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Chagos Archipelago Marine Protected Area – your chance to influence policy

The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has announced a public consultation that could lead to the establishment of a Marine Protected Area (MPA) across the Chagos Archipelago. The consultation closes on 12 February 2010. Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF's Chairman, said "UKOTCF urges organisations and individuals to respond to this unique opportunity by engaging with the consultation and supporting the declaration of a full no-take marine reserve for the largest area possible. This is vitally important, both directly for the conservation of this whole ecosystem and to protect the marine resources on which people's livelihoods depend in a wide surrounding area of the Indian Ocean." If the entire proposed area were to be declared a no-take zone, this would establish the world's largest site with that status, more than doubling the global area with full protection. Many readers will be aware of the controversy over re-settlement rights of the Chagossians, and it should be noted that the current consultation over environmental protection is being undertaken without prejudice to the outcome of current, pending proceedings before the European Court of Human Rights.

The Chagos Archipelago (or British Indian Ocean Territory, BIOT) contains the world's largest coral atoll and is the site of the greatest marine biodiversity in the UK and its Territories by far. The islands are amongst the most important breeding grounds for seabirds and turtles in the Indian Ocean. Their reefs support corals, fish and other species found nowhere else in the world, and provide a stepping-stone that links the reefs of the eastern and western Indian Ocean.

Because it is so remote and relatively undisturbed, BIOT has some of the cleanest seas and healthiest reef systems in the world,



Middle Brother, one of the myriad islets of the Chagos Archipelago
Photo: Chagos Conservation Trust

including more than 50% of the healthy reefs remaining in the Indian Ocean. In their natural state, these are exceptionally resilient, and exhibit the highest densities of rejuvenating corals seen anywhere - 10 or 100 times higher than in most other, polluted locations. In addition, the surrounding waters of the Chagos (within the 200 mile Exclusive Economic Zone, EEZ) include an exceptional diversity of deepwater habitat types. Although these have not been mapped or investigated in detail, work elsewhere has shown that a physically diverse seafloor is a strong indicator of an equally high diversity of associated marine species, many unknown to science.

Announcing the FCO consultation, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband explained, "In March 2009, the Chagos Environment Network presented their vision of *The Chagos Archipelago: its Nature and the Future* which advocates the creation of one of the world's greatest natural conservation areas. This is a remarkable opportunity for the UK to create one of the world's largest marine protected areas and double the global coverage of the world's

oceans benefiting from full protection." The consultation presents three broad options for an MPA. The first involves the declaration of a full no-take marine reserve for the largest area possible. The other options offer more limited protection, or relate to a smaller area.



A Hawksbill Turtle swims in the clean sea of the Chagos.
Photo: Chagos Conservation Trust

Instrumental in persuading the UK Government to consult on these proposals was a workshop on marine conservation in BIOT organised by the National Oceanography Centre (NOC) in

Southampton in August. This highlighted the scientific importance of the Chagos, including in relation to atmospheric CO₂ levels, ocean carbonate levels, and fish populations. It concluded that there was a very convincing case for designating all the potential EEZ as an MPA. This would provide a refuge and breeding ground for migratory fish, marine mammals, turtles and other marine life, protecting the integrity of the wider ecosystem. Given the importance of BIOT waters for the wider biological productivity of the Indian Ocean, it would also underpin sustainable livelihoods of those people in communities that rely on marine resources in adjacent areas. In addition, it would provide the basis for a scientific programme of global importance, through the study and monitoring of environmental (including climate) change, as well as making an important contribution to the struggle to help coral reefs survive in the face of ocean acidification and warming.

William Marsden, Chairman of the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT), said “Britain has a rare opportunity to protect this marvellous, yet fragile, natural environment, by creating a conservation area comparable in importance with the Galapagos Islands or the Great Barrier Reef and of great benefit for people. We hope it will be very widely supported.” Alistair Gammell of the Pew Environment Group added “Establishing a large-scale protected area for the Chagos Islands and its waters would be a conservation legacy almost unrivalled in scale and significance anywhere in the world’s oceans. The UK has the unique opportunity to protect an entire ecosystem and its marine life.”

The Chagos Archipelago is a very special and very rare place – a relatively unpolluted and undisturbed part of the ocean, with



A Clown Fish, endemic to the Chagos, over coral
Photo: Chagos Conservation Trust

its islands, reefs and oceans still teeming with life. Protecting it would be a major contribution by the UK to protecting global biodiversity and promoting sound environmental management.

Details of how to respond to the consultation can be found at: www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/21153320/mpa-consultation-101109

Copies of *The Chagos Archipelago: its Nature and the Future* are available from CCT: www.chagos-trust.org

A full report of the Southampton workshop can be found at: www.oceans2025.org/PDFs/SOFI%20Workshop%20Reports/SOFI_Workshop_Report_10_BIOT_09.pdf

Environment Charters – the way forward

On 2nd September 2009, UKOTCF convened a meeting to address the theme of *Environment Charters – the way forward*. It was attended by representatives of a number of UKOTCF Member and Associate organisations, UK representatives of two UKOT governments, and officials from four UK Government (HMG) departments. The meeting was hosted by the Zoological Society of London, in the Mappin Pavilion at London Zoo.

As background, Oliver Cheesman (UKOTCF) gave an overview of the Environment Charter process to date. HMG had not originally planned to include significant coverage of the environment in the 1999 White Paper *Partnership for Progress & Prosperity – Britain and the Overseas Territories* but, with encouragement from the Forum, FCO and DFID officials of the time ensured that a relevant chapter was included. This outlined HMG’s intention to develop jointly with UKOT governments a set of Environment Charters, based on the *Checklists* earlier proposed by UKOTCF (Pienkowski 1998). Although the Charters were based on the Forum’s ideas, UKOTCF was not involved in HMG’s subsequent drafting of the documents and their negotiation with UKOT governments.

The Charters summarise a set of Guiding Principles for environmental management and biodiversity protection, alongside more specific Commitments on the part of HMG (on one side) and each UKOT Government (on the other). There is some variation between Territories, but essentially the Principles and Commitments are consistent across the Charters, which were signed in September 2001. Although signed by governments, the Charter concept stressed the need for civil society (NGO) involvement alongside governments throughout. The only UKOTs without Charters (for various reasons) are British Antarctic Territory and the Sovereign Bases Areas in Cyprus; Gibraltar has a unilateral Environment Charter. The Crown Dependencies were

not included in the Environment Charter process. However, some (e.g. Alderney, Sark, Isle of Man) have used, or are exploring, the Charters as a model for developing their own, broadly equivalent documents.

An initial set-back occurred within a year of the Charters being signed, when FCO cancelled the Environment Fund for Overseas Territories (EFOT), thereby failing HMG’s Commitment 8 under the Charters. However, the UKOTCF-organised Bermuda conference in March 2003 made clear the problem that this had caused. FCO implemented interim arrangements, and then combined with DFID to establish the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP). Recognising the importance of measuring progress against the Charter Commitments, FCO made an excellent start with a report at the Bermuda conference by members of its Environment Policy and Overseas Territories Departments (Caton *et al.* 2003). Unfortunately, subsequent restructuring in FCO substantially reduced its capacity in relation to environmental matters, including monitoring of progress under the Charters. However, FCO, DFID and others (including some UKOTs and many NGOs) had already asked UKOTCF to develop a more systematic method for monitoring progress.

UKOTCF invested considerable effort between 2004 and 2007 in developing and consulting widely on measures to provide a ‘review of progress’ in Environment Charter implementation, in gathering information to complete the exercise, and producing the final report (Pienkowski 2007; see also summary of results in *Forum News* 31). Also late in 2007, FCO commissioned a report from the International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED), which concluded that the Charters were useful, particularly in providing a set of Guiding Principles, but that a forward process was required to enhance their value. In fact, progress had already

been made in a number of the areas identified, including the linkage of Charter Principles to Territory-specific strategies or action plans, developed through a participatory approach to the identification of local priorities. This reflected Commitment 1 of UKOT governments under the Charters, to bring together all local stakeholders to formulate a detailed strategy for action.

Several UKOTs had recognised at an early stage that support was needed to address this Commitment, and under HMG's Commitment to help, it granted some of the required costs to UKOTCF to pilot the facilitation of strategy development. The TCI Government asked that TCI host the first exercise, which was undertaken in 2002-3, and stakeholders in St Helena then applied a similar Forum-facilitated approach in 2004-5. The strategy documentation and general material from both these exercises are available on the UKOTCF website, as a basis for wider application, and the lessons learnt have been used by several other Territories. Other approaches have been used also to fulfil the same function, in some cases combining these with other regional or local initiatives, such as the development of National Biodiversity Strategies and Actions Plans (NBSAPs). A case study was presented at the Cayman conference by Isabel Peters (St Helena Environmental Co-ordinator), outlining how St Helena had used its Environment Charter as a key document in its economic development plan. In the process facilitated by UKOTCF in 2004-5, stakeholders had developed an environmental strategy, breaking down the Charter Commitments into specific actions. However, as recognised at the time, resourcing was required to move to the next stage, refining and implementing the strategy, as well as producing simpler extracts for wider consumption. This experience illustrates that (whilst invaluable in moving the process forward) the production of a strategy is not, in itself, sufficient to ensure implementation, and continual encouragement and support is needed.

In further exploring the way forward, the 2nd September meeting confirmed that, despite the various changes that had occurred within individual Departments in the years since the Environment Charters were signed, HMG remained very conscious of the Charters and their importance. Reference to the Charters provided a valuable means of assessing proposals for targeted work in the Territories (e.g. under OTEP); in this context, further facilitation work to develop local strategies for Charter implementation could be useful, including to help assess projects against a Territory's own priorities - the preferred approach of both HMG and UKOTCF. It was important for the Territories to lead the Charter process.



Big-eared Bat at roost in the internationally important cave system in Middle Caicos, Turks & Caicos Islands. TCI Government volunteered to develop the pilot strategy to implement the Environment Charters, an exercise which UKOTCF facilitated. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

UKOTCF and its Member and Associate organisations were keen to promote Charter implementation broadly, and to help re-invigorate the process overall. There was a range of ways in which the Forum and its network could contribute, from continuation of earlier work of facilitating strategy development, to more focused projects (for example, to advance establishment of marine and terrestrial protected areas). Where local strategies existed, the next steps typically related (for example) to the development, integration and implementation of annual work programmes for local bodies to address the priority actions identified. It was essential that such programmes were "owned" and operated by local stakeholder (Government and NGO) partnerships, but experience had shown that external support, including from HMG as well as from UKOTCF, was also vital. However, resources were limiting, despite the enthusiasm to pursue such activities.

In relation to funding opportunities, JNCC's exploration of this area was noted, related to HMG's Commitment 9 under the Charters. There clearly remained a need to identify new sources of funding, particularly for larger projects. The particular issue of Lottery funding was considered; it appeared that the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) Trustees' policy remained that UKOT-based projects (as opposed to Crown Dependency ones) were ineligible, a position that many felt should be challenged.

