sent to all UK Dependent Territories and we will incorporate feedback into the final course development.

Provisional dates for the first course are 8 July-30 August 1996. The course will be based at RBG, Kew, in south-west London, but will involve field-trips to collaborating Forum members and other suitable institutions. We also plan to provide a one-month, post-course specialist

placement for further practical training. This will be arranged to suit the needs of course participants and may be at RBG, Kew or at another Forum member institution.

For further information contact Colin Clubbe at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 3AB, UK. Fax: +44 181 332 5610.



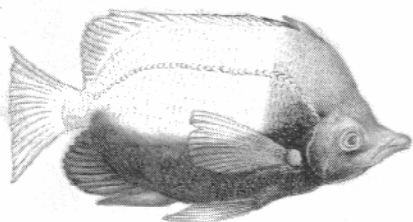
Hawksbill turtle *Eretmochelys imbricata*

Restoring biodiversity to Ascension Island

The elimination of alien predators from Ascension Island provides the UK Government with a unique opportunity to make a major contribution to biodiversity. Ascension Island is the only breeding site for seabirds in a vast area of the tropical South Atlantic. The inhabitants of Ascension Island are in agreement with the eradication project, on the provision that they may retain pet cats that have been sterilized.

The removal of ship rats is now also feasible using anticoagulant poisons in pelleted bait, but there is competition for this bait between rats and land crabs. It has therefore been decided to defer the rat eradication for about 3 years while a bait unattractive to land crabs is developed. It is thought that, despite the removal of feral cats from the island, the rat population will not increase significantly around settlements, provided that appropriate environmental health measures are maintained.

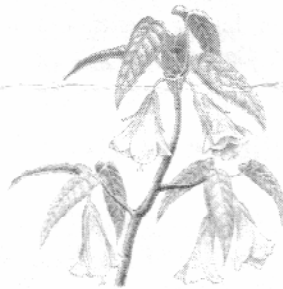
To enable the removal of feral cats to begin, legislation has to be enacted prohibiting the importation of male and female cats capable of having progeny and requiring all pet cats to be sterilized. Immediately before the legislation comes into force, a veterinary surgeon will make a 3-month visit to the island to sterilize pet cats. The police will have responsibility for the registration of the pet cats. After a 3-month period all unregistered cats will be killed by a specialist team who will stay on the island until the job is completed, which is expected to take about 8 months. It is expected that this programme will initiate a long-term ecological restoration of Ascension Island, which will gradually regain its status as the most important breeding station for the seabird community of the tropical South Atlantic Ocean.



Ascension hedgehog butterflyfish
Chaetodon dichrous

Conservation plans for St Helena

As a contribution to the St Helena Sustainable Environment and Development Strategy (SEDS), a plan for the conservation management of the island's endemic plants has been produced on behalf of the Government of St Helena, under assignment from the Overseas Development Administration (ODA). The plan identifies 12 priority species for conservation management based on the results of field surveys undertaken with the Agriculture and Forestry Department. Nine of the species are 'critically endangered' and three are 'extinct in the wild'. Eight other endemic species are recovering following the control of feral livestock populations. The landscape of St Helena is highly degraded and infested with invasive exotic species. The long-term survival of the island's endemic plants will be dependent on the management of eight core habitat fragments selected as protected areas. Work plans for the management of these areas and the 12 priority plant species have been submitted to the ODA.



St Helena redwood *Trochetiopsis erythroxylon*

GIS workshop

The British Dependent Territories (BDT) of the Caribbean GIS Workshop was held in Grand Turk, TCI, in March 1995. Recommendations were made in a number of areas. Training was identified as the key component to ensure successful GIS implementation. In-country training would be by a GIS specialist who would work with each BDT in turn. Access to e-mail will be required. In each BDT basic data is available for a Land Information System, but there is a lack of data for more environmental applications. All BDTs except TCI have recent aerial photographs and these should be analysed to update topographic maps. Dr Gudrun Gaudian has been given the task of co-ordinating this information into a regional concept note to be presented to regional funding agencies for consideration.

Turks and Caicos iguana survey

Rock iguanas are among the most endangered lizards in the world. There are eight species, most in serious danger of extinction through hunting, introduced predators, competition for food and space from introduced livestock and the destruction of their natural habitats. These rock iguanas occur only in the Greater Antilles and the Bahamas and are not protected in any of these countries.

A team of wildlife biologists visited more than 100 cays and islands and discovered that there are currently over 50,000 iguanas in the TCI. However, on nearly every island in the TCI where domestic animals are found (cats, dogs, livestock) the iguanas are gone.

Livestock consume huge amounts of vegetation, reducing the food supply available for iguanas. More importantly, because of their sheer size and weight, these animals trample and destroy prime iguana habitat, collapsing burrow systems and destroying nests.