The issue of including further UKOTs/CDs in UK's ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) was also raised. HMG remained ready to advance this if approached by the Territories concerned. MEA 'sign up' could be valuable in keeping biodiversity on the local political agenda; for example, the joining of UK's ratification of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands by all the remaining UKOTs/CDs had followed a voluntary programme of explanatory work to Territory decision makers by UKOTCF. The subsequent Defra-supported UKOTCF review of existing/potential Ramsar sites had resulted in significant progress, including (for example) in marine management in the Isle of Man. It was noted that exploration of the benefits of MEAs was another area where further facilitation exercises might be useful.

Feedback from both officials and NGOs in the Territories suggested that the Forum's 'review of progress' was useful in maintaining momentum; this was important, as UKOTCF was not interested in conducting this work purely as a 'box ticking' exercise. In December 2008, UKOTCF had begun collecting information for a second review of progress, based on the measures developed for the first - an effective way (at relatively small effort by the Territories) of building on their work for the initial review. Input had been received from most Territories, and a summary overview was presented at the Cayman conference in May/June 2009. Work continued to complete the exercise and to produce the final report.

References

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UK Government policy for biodiversity in UK Overseas Territories

This has been a very eventful year in terms of the UK Government's approach to environmental matters in the UKOTs. Following pointed criticism from the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) and Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) in 2008, in both cases drawing heavily on submissions from UKOTCF, a number of developments have indicated a change in direction within HMG. In early June, a UK environment Minister participated for the first time in a UKOTCF-organised conference on conservation in the UKOTs. Huw Irranca-Davies MP, Defra Minister for Marine and Natural Environment, took the opportunity to announce an earmarking of funds, and development of a specific Challenge Fund, for small projects in the UKOTs under the Darwin Initiative. At the end of that month, HMG held a reception on *Collaboration on Environmental and Biodiversity Issues in the Overseas Territories*, hosted by three Ministers with responsibility for UKOTs, Huw Irranca-Davies, Chris Bryant MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, FCO) and Mike Foster MP (DFID Minister for International Development). The event emphasised HMG's desire to adopt a more "joined up" approach, and included the announcement that Defra would in future lead for HMG on UKOT biodiversity matters, alongside the departments previously involved, FCO and DFID. Since then, Huw Irranca-Davies has mentioned the importance of the UKOTs on a number of occasions, including prominently at the launch of the UK initiative for the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity (see p. 9). The greater involvement of Defra is something for which the Forum and its members have called for well over a decade, and UKOTCF again congratulates the Minister and his officials for progress made in this area.



William Marsden (L), Chagos Conservation Trust, speaks with Huw Irranca-Davies, Defra Minister; and Mike Pienkowski (R), UKOTCF, at the FCO Reception - perhaps about the Chagos. Photo: FCO

Another point raised by the Minister in his speech at the Cayman conference was HMG's development of a strategy for UKOT biodiversity. We are pleased to be able to meet a request from Defra to circulate with this issue of *Forum News* their new booklet *United Kingdom Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy*. (For those reading *Forum News* online, a copy of the *Strategy* will be placed on UKOTCF's web-site. A version without pictures is available at www.ukotcf.org/pdf/fNews/UKgovOTstrategy2009.pdf)

Unlike previous policy developments in this area, UKOTCF was not consulted during the process. (Although the document indicates that "selected NGOs" were consulted on some aspects, this did not include UKOTCF nor its network of Member and Associate organisations.) Accordingly, whilst welcoming the document and strongly supporting its underlying purpose, UKOTCF does not necessarily agree with all of the details.

UKOTCF is pleased to note, for example, that the new policy recognises the need for (although it makes no commitment to) larger funds, beyond HMG's support for small projects, to carry through effective conservation of the UKOT's globally important and threatened biodiversity. UKOTCF is, however, concerned at what seem to be some less positive aspects. The document makes no reference to the work over more than 20 years by UKOTCF in taking the lead on co-ordination and in helping UK Government (and also in helping JNCC - which drafted the document - up to the point when the latter's remit in UKOTs was significantly increased, in 2006). The lack of mention of UKOTCF is actually a retrograde step compared with the 1999 White Paper, and also gives those reading it (whether government officials, politicians or the interested public) a rather incomplete background, especially as some of the needs identified are ones that UKOTCF has been addressing.

Further, the emphasis in the strategy is very much on governmental bodies, whether in UK or UKOTs. In practice, the informal working arrangements around the time of the White Paper and in the following years included FCO, UKOTCF, environment departments and NGOs in the UKOTs, and later DFID. The new group established to take the strategy forward will be chaired by Defra, have a secretariat from JNCC, include officials from FCO, DFID, other UK Departments and the UK Overseas Territories Association, but not UKOTCF or NGO bodies in UK or UKOTs.

These changes seem unfortunate, especially at a time when JNCC staff have remarked on their capacity being inadequate to manage all the funds that they have been awarded for work in UKOTs – and as the document indicates that FCO's staffing in this area, heavily reduced in 2006, has been further decreased from one post to 0.5. To make best use of limited resources, it would be valuable to involve those organisations with most experience in this area, and UKOTCF looks forward to being able to make a positive contribution in future, so that its 20 years of work can be built upon. In this context, UKOTCF is encouraged by the Minister's answer to an enquiry at the Cayman conference that UKOTCF and its mainly NGO network will have a strong role in helping to co-ordinate future work. Given the scale of the environmental challenges faced by the UKOTs, a good deal of work will be required to turn the new policy document into a strategy that will meet fully the needs of the Territories. UKOTCF remains happy to assist in this, in line with the Minister's comment, and looks forward to possible support from the increased resources to continue its highly valued work.



The Black Lizard, endemic to Sombrero, Anguilla, mid-way to BVI, still survives, as do other endemic species and important seabird colonies there. There is always pressure from inappropriate developments in the small and sensitive areas of the UKOTs and CDs. Much progress has been made by HMG and UKOTCF

pooling effort. It was such combined effort by UKOTCF, its Member organisations, FCO and organisations in Anguilla and BVI which prevented the construction of a rocket launching site on this tiny island in 1998. This started many other conservation initiatives in Anguilla, including the Government declaring Sombrero a nature reserve.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

UK Government White Paper on Overseas Territories: 10 years on

Overseas Territories Consultative Council 2009

Ten years after the publication of the 1999 White Paper *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity – Britain and the Overseas Territories*, on the relationship between Britain and the UKOTs, and at the request of Overseas Territory leaders, a workshop was organised on 8th December 2009 to review progress. This involved outside participants in addition to the UK and UKOT Ministers (or equivalents) and officials who participate in the annual closed Overseas Territories Consultative Council (OTCC) meeting, held on the following days. The White Paper had established the principles that have guided the relationship between the UK and Territories since 1999. UK Government considers the workshop as the first stage of a consultation process on the future of the UK/OT relationship.

The OTCC was established in 1999, as a forum for discussion of key policy issues between British Ministers and elected leaders from the Overseas Territories. It meets once a year in London. An FCO Minister (currently Chris Bryant) has specific responsibilities for Overseas Territory issues. The Territories represented at this year's OTCC and the preceding workshop were: Anguilla, Ascension, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, Montserrat, Pitcairn, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha and Turks & Caicos Islands.

The Defra Minister for Marine and Natural Environment, Huw Irranca-Davies, and several NGO participants joined the 1-hour workshop session on sustainable development and environmental conservation.

Huw Irranca-Davies recalled his attendance at the UKOTCF-organised Cayman conference, as the first UK environment minister to attend one of these meetings. He noted also his announcement then of Defra's involvement, alongside FCO and DFID, in UKOT environmental matters and the earmarking for UKOTs of some of Defra's Darwin Initiative small projects fund. He remarked also on the need for better communications and announced a new enquiries email address: ukotenquiries@defra.gsi.gov.uk. He invited representatives of UKOTs to report on progress they had made against the Environment Charters.

The Falkland Islands representative reported on the highly sustainable fisheries that currently provide the basis of that territory's economy. Effective measures had been introduced to end almost totally by-catch of birds in the Falklands fisheries and by Falklands vessels operating in South Georgia & South Sandwich

Islands waters. With respect to the White Paper and Environment Charter, he regretted the lack of engagement by FCO for the past few years. The Pitcairn Islands noted progress on physical planning matters and also plans for wardening of Henderson Island, as well as improving arrangements for visitors. Tristan da Cunha noted the economic importance of wildlife tourism, even with present infrastructural challenges. St Helena reported the importance of the strategy for implementing the Environment Charter (developed with facilitation from UKOTCF) in guiding much of the progress in recent years. The Premier of the Cayman Islands enquired as to whether guidance was available from UK Government on the development of eco-tourism, and also on what was being done to monitor progress in implementing the Environment Charters.

From the NGOs represented, Mike Pienkowski, Chairman UKOTCF, welcomed the presence of Mr Irranca-Davies, both at the Cayman conference and in this workshop, and the involvement of Defra that this represented. Whilst congratulating Defra on earmarking some Darwin Initiative funds for UKOT projects, thereby (with OTEP) doubling the resources for small projects, Dr Pienkowski underlined the remaining need for a larger fund to enable biodiversity recovery programmes and also to facilitate the development of a cadre of local UKOT personnel to work alongside colleagues from UK and elsewhere, to provide the future local capacity to maintain this work, fundamental to the UKOTs' futures. He noted also that UKOTCF had accepted the task of collating information from the Territories (and UK Government) on their fulfilling of their respective Commitments under the Environment Charters. The first report on this had been published in 2007, and an update was nearing completion. He congratulated the UKOTs on the progress that had been made. He noted that, particularly at the recent Cayman conference, a concern expressed by many personnel from UKOTs was the loss of natural capital due to problems in strategic and physical planning processes. He wondered whether any UKOTs suffering from such problems might like to seek UK Government support in this area.

Clare Stringer, RSPB, underlined the need for a fund for larger recovery programmes, recalling estimates of at least £16m per year needed for conservation work in UKOTs, compared with the £2m available for the coming year. She noted also an obvious example of this need in the removal of introduced mice from Gough Island, to allow recovery of several species of breeding seabirds which occur nowhere else in the world. Alistair Gammell, Pew Environmental Trust, reiterated the need for funding from the National Lottery to be made available for conservation projects in UKOTs, as it is for domestic UK. Colin Clubbe, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, underlined the points made by UKOTCF and other colleagues, calling for support for UK and UKOT NGOs, as well as other UKOT bodies, to implement biodiversity recovery work and to facilitate the structured development of the next generation of local UKOT conservation workers.

From other academic institutions, the National Oceanographic Centre outlined deep-water research cruises off British Indian Ocean Territory and the Cayman Islands, although some concerns were noted by the UKOTs and the NGOs about whether local workers and administrations were adequately involved.

The workshop in session in Great George Street, Westminster. Photo: FCO





The Millennium Forest on St Helena, a local initiative with support from many partners. This is well on the way to making the survival of the endemic Gumwood secure. St Helena has many species (and even genera, the next highest classification) of plants and invertebrates which occur nowhere else in the world. Local effort, small project funds from HMG and lots of help from NGOs has demonstrated the practicality of conservation actions. What could be done if real recovery funds were available? Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

The Governor of Anguilla sought confirmation as to whether the UKOT natural environment remained a high priority for UK Government, in view of some signs that this might not be the case.

In responding to the points made, the UK Minister confirmed that protection of the UKOTs' natural environment did indeed remain a high priority for UK Government, noting the international commitments it had made on behalf of the UKOTs. He recognised the huge world importance of the wildlife of the UKOTs and the need for more resourcing. Whilst he could not, of course, commit further funds, he did note the high value for money that conservation work in the UKOTs represented, and looked forward to continued effective coordination both by governments and, for example, UKOTCF. He saw the International Year of Biodiversity, just starting, as a good opportunity to deliver progress. He noted the opportunity to refresh the Environment Charters, the opportunities of post-2010 biodiversity targets, the importance of analysing and stressing the economics of ecosystem services, and the need to focus on best practice. He noted in particular the need to make people in Britain more aware of the uniquely high global importance of wildlife in UKOTs, a point echoed by Colin Roberts, FCO Director of Overseas Territories, in summing up the day's workshop.

In preparing for the workshop, FCO had asked UKOTCF to take a quick look at the way in which the environmental plans of the White Paper had been taken forward. The following is drawn from that analysis.

Background

Chapter 8 (*Sustainable development – the environment*) of the 1999 White Paper recognised that the natural capital of the UK Overseas Territories was globally much more important than that of the metropolitan UK, with the UKOTs supporting orders of magnitude more endemic species (i.e. those that occur nowhere else) than Great Britain & Northern Ireland. This point has since been forcibly re-emphasised by the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (in its 2008 report on *Halting Biodiversity Loss*), which concluded that “One of the most important contributions that the Government could make to slowing the catastrophic global biodiversity loss currently occurring would be to accept its responsibilities and to provide more support for

the UK Overseas Territories in this area.” In addition, the natural environment is crucial for the economies, sustainable development and future well-being of UKOTs, including through the provision of ecosystem services such as marine fisheries, freshwater capture and storage, coastal protection and potential eco-tourism.

Recognising the importance but also the challenges, the 1999 White Paper said (paragraph 8.8):

We aim to integrate sustainable environmental management into the Government's decision-making. ... But in Overseas Territories as elsewhere, short-term economic pressures can be severe and can undermine the goal of sustainable development. That makes it all the more important for the Government to give guidance and support on how to develop policies and practices to ensure that practice in the Overseas Territories is consistent with the objective of sustainable development.

The means to achieve these aims were set out in paragraphs 8.11 and 8.15, in bullet points that provide the italic headings below.

Review

Helping to make sure Overseas Territories have the legislation, institutional capacity and mechanisms they need to meet their international obligations

This has been addressed mainly by the reactive small grants programmes noted below, by support from NGO networks and by the assistance of some UK Government agencies. Some valuable progress has been made, but the process is far from complete. Workers from several UKOTs made clear at the UKOTCF-organised conference in Grand Cayman in June 2009 that appropriate planning laws, enforcement and monitoring are crucial to the success of any sustainable development process, but that there are particular problems in this area at present.

Using UK, regional and local expertise to give advice and improve knowledge of technical and scientific issues. This includes close and open consultation with interested Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) groupings such as the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

UKOTCF had a close working relationship with HMG at the time of the White Paper and for some years after, and still gives a great deal of support. There is a close working relationships between UKOTCF and its Member and Associate organisations based in the UK and UKOTs, helping to transfer skills and experience to and between Territories. UKOTCF has received part funding from HMG to undertake some of this work, including for communications via a well-regarded web-site and for organising highly valued 3-yearly conferences. However, UKOTCF is slightly concerned that the degree of consultation and collaboration has become less in the last 3-4 years, since FCO drastically reduced its environmental staffing. Whilst welcoming recent modest increases in total spending by HMG in support of environmental conservation in the UKOTs, UKOTCF is also concerned at the declining contributions from HMG in support of its largely voluntary work in this area.

Providing financial assistance to the Overseas Territories for integrated environmental management

UKOTs cannot access most global and international aid and environmental funding mechanisms (which regard UKOTs as British), nor many UK sources (such as the Heritage Lottery Fund, which conversely regard UKOTs as “foreign”). Support comes mainly from:

- UKOTs, drawing on their own resources
- NGOs, including through voluntary inputs, from UKOTCF, its network and others
- HMG, via a single dedicated small projects fund, FCO/DFID's joint Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP). However, the continuity of this is never guaranteed for more than a year or two, and its predecessor was actually lost for a time shortly after the signing of the Environmental Charters. This programme has been highly effective in supporting small projects, most of which give excellent value for money, in many cases because of major donations of skilled voluntary time by implementing NGOs.
- HMG, via the Darwin Initiative, some funding from which has recently been earmarked for UKOT projects. This is greatly welcomed.

As the White Paper notes, under international conventions, UK Government shares responsibility for biodiversity conservation in the UKOTs with UKOT Governments. However, an analysis for a recent year based on UK Government figures showed that it spent about 500 times less on conservation in UKOTs (£1m per annum) than in Great Britain & Northern Ireland (>£460m per annum). The recent earmarking of Darwin Initiative funds approximately doubles the spend on UKOTs, but the scale of the funding gap is clearly still profound, despite the global importance of biodiversity in the Territories. Most significantly, no funding mechanism exists for projects larger than those supported by OTEP or the Darwin Initiative. At a stage when, in domestic UK, a project would (for example) develop into a species recovery programme, it stops in a UKOT for want of such a fund.

Promoting effective communication, exchange and dissemination of information with UK Overseas Territories

Addressed via links through UKOTCF (see above), with some further provision recently through increased activity in the UKOTs by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC).

Promoting sustainable development strategies, including commitments to clear environmental and sustainability targets

In the UKOTs, environmental sustainability is typically threatened by habitat destruction and degradation of ecosystems (generally due to built developments), invasive species, over-exploitation of natural resources and other factors. These threats, combined with the lack of resourcing noted above, mean that endemic species are still being lost, despite pilot work in small projects identifying



The vegetation and soil of Montserrat's hills provide the island's main water reservoir (as is the case for some other islands, such as St Helena). Work on biodiversity conservation and ecosystem services is based on long co-operation between Montserrat government and NGOs, working with UK bodies, from the FCO/UKOTCF biodiversity survey project of 1995, through emergency work by outside bodies coordinated initially by UKOTCF after the start of volcanic activity, to the current collaborative work on the Centre Hills. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

potential solutions. For example, the St Helena Olive (an endemic genus) went extinct in 2003 – after UK agreed the target to reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. If the UK is to have any credibility in the face of this target, we cannot afford to permit further biodiversity loss from our Territories, yet at least 240 UKOT species are at high risk of global extinction, according to the IUCN.

Another related issue concerns the lack of effective and participatory planning systems in several UKOTs, noted earlier. The Environment Charters (see below) include commitments to: the protection of key habitats, species and landscape features; environmental impact assessments; and open and consultative decision-making. However, serious procedural flaws are often reported, especially in the UKOTs of the Wider Caribbean, leading to built developments that many consider inappropriate.

Development of Environment Charters to clarify roles and responsibilities, set out a shared vision, etc

Good progress was made after the White Paper, with most UKOTs signing an Environment Charter jointly with HMG in 2001. These included statements of Principles, and Commitments made by both parties, including to formulate a detailed strategy for action, with the goal of integrating environmental conservation into all sectors of policy planning and implementation. With support from HMG, and at the request of the Territories concerned, UKOTCF facilitated local stakeholders developing such strategies in some UKOTs. UKOTCF has also collated information on progress in Charter implementation, the first report being published in 2007, with an update currently in progress. (For more detail on Environment Charter matters, see article on pp 2-3.)

There are some suggestions that replacement Charters are now required to tailor these more to local requirements. However, this represents a fundamental misunderstanding of the Charters, which represent formal statements of intent that provide a framework for the development of more detailed, locally-focused strategies and plans. This has already been done in some UKOTs, either through the UKOTCF-facilitated exercises noted above, or through the production of a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (or similar strategic documents). To replace the Charters would be a retrograde move, rather than a step forward to build on what is already in place.

Conclusions

What are the main needs to stop the loss of biodiversity and enhance sustainable development in the UKOTs?

- A more open approach in UKOTs to decision making in planning, with greater involvement of civil society.
- Greater recognition in the UK (amongst public, officials and politicians) that the Territories are British, not foreign, and that the UK shares responsibility for the conservation of their natural resources.
- This means UK Government:
 - maintaining its one dedicated fund (OTEP) and other support for small projects (earmarked part of Darwin Initiative), but providing also a separate UK Government fund, at least an order of magnitude larger, for full-scale conservation programmes and support of sustainable use of natural resources in UKOTs, as well as capacity development
 - supporting the release of Heritage Lottery funding, etc, for UKOT projects
 - otherwise encouraging and assisting UKOTs in meeting their commitments.

Cayman - the conference and beyond

The first report of the Grand Cayman conference *Making the Right Connections* appeared in *Forum News* 34, and work continues on the conference proceedings, which we hope to publish on www.ukotcf.org shortly. Lots of other things happened in, around and after the conference, and here are short articles on a few of them.

A new tree species? Cannibalistic snakes! ...all in a morning stroll at the Mastic Trail Reserve

The Mastic Trail Reserve represents part of the only remaining subtropical, semi-deciduous dry forest on Grand Cayman. Many rare endemic species such as the ghost orchid can be found there. The National Trust for the Cayman Islands has devoted considerable effort to maintaining and safe-guarding the trail. At present, 754 acres are managed by the Trust, forming the Mastic Reserve. The trail is thought to have been used as a passage around the dense mangrove wetland that forms most of the interior of the island. Before the development of the coastal roads, the trail was used as a major thoroughfare. After this time, the trail became overgrown as alternative transport routes were found. The National Trust received some funding in the early 1990s, which meant that some work on clearance and restoration could begin. In April 1995, His Excellency the Governor, Mr Michael Gore, opened the trail to the public. Mr Gore was thrilled to return to the Trail with the conference party to enjoy it as a visitor.



The conference field-visit to the Mastic Trail Photo: Catherine Quick

A group of 25 conference participants was taken into the reserve by knowledgeable guides from both the National Trust and the Cayman Islands Government Department of the Environment. Along the way, field officer Stuart Mailer gave the group an insight into many medicinal and practical uses for some of the plant species, as well as pointing out rare events such as the two racer snakes *Alsophis cantherigerus caymanus* that seemed to be displaying territorial behaviour, but in fact one was eating the other!

One tree found on the trail is probably endemic to the Cayman Islands and may be unknown to science. Stuart said "The tree is almost certainly in the Genus *Zanthoxylum*, with a spiny trunk closely resembling Shake Hand *Z. coriaceum*, but with leaves similar to Satinwood *Z. flavum*. We have sent a pressed specimen, that included dry fruit, to Dr George Proctor (who wrote *Flora of the Cayman Island*), but we have not yet found flowers, which are required for a firm identification or description".