As iguanas and other wildlife join coral reefs as an important part of ecotourism in the Caribbean, the conservation of these natural resources will be increasingly necessary, as development and tourism increase. A feral animal control programme needs to be put in place, the main goals being to prevent the introduction of animals on islands where they do not currently occur and the removal of livestock from uninhabited islands. Reintroduction could only take place if feral cats are removed but this is an exceedingly difficult undertaking. It will also be very important for the TCI government to adopt special legislation affording complete protection to the Turks and Caicos rock iguanas to prevent hunting, collecting or development of lands occupied by healthy iguana populations.



Stephen's lory *Vini stephensi*, Pitcairn

Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK funds conservation projects in the Dependent Territories

The following conservation projects in the Dependent Territories were funded under the FCO's 1995/6 AUSPB (Assistant Under Secretary's Programme Budget)

British Virgin Islands received £5000 for the purchase of equipment for recycling raw materials from the Botanic Gardens and a recycling education programme.

Gibraltar received £10,000 for the conservation of bat locations, enforcement of legislation, research and promoting public awareness. Gibraltar also received £17,000 for the purchase of a 33-foot sports cruiser for dolphin research and conservation activities.

Montserrat received £1500 for solid waste management and cultivation of environmental awareness, and £6000 for the production of low-cost environmental education materials and prizes for an environmental annual competition.

South Georgia received £4500 for a seal survey.

St Helena received £6000 for the production of information about Diana's Peak endemic forest and £5000 for Peak Dale Gumwoods endemic management zone.

Tristan da Cunha received £4000 for the study of endemic flora and £2000 to plant Kikuyu grass to bind soil at the penguin rookery.

Turks and Caicos Islands received £6000 for its National Trust Conservation Education Campaign and £1850 for the development of a GIS.

£20,000 has also been allocated to fund the Biodiversity Database User Needs Analysis in the Caribbean DTs. This equals a total commitment of £84,850.

Reserve list (to be decided early December, funds permitting). £14,155 to study saline and brackish ponds of the Cayman Islands.

£16,500 for the preparation of two field guides on higher plants and ferns by Falklands Conservation.

New subscription rates

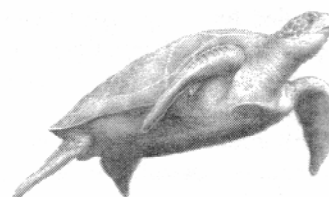
The Forum Darwin Initiative funding is coming to an end. Consequently the Executive Committee has been looking at ways to replace the revenue so that the Forum can continue to employ a Co-ordinator, without which the Forum would not be able to carry out all its current activities.

A number of options are being explored, including approaching corporate sponsors, charitable trusts, lottery funding and the FCO. All these avenues will be followed up in the next year, so that the Forum's finances can be placed on a firmer footing.

In the immediate future, there is a pressing need to increase the core income of the Forum, which has led to the proposal of increasing the subscription rates of Forum members. The guidelines are as follows: the category in which any organization falls will depend on their income and/or membership size. The position of each member is being discussed individually.

Small charities	£ 250
Institutions and medium sized charities	£ 500
Large charities	£1000

The extra financial security this will provide will allow the Forum to continue to expand its role and influence at a time when gaining external funding is becoming increasingly competitive.



Green turtle *Chelonia mydas*

Malta meeting

Twenty-five Commonwealth small island developing states attended a meeting on identifying and monitoring biodiversity and its use in their territories. Forum representatives attended the conference held in Valetta, Malta, from 30 October–3 November. The methodology developed at this meeting will be applicable to many UK Dependent Territories.

While Sara Cross was on maternity leave, Fauna & Flora International (FFI) acted as the Secretariat for the Forum for 3 months this summer. The Co-ordinator's duties, including the compilation and editing of this issue of *Forum News* were carried out by Stephanie Pendry at FFI.

Illustrations drawn
by Robin Budden.

Expedition to the Chagos

The 1996 Chagos Expedition is due to start in February of next year, and will last 6 weeks. On board two yachts will be a team of scientists whose aim is to conduct a survey on the wildlife, both marine and terrestrial, of the Chagos. This will be compared with data from the previous expedition to the Chagos, that took place almost 20 years ago. A conservation management plan for the archipelago will be written based on the information obtained from the survey.

Production of *Forum News* was supported by the British Association of Nature Conservationists (BANC), Fauna & Flora International (FFI), Plantlife, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC), World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-UK) and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL).

Enquiries about the Forum should be made to:

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We welcome any comments or articles which may be of interest from Forum readers. Please send to Sara Cross at the address on this page.



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