The damage to the Islands that resulted from Hurricane Ivan in 2004 can still be seen, not just along the coast where *Casuarina* has invaded cleared areas, but can also on the trail. Many trees have been so badly damaged by the effect of the domino beetle which has moved into areas where it was usually controlled by its natural predator, the woodpecker. As the latter's numbers have decreased, the beetle population has grown, causing visible scarring and destruction of many trees on the trail.

Some of the other plant species found on the Trail were: Black Mangrove; Silver Thatch Palm; Cedar; Mahogany; Wild Banana Orchid, the National Flower of the Cayman Islands; and Mastic Tree, from which the Reserve and Trail take their names. Animals observed included: the endemic Grand Cayman Parrot; West Indian Woodpecker; Caribbean Dove; large hermit crabs; termites, and their carton nests; and various butterflies, lizards, frogs, and (non-venomous) snakes.

Catherine Quick (UKOTCF) with help from the National Trust of the Cayman Islands (www.nationaltrust.org.ky)

More honours for Michael Gore

Michael Gore, then Governor of the Cayman Islands, established the Cayman Islands' first Ramsar site: the Red-footed Booby colony on Little Cayman, the largest such colony in the western hemisphere. Through his Governor's Fund for Nature, he was a major contributor to the National Trust Visitors Centre and viewing station which overlooks the colony.

Following the conference in Grand Cayman, and in recognition of his work for conservation on the island, the Little Cayman branch of the Cayman Islands National Trust unveiled a plaque on the building. This commemorates the inauguration of the Centre in July 1995 by Governor Gore, which was one of his last duties before he retired. Following his retirement, Michael Gore served on the Council of UKOTCF and as Chairman of its Wider Caribbean Working Group.



Michael Gore beside the plaque at the entrance to the Visitors Centre

... and Fred Burton

Congratulations to Fred Burton MBE (also a former Council member of UKOTCF) who, as this edition goes to press, has been awarded the first of JNCC's new *Blue Turtle Awards*, for his work on the endemic and critically endangered Grand Cayman Blue Iguana, continuing his many efforts in conservation on numerous aspects in the Cayman Islands.



International Year of Biodiversity

The United Nations has designated 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity, and countries around the world are developing initiatives and partnerships to promote understanding of the importance of biodiversity and its conservation.

The UK has a growing partnership (IYB-UK), which already involves over 200 organisations. UKOTCF is part of this initiative, and will be working through IYB-UK to raise awareness of the biodiversity of the UKOTs - the most important biodiversity for which the UK is internationally responsible. On 25th November 2009, the official launch of IYB-UK was held at the Natural History Museum (NHM) in London, which provides the IYB-UK secretariat. Speakers included Richard Lane (Director of Science, NHM), Ahmed Djoghlaif, (Executive Secretary, Convention on Biodiversity) and Huw Irranca-Davies MP (Defra Minister). In his address, the Minister specifically referred to the UKOTs, and later cited the Cayman Islands Blue Iguana recovery project as an example of how an iconic species can be used to promote

biodiversity and convey its importance to the general public.

UKOTCF would like to encourage its partners in the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies to mark the International Year of Biodiversity (and the annual International Biodiversity Day, on 22nd May) with their own local awareness raising activities. Please let us know what you have planned: oliver@dipsacus.org
For information on IYB-UK, visit: www.biodiversityislife.net



At the launch of IYB-UK, on the 150th anniversary of the publication of On the Origin of Species, musicians under the statue of Charles Darwin entertain the participants below the dinosaur skeleton at the Natural History Museum, London. Photo: Natural History Museum, London

Biosphere Reserves – a useful tool for UKOTs/CDs?

Biosphere Reserves (BRs) are quite an old concept, but this is being re-invigorated. UK has a committee which promotes the use of this designation to drive forward conservation and sustainable use. This group recently asked UKOTCF to join in order to explore whether the concept might be of use for UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. In order to help workers in the territories to consider this, Richard Butler MBE, a member of the UK's Man and Biosphere (MAB) Committee and a driving force behind one of Britain's BRs, has supplied this viewpoint.

What is a Biosphere Reserve?

An individual BR is part of a global network of special places for people and nature, and will have at its heart the principles of conservation and sustainability. There are about 450 in almost 100 countries, and each has to reach a standard set by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The concept was developed as part of the UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Programme in the 1970s, and has been evolving ever since. This evolution culminated in a statutory framework being agreed worldwide defining a series of key principles, including sustainability and the maintenance of biodiversity, in Seville in 1995. Another key component is the involvement of local communities as a major driving force. This fosters the feeling that this is 'our Biosphere Reserve' and not 'theirs' imposed from upon high. With 2010 designated as the International Year of Biodiversity, our work could hardly be more significant!

What does the Biosphere Reserve do?

To us all, steeped in our convictions, it is "motherhood and apple pie." There are three complementary functions:

- First, conservation: to contribute to the conservation of landscapes, ecosystems, species and genetic variation.
- Second, to foster economic and human development which is socio-culturally and ecologically sustainable.
- And third, to provide support for research, monitoring, education and information exchange related to local, national and global issues of conservation, development and climate change.

Who manages and coordinates the Reserve?

BRs do not belong to one organisation. They may include land and water areas owned and managed by a mixture of private individuals, government and non-governmental organisations, companies and so on. The management structure must be open, evolving and adaptive. This is sometimes easier said than done! All who participate must have patience, perseverance and imagination and will demonstrate a cohesion so that all feel that their role is vital to the success of the whole project. Sometimes it is decided to work within a legal framework and sometimes not. Those concerned with a Reserve must feel that they can call on their National MAB Committee to provide support and linkage through to UNESCO. In Great Britain and Northern Ireland, we are always keen to know that we have the support also of our national and/or devolved government.

Are there different areas of the Biosphere Reserve?

Yes, usually there are three complementary zones. The core area or areas are devoted to nature conservation and legally protected. Buffer zone(s) often surround the core, and will maintain activities compatible with the conservation activities of the core. Both the core and buffer zones have defined boundaries. The final zone is the transition zone, or area of cooperation, in which sustainable development is promoted and developed with a flexible outer boundary, and where most of the population live. People tend to see this as the fried-egg-in-the-pan picture, with the yolk being the core, the white being the buffer and the frying pan the transition zone. This is an over simplification, as you may have several core zones, for example. Alternatively, the main street where most of the population lives may be the transition zone, as a linear feature, with the buffer and core zones lying outside (perhaps on the tops of hills).

What are the benefits of having a Biosphere Reserve?

Benefits will vary from one BR to another and, in the same BR, benefits may vary with time. One obvious benefit is being a member of a worldwide network to share experience and best practice. It is often a comfort to know that you can ask for help

when the going gets tough! Many find the accolade a useful branding tool to stimulate the production and sale of local goods – local food and drink is an obvious example. It is extremely useful when looking for funds, be it from national or local Government or local, charitable or other sources. Considering applying for BR status has often been used when interests are actually or potentially conflicting! Instead of hurling insults at each other, sitting together round a table often brings about not only an understanding of each other's point of view, but a realisation that a symbiotic relationship can be of enormous benefit to all. Management boards of some BRs are now made up of one-time antagonists! Finally, there is an added value component which may cover regional planning issues or the running of educational and training programmes with the subsequent value for jobs and economic viability.

In Great Britain, we now have two fully fledged 'Seville new-look' BRs, one in North Devon (SW England) and the other the Dyfi

estuary (Wales). There is another being developed in the Galloway Hills (SW Scotland). There are another four working toward full Seville recognition, two more in Scotland, at Loch Druidibeg in the Western Isles, and Ben Eighe in the NW Highlands, and another two in England, one in Norfolk and the last in Upper Teesdale. Each was originally based on existing National Nature Reserves which gave the opportunity of only core and parts of buffer zones, but not initially transition zones. As you can see evolution is alive and well here!

Our North Devon BR is twinned with a BR in Kenya, and has developed close relationships with others in Europe and Australia. Perhaps colleagues in the UKOTs and CDs might want to join with us. You would be very welcome, but do come back if you have thoughts or questions: richard@crawfordton.net

Turtle deaths in Western Sovereign Base Area of Cyprus

Episkopi Turtlewatch is a group of volunteers carrying out turtle conservation on beaches in the Western Sovereign Base Area (SBA). Volunteers, a mixture of people working in the SBA and permanent residents, organise beach cleanups and, during the turtle nesting season which extends from late May until early September, check the beaches daily for fresh turtle tracks. Nests are covered with a cage to protect them from predators and monitored until they hatch. After hatching, nests are excavated and data on the number of eggs and the percentage hatched are passed to the SBA Environment Department and the Cyprus Fisheries Department. Episkopi Turtlewatch covers about 5 km of beaches around Episkopi. Both Loggerhead *Caretta caretta* and Green Turtles *Chelonia mydas* nest on the beaches. The turtle population is much smaller than around the Akamas and Karpas peninsulas, to the west and east respectively, and the number of nests is correspondingly smaller, averaging a dozen per year. Nevertheless, the turtle population is important in terms of genetic diversity and in maintaining the local marine environment.

In recent years, illegal fishing and deliberate killing of turtles by fishermen has increased. For many years, the average number of dead turtles found on the beaches each year was three or four. Most showed no obvious signs of the cause of death. In 2008, following a reduction in the minimum depth at which fishing nets could be laid, the number of casualties soared. By the middle of the year, 11 dead turtles had been recovered. Many showed obvious signs of having drowned following entanglement in fishing nets – there were ligature marks around their head and their front flippers were damaged in their efforts to escape. Alarming, two of the casualties had obviously been struck on the head with a heavy object. Local fishermen do this when they find turtles in their nets because they regard the turtles as a pest.

The Turtlewatch group drew attention to the situation and, in July 2008, requested the Chief Officer to use his powers under the SBA fisheries legislation to prohibit fishing boats in less than 10 metres of water off turtle nesting beaches during the nesting season. The Chief Officer has the power to do so if he considers it is in the public interest, including for the purposes of protecting fishing resources and aquatic animals. Unfortunately, he declined to exercise his powers but the SBA police and customs authorities were instructed to step up their efforts to enforce the fisheries legislation.

Unfortunately, this course of action proved ineffective in stemming the number of turtle deaths. In the second half of 2008, a further

11 turtles were killed, bringing the number of deaths for the year to 22. Despite further enforcement efforts, the number of deaths has increased markedly in 2009, and by mid-September it stood at 25. More alarmingly, 40% of the turtles had clearly been killed deliberately, by being struck on the head or decapitated altogether.

Episkopi Turtlewatch believes the only solution is the introduction of a "reserve" area off turtle nesting beaches, as the current legislation is impossible to enforce. The police marine unit is stationed an hour away from Episkopi beaches and, as soon as the fishermen see the police approaching, they move away, making it impossible to secure evidence of an offence.

The Turtlewatch group has again requested the Chief Officer to prohibit fishing boats off turtle nesting beaches, and this request is being considered. David and Linda Stokes from Turtlewatch say that time is of the essence, "Since we submitted our original request in July 2008, we have had 36 dead turtles on our beaches. Most of these were drowned in fishing nets or deliberately killed. Twenty-eight of them were Green Turtles. The adult Green Turtle population in the entire Mediterranean Sea is estimated at fewer than 600 pairs. This rate of depletion of a severely endangered and protected species is unsustainable and cannot be allowed to continue."

David and Linda Stokes, coordinators of Episkopi Turtlewatch
Email: info@episkopiturtlewatch.com



Dead male Green Turtle at Curium beach, 27 August 2009
Photo: Episkopi Turtlewatch

A few changes

Mike Pienkowski outlines some new roles and gives a personal view of some developments over the last 14 years.

In the mid-1990s, the Forum's Member and Associate organisations in both the UKOTs and Britain started to press UKOTCF to take an increasingly active, hands-on role, in partnership with local organisations, in addition to its cross-Territory role. In order to address these challenges, the Council and membership developed a 5-year business plan. When the time came, in the first years of the new millennium, to review how well this had been fulfilled, we were somewhat surprised to discover that virtually everything planned had been achieved – except, of course, to put the Forum on a sound funding basis. UKOTCF has continued to depend very heavily on large quantities of donated time.

For this reason, the Forum has never been able to afford to appoint an Executive Director. In fact, the total paid personnel of UKOTCF is approximately equivalent to one full-time person. With the inability to employ an Executive Director, Council asked me to cover this role on a voluntary basis alongside the voluntary role of Chairman. Fortunately, I was able to take early retirement from the UK Government's statutory conservation bodies in 2001, and since then have been able to work effectively full-time (but unpaid) on core activities for UKOTCF. However, with increasing activities and challenges, the work-load has become quite excessive.

For at least half the time since being persuaded to take on the Chair of UKOTCF (or UKDTCF as it then was) in 1995, I have been looking for a successor. However, the potential ones seemed to be able to spot the potential burden in time, and take evasive action! In discussions over recent months, Council has realised that the solution is to split the post into the two that it really consists of: Chairman and Executive Director. As funds remain very limited, both posts remain unpaid.

I am delighted that Dr Chris Tydeman has accepted Council's invitation to take on the chairing role. I had the pleasure of working on some of WWF-UK's advisory committees in the late 1980s/1990s when Chris managed their conservation programme (see below), and look forward to working with him in his new role. It seems that there is no time off for good behaviour for me,

continuing at Council's request as Honorary Executive Director.

Standing down from the Chair provides a good chance to give some personal reflections – by no means exhaustive - on progress (and otherwise).

From 1984 (after moving from a university ecological research post), I had worked first as Head of Ornithology and then as Assistant Chief Scientist for the UK Government agency, the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC), and then as the official who set up, and the first Director of, one of its successor bodies, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). Although always interested in UKOTs, I had no particular involvement during this period – except when, on the Council of an NGO which was being taken over by another, I tried (unsuccessfully) to have one of its trust funds, which had been set up to support UK Overseas Territories, transferred to the new UKDTCF, rather than being lost to the UKOTs.

After taking a lead in a series of high-profile, and often initially controversial, conservation issues during my time at NCC/JNCC, in 1995 I agreed to take up a 2-year secondment to head one of the international departments at RSPB, and discovered that this included being RSPB's representative to UKDTCF. At the first meeting I attended, the then Chair and other representatives marked me down to take on the chairing role. At the time, UKOTs did not feature as a priority in RSPB's own work. I started to change this, but much more progress was made by my successor as RSPB's representative to the Forum, Jim Stevenson. Until he left RSPB for family reasons in 2003, Jim was the model of what a representative should be, a strong advocate of his own organisation, but making that even stronger by acting in consort with the rest of UKOTCF, as well as keeping his colleagues well informed of the role of the Forum.

The relationships between UKOTCF and its Member and Associate organisations is always very sensitive to the changing policies and priorities of those organisation, as well as the capabilities and

New UKOTCF Chairman: Dr Chris Tydeman

Chris Tydeman became re-involved in UKOTCF while Chair of Trustees of the Herpetological Conservation Trust (now Amphibian & Reptile Conservation), a Forum Member organisation. He was elected to UKOTCF Council in 2008. He is an independent consultant dealing with both environment and development issues, specialising particularly in recent years in wetlands management, water supply and sanitation, biodiversity strategies and climate change. He left WWF-UK as Chief Scientist, having spent 23 years there, with secondments to the WWF European Programme and WWF International, before becoming a consultant in 2001. At WWF, he was responsible for the UK Conservation Programme, which included providing financial and staff support to the UKOTCF, as well as Programmes on Freshwater, Marine and Toxic Chemicals.

Chris has extensive policy experience at national, European and international levels with government, intergovernmental organisations and NGOs and has held a number of representative positions. These include being on the UK Secretary of State's Advisory Committee for the Convention on Biological Diversity, UK Government advisory groups on otters and coastal management, and both the Standing Committee and the Scientific and Technical Review Panel of the Convention on Wetlands (Ramsar Convention). He has also acted as Northern co-chair of the UN Freshwater Caucus and represented NGOs at the World Water Forum in the Hague in 2000, including at the Senior Officials meetings, and as head of the WWF delegation at a number of international and intergovernmental meetings including the North Sea Ministerial Conference. He has served on the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats, and as chair of numerous NGO bodies. He is a member of the EU Water Initiative Coordination Committee and a number of its working groups.





Masked Booby and chick on the main island of Ascension, 2004. From its formation in the 1980s, UKOTCF made many attempts to find resources to re-establish on the island seabirds restricted to offshore stacks because of

introduced cats on the main island. Funding was finally secured by FCO, and then UKOTCF Member RSPB took the lead, later handing over to the Ascension Conservation Department (established as part of the same process). This remains the only occasion on which major recovery funding was provided by HMG, this being secured because an FCO-funded non-environmental project could not proceed. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

attitudes of their respective representatives to the Forum. In the 1990s, WWF-UK was the strongest of Forum Members, with a major spend in UKOTs. However, following Chris's departure and policy changes, its involvement in UKOTs sank to nothing, despite the best efforts of UKOTCF and some of WWF-UK's own trustees. Maintaining good contacts with Members and Associates will remain an important and time-demanding activity.

Particularly satisfying progress in this area has been the development of conservation bodies in the UKOTs. Helping local people do this has been a major priority for UKOTCF, and it is pleasing also to see such bodies taking an increasing role in the governance of the Forum itself. Of course, inevitably with organisations depending on small numbers of individuals, there are occasional set-backs. However, the Forum and its other Members always remain ready to help local people rebuild in such cases. UKOTCF has helped also to support the development in capacity of government environment departments in a number of UKOTs. This has included facilitating strategy development exercises (partly related to Environment Charters – see pp 2-3). We were gratified also to hear, at our Bermuda conference in 2003, that the Bermuda Government had used a UKOTCF publication from 1998 to guide the restructuring of its environmental units. Further, very encouraging steps were the decisions by Crown Dependencies (CDs) to become involved in UKOTCF, something which is mutually beneficial to UKOTs and CDs.

Within Britain, UKOTCF arguments have had a major effect on getting UK Government to accept its shared responsibility for biodiversity conservation in the UKOTs and, to a limited extent, the Crown Dependencies. In the 1990s, UKOTCF, alongside other bodies, encouraged the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO, which has the policy lead on UKOTs) both to create an Overseas Territories Department (UKOTs having previously been scattered across geographic departments) and to strengthen the previous Environment, Science and Energy Department into an Environment Policy Department, with suitable staff. (Sadly, after several years of valuable work, ESD's successor was abolished by FCO in 2006, with the loss of all but one environmental post.)

When, in 1998, the then fairly new UK administration announced its intention to have a White Paper on the UKOTs, it indicated that there would not be a chapter on the environment – until UKOTCF correspondence with the Foreign Secretary changed that. The original idea (but not the name) of what became the Environment Charters came from UKOTCF, as a way of reconciling the fact that UK Government answers internationally for environmental

conservation but UKOT administrations are responsible for legislation and enforcement. UKOTCF was not involved in the drafting of the Charters. However, at the request of the UKOTs and others, the Forum has played two key roles. One has been facilitating the development by stakeholders in several UKOTs of strategies to implement the Charters. The other has been collating information from the Territories and UK Government on progress in implementing the Commitments under the Charters. Both UKOTs and UK Government were keen that UKOTCF take on this role – as a neutral party to the Charters. Inevitably, this is a rather thankless task, as the messenger is often blamed for the message – even when this contains good news as well as bad!

Progressing the Charters also suffered a setback when FCO deleted its environmental posts in 2005-6 and consequently lost capacity and focus in this area. There are present calls to replace the Charters, allegedly because they need more focus on each UKOT. However, this is a misunderstanding of the Charters, whose first commitment is to bring stakeholders together to produce a locally focussed document – as UKOTCF has helped some UKOTs to do. To rewrite the Charters, rather than continue this work, would be a retrograde step. Environmental officials and NGOs in the UKOTs have made clear the value to their work of having the Charters. This is why UKOTCF has donated so much effort into helping progress them. Moving away from the existing Charters would raise serious questions about the commitments of UK Government and UKOT governments to environmental conservation.

The environmental chapter of the White Paper, which UKOTCF had insisted upon and which ethical FCO officials had worked hard to produce, also met another target: the establishment at last, in 1999, of the first small projects fund for environmental work in UKOTs. However, although this Environment Fund for Overseas Territories (EFOT) was specifically included as a UK Government Commitment in the Charters signed in September 2001, FCO announced in 2002 that it was abolishing EFOT. Reversing this error distracted the conservation efforts of UKOTCF and several UKOTs for much of a year. However, this effort did result, in 2004, of the creation of the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP). This combined both the FCO contribution and a roughly equal amount from the Department for International Development (DFID). (It had originally been intended that DFID would be involved from the start, in 1999 but, in the next few years while using consultants to design a programme before implementing this, DFID had lost that element of its budget.) The new OTEP provided about £1m per year, although UKOTCF and partners have already had to intervene to prevent this fund being cancelled.

By 2006, UKOTCF had helped JNCC persuade UK Government to widen JNCC's remit to include UKOTs and CDs. Most recently, at the UKOTCF-organised conference in Grand Cayman (and after about 15 years of UKOTCF effort), the Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra, which has the environmental lead for UK) announced its involvement in UKOTs. We congratulate the officials and ministers involved in this decision. Defra has also earmarked for UKOTs part of its Darwin Initiative, potentially doubling the UK Government budget in this area. We still lack a budget line for recovery programmes or other major needs which would be the normal follow-on in Britain and elsewhere to exploratory small projects – but we will continue to pursue that.

One of the ways in which UKOTCF has encouraged improvements has been by provision of evidence to Parliamentary and other Inquiries, notably the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) and Environmental Audit Committee (EAC). It was the conclusions of the latter, based largely on UKOTCF



Caicos Barking Gecko, an endemic species thought to be extinct until rediscovered as part of the work co-ordinated in TCI by UKOTCF to underpin conservation and the development of trails, visitor centres and other interpretation, to provide the basis both for eco-tourism and education. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

evidence, which led to Defra's welcome change of position and increased funding from them to JNCC for UKOT work.

There are problems in success. For several years in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the main driving forces in Britain (in addition to UKOT players) to support conservation in UKOTs arose from discussions between personnel of FCO and UKOTCF. With UKOTCF's success in encouraging others who should have been involved, UK governmental bodies have increasingly discussed UKOT matters amongst themselves, excluding the UKOTCF network. This is understandable, but reduces efficiency and effectiveness. A further challenge of success in persuading UK Government to increase its funding contribution to UKOT conservation is that relatively well-funded bodies not previously interested in such work become increasingly attracted to securing such funding. When this results in UKOTCF's largely voluntary efforts receiving less support (as seems to be the current trend), value for money also reduces. This is important, not least because UKOTCF has a major role in ensuring that the voices of smaller conservation organisations in UKOTs, CDs and supporting ones in Britain and elsewhere are heard, as well as more vocal, larger organisations.

UKOTCF has been active in other areas. The main reason that all UKOTs and CDs have chosen to join UK's ratification of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands is that UKOTCF took opportunities over several years to explain this to decision-makers in the Territories. It was slightly amusing recently to hear discussions (in a body more recently involved in UKOTs) exploring how to do this for other conventions, when their corporate memory had forgotten UKOTCF's actions of just a few years earlier.

The Forum has worked also to help develop equivalent bodies in other European Union (EU) States with Overseas Territories. This has resulted in the joint initiative, Bioverseas, between these bodies. Some years ago, Bioverseas suggested to the European Commission (EC) the idea of financial support to Territories if they voluntarily adopted conservation practices for protected areas inspired by the EU's Natura 2000 network. This idea has been adopted by senior EC officials as the proposed BEST initiative. If they succeed in getting this adopted, one challenge will be to find a way of overcoming the appalling level of bureaucracy linked to EC funding. On behalf of the UKOTs and at their request, UKOTCF has already wasted huge amounts of effort (which could otherwise be used for conservation more directly) on attempts to access other EU funds. One grant that has been secured (but which still soaks up lots of time on EC bureaucracy) is Net-BIOME. This pulls together tropical and sub-tropical Overseas Territories and Outermost Regions of several EU States, to coordinate biodiversity research and attempt to secure more funding for this.

Lack of space prevents more detailed mention of other UKOTCF progress, such as its newsletter, web-site and database, conferences, Working Groups, the encouraging of Territory-to-Territory contacts, and the many collaborative on-the-ground projects with local partners.

There is clearly much still to do, and I look forward to a continuing role in this, hopefully under marginally less pressure!

Alderney Hosts 2009 Inter-Island Meeting

Last year saw the re-establishment of regular meetings between environmental bodies in the Channel Islands, to exchange information and enhance co-operation, thanks to the efforts of Charles David of La Société Guernesaise (see *Forum News* 33). This year's Inter-Island meeting took place on 1st and 2nd October, and was arranged and hosted by Roland Gauvain (Manager), Susan Allender (Assistant Ecologist) and their hard-working colleagues at the Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT). The 2010 meeting saw an expansion from a one-day to a two-day format, and participation from a greater range of NGOs, governmental bodies and individuals, including from the UK and the Isle of Man. Gathering in the Anne French Room at Island Hall, delegates discussed a range of topics on the morning of day one, including international conventions, conservation legislation and strategic planning in Jersey and Guernsey, seabird monitoring results from across the Channel Islands, and aspects of coastal zone management. In the afternoon, delegates heard about JNCC's expanding work in relation to UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, concerns over marine invasive species, and the importance to conservation in the Channel Islands of volunteers and environmental education. UKOTCF's Oliver Cheesman addressed the theme of developing co-operative working, based on his experience with the Forum and other networking groups. Day two was devoted to discussions of renewable energy, particularly tidal power which the Channel Islands are well-placed

to exploit. In addition to the formal sessions, delegates enjoyed opportunities to network informally and to see important sites for wildlife around the island, where the local government (the States of Alderney) has devolved responsibility for most aspects of environmental management to the AWT. We congratulate Roland and his team of almost exclusively volunteer staff on their many successes in this respect, and for organising such a successful meeting. We were delighted to hear rumours that the island of Herm has offered to host the Inter-Island meeting in 2011.

Visit the AWT website: www.alderneywildlife.org



Despite their small area, the tiny islets of Les Étacs (pictured here at sunset) and nearby Ortac, off the coast of Alderney, support around 2.4% of the world's population of gannets. Photo: Dr Oliver Cheesman

Amphibian and Reptile Conservation is officially launched

The Herpetological Conservation Trust (HCT) and Froglife merged in July 2009, forming a single conservation NGO. The new organisation is called

**amphibian and reptile
conservation**



Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (ARC) and was formally launched in London on Wednesday 4th November. ARC will continue the range of activities formerly undertaken by Froglife and HCT, while providing a stronger basis for conserving amphibians and reptiles in the future. ARC will continue HCT's membership of UKOTCF. Dr Tony Gent, CEO of ARC declared: "By merging we can achieve more for these animals. By forming a single organisation our thinking is clearer, making partnerships is easier, our money goes further and our message is stronger. These actions give us the direction that we must take as a new organisation, but we need partnerships with other wildlife organisations and commitment to act from those in power, to make them into winning results for reptiles and amphibians."

The Right Hon. John Gummer MP, former Secretary of State for the Environment, gave the keynote speech at the launch: "I am much impressed in the way that this amalgamation has taken place. It is amazingly valuable, and it will give you huge strength."

ARC is committed to ensuring that new legislation and policy decisions fit the needs of wildlife, particularly amphibians and reptiles, and will work towards influencing policy relating to agriculture, habitat conservation, wise water-use and planning. Although based in the UK, ARC has a global remit, and a particular interest in promoting reptile and amphibian conservation

in Europe and the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. HCT has undertaken work in the UK Crown Dependencies, including a

great deal in Jersey. This encompassed surveying and monitoring species, habitat management work, and providing conservation advice on the agile frog and green lizard. HCT also supported the development and implementation of the action plan for the agile frog, made good links with Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, and promoted survey through the National Amphibian and Reptile Survey on Jersey and the Isle of Man.

HCT produced a draft Action Plan for the Bermuda skink *Plestiodon longirostris* and has attended three UKOTCF-organised Conferences. With the financial support of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, HCT initiated a complete species inventory and overview of conservation and research priorities for the amphibians and reptiles in the territories. A working document has been produced (dated March 2009) and is available to download at <http://tinyurl.com/yjf54fn>. ARC is now working actively to further develop involvement in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, and is currently taking forward the completion of this document to include comments received to date. Once completed this will be posted on the ARC website www.arc-trust.org

Contact: Dr Tony Gent, Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
tony.gent@arc-trust.org

Beyond the Beach — Birds and Tourism for Sustainable Islands

This was the title of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds' 17th Regional Meeting, held 14th-18th July 2009 in Antigua and Barbuda. Among the participants were several from UKOTs (notably former SCSCB President, Andrew Dobson) and UKOTCF. One of the main topics for this conference was sustainable tourism, something that UKOTCF has been promoting and developing with local partners, particularly in the Caribbean UKOTs, for many years.

The keynote speech by Ted Eubanks (Fermata Inc) on *The Business of Nature – Sustainable Birding, Outdoor Recreation and Tourism* gave concrete examples of how outdoor recreation, particularly birding, can be used as a means to an end. His clear thinking approach, backed by successful examples, provides an excellent model for others promoting sustainable development and tourism. For more information, see <http://fermatainc.blogspot.com> where you can also find the PowerPoint presentation which Ted made at the SCSCB conference, and a *Portfolio of Interpretive Projects* giving details of Fermata's recent and current work.

Another keynote speaker was Andrew Rothman, who is director of the Sarapiquí Conservation Learning Center in Chilamate, Costa Rica, and also serves on the Board of Directors of the Rainforest Biodiversity Group. His presentation promoted the idea that establishing sustainable bird tourism opportunities with local landowners in Latin America may help with the creation of biological corridors and the conservation of wildlife habitat. The Rainforest Biodiversity Group is working in Costa Rica to develop the Costa Rican Bird Route as a means to increase connectivity and landowner participation in preservation of wildlife habitat. More information can be found at www.costaricanbirdroute.com/index.htm This is another excellent "how to do" example which could be used by others.

If you are going to have sustainable tourism, then local communities need to benefit economically from this. One key factor is to have local guides. Barbara MacKinnon, the third keynote speaker, explained how, through her bird guide training workshops in rural communities in the states of Yucatan and Quinana Roo on Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula, she had developed a bird guide training programme and manual. The English version of the training manual is available for download from www.birdlife.org/news/news/2005/03/bird_guide_manual_en.pdf It is also available in Spanish. The manual provides an excellent reference for people developing bird guide training in other areas. This resource is also referenced in the UKOTCF environmental education resources database (<http://www.ukotcf.org/infoDB/index.htm>).

Coincidentally, sharing the conference venue was the Caribbean Youth Summit Association *Treasures of the Caribbean* workshop. This event, held under the auspices of the Franciscan Ministries in Jamaica (but involving those of all religions and none), aims to bring together young adults from across the Caribbean to discuss, plan and recommend improvements they would like to see in the region. One of their issues for this meeting was the environment. The UKOTCF Environmental Education Co-ordinator was invited to attend this session. Discussion topics included *How do we go about educating ourselves about the vulnerability of the Caribbean?* This has clear links with the UKOTCF discussion forum, and there may be future opportunities for linking up with this group, particularly regarding youth participation in environmental issues, acknowledged to be a key factor in making progress in environmental advocacy.

Ann Pienkowski, UKOTCF Environmental Education Co-ordinator
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Illegal bird trapping in the Eastern SBA, Cyprus

For some years, the killing of large numbers of migratory songbirds as they pass through Cyprus, including the SBAs, has been a major concern to the conservation community. They are trapped using fine mist nets raised on poles, or adhesive-coated “limesticks”, and may be lured into an area using recordings of bird calls. Although the practice is illegal, boiled or pickled songbirds are still sold in some local restaurants, as ambelopoulia. Many of the species concerned are also under pressure elsewhere, either from changing land use in their breeding grounds across northern Europe, or from the affects of climate change in their African wintering areas. The removal of large numbers – estimated to be millions each year in the 1990s – during the migration only exacerbates the problem, and many populations are in decline.

The relationship between the SBAs and the Republic of Cyprus is undoubtedly complex, and UKOTCF does not seek to involve itself in internal Cypriot matters. However, for such large numbers of songbirds to be killed in a British territory when passing through Cyprus to refuel after their long journeys is both illegal and unacceptable.

A few years ago, organisations including UKOTCF, and concerned individuals, campaigned vigorously against bird-trapping in the SBAs, and by 2006 the activity appeared to have been much reduced. However, recent reports from organisations including Birdlife Cyprus indicate that the practice is on the increase again in the Eastern SBA. Whilst the situation is not as bad as it was (say) 10 years ago, trapping has undoubtedly increased since 2006.

In July, Michael Gore wrote to the SBA Authority emphasising UKOTCF’s grave concerns, and urging that the SBA Police take action to curtail trapping during the forthcoming migration season, by removing illegal netting infrastructure and arresting offenders. Rapid reassurances were received that this matter was taken very seriously, and that the SBA Authority was taking action, including by working with external bodies and in liaison with the local community.

More recent reports indicate that specific action has indeed been taken by the SBA Authority, and this is clearly welcome.



Unfortunately, data collected by Birdlife Cyprus suggest that netting during September/October 2009 was significantly greater than in the same period for 2008 (when levels were the highest recorded in any season for five

Pipes permanently placed to support mist-net poles for illegal trapping of migrant birds, Eastern Sovereign Base Area of Cyprus, May 2009. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

years), and that netting infrastructure was much more common on Eastern SBA land than in areas surveyed in the Republic of Cyprus. Clearly, renewed effort is required to tackle this deplorable situation.

British Birdwatching Fair 2009

The UKOTCF stand at the Birdfair in August benefited greatly from the presence of Dr Keith Bensusan and Rhian Guillem from the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society, a Forum Member organisation. Official visitor numbers to the event were 22,800 people, an increase of 2,800 compared to 2008. Funds raised at the 2009 Fair will be used to support the ‘Species Guardians’ and ‘Species Champions’ initiative - with the aim of seeing many birds come off the Critically Endangered list and have a more secure future. The event certainly attracted a large audience of well-informed individuals, and visitors to the stand were responsive to the Forum message about the tremendous value of biodiversity in the UKOTs. The event remains a unique opportunity to interface with a public audience who support conservation.

Catherine Quick, UKOTCF Coordinator cquick@ukotcf.org



TV naturalist Nick Baker (centre) visits the UKOTCF stand, flanked by Rhian Guillem (L) and Keith Bensusan (R) Photo: Catherine Quick

Net-BIOME progress

Work continues on this project, which brings together the tropical and sub-tropical overseas territories and outermost regions of relevant European Union Member States (France, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and UK). The project aims to review biodiversity research and encourage further such work. At the project’s Executive and Governing Board meetings in French Guyana (one of the partners) in October 2009, discussions focused on developing funding for biodiversity projects. The Portuguese Atlantic Island regions of Azores and Madeira have already offered funding, and France has also given positive indications. The other partners are pursuing contributions and UKOTCF is discussing such a possibility with UK Government, so that any such research can include UKOTs.

The project has just published a newsletter which can be downloaded from www.netbiome.net/images/stories/newsletter/NetBiome_newsletter_2009_01.pdf





The Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) is a joint programme of the Department for International Development (DFID) and the 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 UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum continues to provide aspects of communication management for OTEP. This is the eleventh in 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 the Forum with FCO and DFID.

This issue of the OTEP supplement to *Forum News* includes an updating note on the projects that were successful in the 2009 bidding round as well as a number of reports from projects funded in earlier rounds. OTEP welcomes jointly funded projects, so that some articles could equally occur in the OTEP supplement or the main section of *Forum News*, as is the case in this issue.

Further information on some projects (including outputs in cases where these have been supplied by project managers) can be found in the OTEP section of www.ukotcf.org.

Successful Project proposals 2009

At the time *Forum News* 34 went to press at the end of June, OTEP had not confirmed final approval for the projects marked * in that issue. These had been approved in March subject to individual conditions. We are now able to note that all those projects were subsequently confirmed.

Summaries of progress or completion for a range of OTEP projects already active

Establishing a Botanic Garden at the Montserrat National Trust (MNT203)

The volcanic eruptions in Montserrat had left few green spaces in which people could relax. The pressure to clear land to erect buildings highlighted the need to raise public awareness about the importance of conserving plants. Our elders were relocating to foreign places with the traditional knowledge of our medicinal plants. It seemed that a well established botanic garden could help to address those problems in an interesting way. So, the Montserrat National Trust set about developing its grounds into a botanic garden. In 2004, an application was made to the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) and a grant was awarded in 2005.

From the start of the project a committee of volunteers worked with the staff of the Trust, the gardeners Philemon Murrain and Victor Browne and the director Eudora Fergus, to implement the project. The volunteers were Easton Taylor- Farrell (Chairperson), Gerard Gray, Claude Browne, Claudia Skeritt, Stephen Mendes, John Martin and Daphne Cassell.

Professional guidance and practical support was given by a team from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBGK) - Colin Clubbe, Stewart Henchie and Martin Hamilton. The RBGK team visited periodically and assisted with a variety of tasks including preparing an inventory of the plants in the garden, setting up a computerized database, labeling the trees, and showing staff how to propagate flowering plants from seeds.

The community, including H.E. Debra Barnes Jones, Hon. Margaret Dyer Howe and the Montserrat Defence Force, joined in maroons to progress the work. Jueun Song (a student from RBGK) captured

the ideas of the committee and developed them into a Master Plan. The garden was designed to showcase plants found in the Centre Hills.

By the end of the OTEP funding cycle:

- A lawn terrace was built where groups could assemble for instruction before starting on a tour through the garden.
- The nursery and shade house with a misting unit were functioning.
- The Seasonal Ghaut mimics those in the Centre Hills which flow



High powered help: Her Excellency Deborah Barnes Jones, then Governor (L), and Hon. Margaret Annie Dyer Howe, former Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and the Environment (R), assisting in the garden at one of the maroons.

Photo: Montserrat National Trust.



MONTSERRAT BOTANIC GARDEN LANDSCAPE MASTER PLAN

AUGUST 2007

DRAWN BY JEEUN SONG-DUSOIR

in the rainy season and dry up in the dry season with vegetation along their banks changing as one moves from the top of the Centre Hills to low lying areas.

- The Orchid House displays the endemic orchid along with other orchids found on Montserrat.
- The Medicinal Garden was installed with plants traditionally used for medicinal purposes.
- The Composting Unit produces compost for the plant beds from the dead leaves,
- The croton patch, the hibiscus patch and palm walk and some walkways were installed.

Not every feature on the Master Plan could be installed within the time of the project and with the funds given. But the Trust continues to maintain the garden and seek funds to add new features. It is developing into an education tool and a delightful place for residents and visitors to Montserrat.

The Trust is grateful to OTEP for funding the project.

Eudora Fergus, Montserrat National Trust mnatrust@candw.ms

New Conservation Department Created in Tristan da Cunha (TDC202)

Partly funded by OTEP, the Tristan da Cunha Government has recently created the Tristan Conservation Department (TCD). The new Department is separate from the Agriculture and Natural Resources Department, with Trevor Glass as Head of TCD, Norman Glass as Assistant and Kirsty Green as Clerk.

The Tristan Conservation Department can be contacted on +44(0)2030145016 and at tg.conservaion@gmail.com

Eradication work on Gough continues (TDC302, TDC502 and TDC601)

Newly received support from OTEP has enabled ongoing conservation work on Gough Island, Tristan da Cunha, to be continued and expanded. The project titled "Preparations for the eradication of mice and *Sagina* from Gough Island" (OTEP project TDC601) aims to step up efforts to control and eradicate the introduced plant Procumbent Pearlwort *Sagina procumbens* and continue with planning and preparations for the future eradication of house mice *Mus musculus*. The project is being managed by the RSPB in collaboration with Tristan da Cunha's Conservation Department. The recent visit of the South African research vessel, the *S. A. Agulhas*, to Gough Island in September 2009 placed two new RSPB fieldworkers, Kalinka Rexer-Huber and Graham Parker, both from New Zealand, replacing Henk Louw and Paul Visser, who had been on Gough for the previous 13 months (under OTEP project TDC502). During the course of the *S.A. Agulhas*'s visit, Kalinka and Graham received training and instructions from Peter Ryan, from the University of Cape Town, on the detailed work plans for the coming year. Work plans relating to



John Cooper spraying stripped areas of ground at Snoekgat.





Tristan Conservation Officer Norman Glass descending cliff

the planned future mouse eradication include the capture and captive care of the critically endangered Gough Bunting and endangered Gough Moorhen. Without captive populations, both species could be at risk from an eradication operation.

Work during the September visit also targeted *Sagina*, which has infested areas of cliffs close to the South African meteorological station, and will present a major risk to Gough Island's unique vegetation if it were to escape to upland areas of the island. With the support of Norman Glass, from Tristan da Cunha's Conservation Department, specialist rope-access work from Donovan Willis, and able assistance by Dalton Gibbs and John Cooper (all from South Africa), work to eradicate the plant was stepped up during September with all areas of coastal cliffs checked and any plants in the infected areas removed and sprayed with herbicides. Following pilot work during 2008 to test a new method of clearing and stripping soil, a new high-pressure water-pump was purchased, positioned by helicopter within a *Sagina* area distant from the base, and successfully installed during the relief voyage. The new pump is being used to blast soil from infected areas with salt water. As well as stripping the soil from the cliffs, germination trials have shown that the salt water kills and prevents new *Sagina* plants from emerging. Continued stripping of soil and spraying is planned throughout the coming year.

Our thanks go to the South African National Antarctic Programme and Titan Helicopters for supporting the September work, to the Tristan Island Council for supporting this conservation project, and to OTEP for funding.

Richard Cuthbert, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Richard.Cuthbert@rspb.org.uk

Restoration of the Sandy Point area by the eradication of the Loganberry plant (TDC404)

The Sandy point project was funded by OTEP to enable the people of Tristan da Cunha to: eradicate the Loganberry *Rubus loganobusacc*, produce their own fruit and build a research hut where studies can be carried out. The Loganberry was taken from Diars Garden by Upton and planted at Sandy Point in 1953. It then began to spread and became a pest; growing over the apple orchids and covering the gulches making footpaths very dangerous. In 2007, the Darwin team went to Sandy Point to eradicate it. This was a great task and now the Loganberry is at least 99% under control. Following efforts to control and eradicate Loganberry from Sandy Point, the ground had been cleared sufficiently to allow for the re-planting of fruit trees.



*Vigorous growth of Loganberry *Rubus loganobusacc**
Photo: Trevor Glass

The once productive orchard appears to be in an advanced state of decline with many trees dead or dying. The main reason seems to be the old age of the trees and a long history of neglect; there has been no pruning for many years, if ever, and the fruit on the remaining apple trees were very small, probably as a result of this. In addition, woolly aphid and mealy bugs occur and probably weakened the trees further, although individuals that were still alive displayed lush foliage.

In order to re-stock the area with new trees, a large number of different young fruit trees were ordered from Cape Town, including apple, pear and peach. A total of 52 apple trees were fit to be planted, all of which were either of the 'Royal Gala' or 'Golden Delicious' variety. Due to the good quality of the soil it was not necessary to add any compost. The trees were spread out evenly across the slope in front of, beside and behind the existing research hut. The insect pests are more likely to be a threat to the new trees and so they have been sprayed with Spray-kill, to kill aphids, moths and white fly. Hopefully these measures will mean that the new trees will be producing fruit in the New Year.



Darwin team members Matthew Green and Simon Glass planting a tree. Photo: Trevor Glass

The existing hut was built in 1980 where the Agriculture team used to spend some time in the summer cutting down pine wood for fencing poles and replanting young trees. At the moment, with the cost of fuel prices and the rebuilding of the harbour, this has come to a halt as it is much cheaper to order the pine wood from South Africa. Hopefully, after this project we will be able to start bringing pine up to the Settlement again.

Trevor Glass, Head of Conservation Department, Tristan da Cunha tg.conservation@gmail.com

Developing a plan for Pacific rat eradication on Henderson Island (PIT401 & 501)

An OTEP-funded project to undertake conservation research on Henderson Island, in the Pitcairn Group, recently supported a successful expedition to Henderson to carry out fieldwork aimed at removing the last remaining obstacles prior to the planned eradication of Polynesian rats. Team members were Henderson Island and seabird expert Mike Brooke (Cambridge University, UK), Pawl Warren and Sue O'Keefe (Pitcairn Island), rodent eradication specialist Nick Torr (New Zealand), Alve Henrikson (Sweden) and Richard Cuthbert (RSPB, UK). The expedition sailed from Mangareva in French Polynesia in early August, visiting Pitcairn to meet and brief islanders on the expedition's objectives, to receive essential supplies and pick up Pawl and Sue. A further day's sailing and two days of fine weather saw the team safely ashore and installed in a field camp on Henderson's North Beach.



Mike Brooke measuring and weighing one of the captive Henderson rails.

Photo: Nick Torr

Predation by Polynesian rats on breeding seabirds, particularly those of the endemic Henderson petrel, are driving large-scale population declines, and will lead to their eventual extinction without an eradication. A previous, OTEP-funded feasibility study and draft operational plan for the eradication of rats (PIT401) highlighted three main areas of concern that needed to be addressed. These were: the potential competition for bait between rats and hermit crabs that occur at high densities in vegetation behind the island's beaches, the risk

to the Henderson rail as a non-target species during an aerial bait drop, and the possible impact of bait on Henderson's endemic land snails. Over the six weeks of fieldwork, the expedition team tested different densities of non-toxic dyed bait and established that, despite high crab densities (>1000 crabs per hectare), all rats were able to access and feed on bait pellets. After testing different catching techniques, the team captured 20 Henderson rails and successfully held these birds for four weeks in captivity, paving the way for a similar approach to be adopted during an actual eradication. Trials with toxic bait pellets and endemic snails revealed no significant



Sue O'Keefe, from Pitcairn Island, setting a live-trap to capture Polynesian rats. Photo: Pawl Warren

snail mortalities, indicating that this group of animals is not at risk from an eradication. These positive results have removed the last remaining obstacles for an eradication, and the challenge now is to raise the necessary funds to carry out this priority eradication operation.

Our thanks go to Pitcairn Island for supporting this conservation work on Henderson, to the crews of the *Braveheart* and *Claymore* for their help in getting to and from Henderson, to the New Zealand Department of Conservation and Landcare for lending equipment and valuable advice, and to OTEP for funding.

Richard Cuthbert, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Richard.Cuthbert@rspb.org.uk

Ascension Island Endemic Plant Project Update (ASC 503)

The Ascension Island Conservation Department are working in collaboration with the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew on an OTEP-funded Endemic Plants project. Experts from the UK Overseas Territories Team at Kew advise on propagation techniques, *ex-situ* cultivation and the re-introduction of endangered species. Horticultural protocols for each species are to be outlined, these will be used to improve local collections and further develop *ex-situ* plant collections. Stedson Stroud, AIG Conservation Officer, has already successfully cultivated in large numbers three of the endemic species, *Pteris adscensionis*, *Euphorbia origanoides* and *Sporobolus caespitosus*. The aim is to establish collections of all endemics, including *Marattia purpurascens*, *Xiphopteris ascensionense* and *Asplenium ascensionis*. The cultivation of these species will involve a series of trial-and-error propagation trials, recording the results and producing horticultural protocols. The clearing of invasive species on Green Mountain has resulted in the creation of a restoration site for the reintroduction of endemic species on the mountain. The project work will now focus on the mixed planting of the endemic and native species in the Green Mountain restoration area. The collection of a DNA library and accompanying herbarium specimens for all endemic species will take place over the next few months. In addition, the annual plant census of the endemics will be completed by the end of the year. There is currently ongoing work to establish a seed bank of the endemic *Sporobolus* and *Euphorbia*, and a spore bank of the endemic ferns, both on Ascension and at the Millennium Seed Bank, UK.



Restoration site on Green Mountain. Photo: Ascension Island Conservation Department





Pteris adscensionis in cultivation at Green Mountain nursery
Photo: Ascension Island Conservation Department

Work completed (September 2009):

- Restoration of two new shade tunnels on Green Mountain.
- Invasive species clearance in restoration area and in wild habitats.
- Participation in island-wide plant census.
- Seed collecting for propagation and storage both on Ascension and at the Millennium Seed Bank.
- Propagation and cultivation of endemic species for continued restoration work.
- Cultivation of the endemic *Euphorbia organoides* at the Chicken Run Nursery.
- Propagation of *Asplenium ascensionis* and *Xiphopteris ascensionense* from spores.
- Mixed planting of the endemic species with natives at the restoration site on Green Mountain.
- Appointment of a new Horticultural Officer for the period October 2009 – April 2010.

Olivia Renshaw, AIG Assistant Conservation Officer,
olivia.renshaw@ascension.gov.ac

Jost Van Dyke's Community-based Programme Advancing Environmental Protection (BVI503)

In early 2010, the Jost van Dykes Preservation Society in the British Virgin Islands will complete its OTEP-funded project, entitled "Jost Van Dyke's Community-based Programme Advancing Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development".

After more than a year of work, the largest output for the project, *The Environmental Profile* has been completed and published. *The Environmental Profile*, which is the first such effort in the British Virgin Islands, provides a synthesis of the current state of the environment of the island of Jost Van Dyke and its immediately adjacent smaller islands of Little Jost Van Dyke, Green Cay, Sandy Cay, and Sandy Spit. A portion of the publication represents the first comprehensive inventory and assessment of the terrestrial environment of Jost Van Dyke and these sister cays.

Field research completed for the *Profile* by J.P. Bacle and Kevel Lindsay (Island Resources Foundation) yielded the recording of 200 species of native and naturalised plants, including 12 species of special concern,



Cockspar Erythrina eggersii

including several endangered endemic species such as the Cockspar *Erythrina eggersii*, Thatch Palm *Coccothrinax alta* and the Sour Prickle Pear *Opuntia rubescens*. On the steep slopes of Little Jost, the research team discovered the Simple-leaf Bushweed *Flueggea acidoton*, a new species for the Virgin Islands. Alongside development, the island's enormous population of free-roaming goats are the primary agents of change for the island's vegetative communities. The subsequent erosion caused by unfettered goats pose a serious threat to many of the island's plant species.

The *Profile* team recorded at least 60 species of birds, including some of the Territory's rarest species, such as the Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* and the Bridled Quail Dove *Geotrygon mystacea*. The team recorded 5 species of frogs, including the endemic Virgin Islands Coqui *Eleutherodactylus swartzi*, now believed to be extinct in the nearby US Virgin Islands and the Mute Frog *Eleutherodactylus lentus*, which is classified as endangered on the IUCN Red List. The island's list of 9 recorded reptiles includes the endangered Virgin Islands Tree Boa *Epicrates monensis*. The island has 5 species of bats, the island's only remaining native mammals. The island's non-native mammals (goats, sheep, rats, feral cats, and the Indian Mongoose) are a significant menace to the islands' faunal biodiversity. While the Ground Lizard *Ameiva exsul* is plentiful on mongoose-free Sandy Cay, the Indian Mongoose has decimated *Ameiva* populations on Jost Van Dyke. Similarly, the typically abundant Dwarf Gecko *Sphaerodactylus macrolepsis* population on Jost Van Dyke is atypically low, the result of a lack of leaf litter, which is a direct result of the island's goat population.

While the *Environmental Profile* will be provided to key stakeholders and made available to the public, an abridged version will be provided to each household on the island. Final stages of the project will also include continued community education and outreach activities and the final installation of four permanent exhibits to be housed on the island to help relay the contents of the recent research.

Contact Information: Susan Zaluski, Jost Van Dyke Preservation Society, susanjvdp@gmail.com

Falkland Islands Shallow Marine Programme (FAL501)

For a nation comprising over 700 islands and a correspondingly large coastline, little is known about the inshore environment around the Falkland Islands. Most of the available scientific literature deals with offshore commercial fisheries in waters that are on the whole deeper than 50 m.

In March 2007, Shallow Marine Surveys Group (SMSG), in partnership with Falklands Conservation (FC), were fortunate



Wetch takes photos for species guide.

enough to be awarded a grant from OTEP which enabled us to employ a full-time benthic ecologist, Dr Karen Neely, as the Project Officer. The funding has also allowed us to purchase equipment for inshore marine research as well as fuel for the craft we use, resulting in a significant step forward in our knowledge of the shallow seas around the Falklands Islands. In addition, it has also covered the cost of yacht charter in order to survey marine areas further afield.

The project has made enormous progress with over 300 species identified, and has built up a national reference collection housed at the Falkland Islands Government Fisheries Department. Excitingly, several new species have been found and are currently being described including a local sponge species in the genus *Hymedesmia*. It is likely that a number of other sponge species are also new to science. We have also recorded a unique spawning behaviour in the commercial squid *Loligo gahi*. With the help of the JNCC, we have adapted the UK's Marine Recorder database in order to store our qualitative and quantitative data, which makes data analyses for community studies, habitat classification and GIS less cumbersome.

Since the start of the project, we have undertaken major survey expeditions to the remote Jason Islands, and more locally Berkeley Sound and Port William resulting in a cumulative number of 90 transects, 1800 quadrat photos and over 300 dives. We have established permanent transects at a site around Kidney Island in Berkeley Sound, one of the Falkland Islands Government's National Nature Reserves; this allows us to monitor for invasive species and to examine the seasonal changes in the local community structure. The surveys carried out locally and outside the Stanley area have also enabled us to start fine tuning our habitat classification system. These expeditions have, in addition, undertaken surveys of coastal birds providing information on many local data-deficient species.

We have an ambitious programme this summer that will see expeditions to Adventure Sound, Beauchêne Island and north



Paul and Jude identifying animals post dive.

Falkland Sound as well as our continuing work in Berkeley Sound and Port William.

The project has gained an enormous amount of community support, in part due to the public's astonishment of the beauty below their shallow seas, through our photographic collection and involving them through regular talks, identification workshops, FC Watch Group Activities and articles in popular dive magazines and the local press.

We are extremely grateful to OTEP and to the Falkland Islands Government for the opportunity to advance inshore marine research in the Falkland Islands. Finally we would like to thank all of our volunteers that make the project possible. Project Stakeholders: JNCC, RSPB, FIG Fisheries Department, FIG Environment Planning Department, National Museums Northern Ireland.

Dr Paul Brickley and Judith Brown, Shallow Marine Surveys Group
(Please visit www.smsg-falklands.org or www.falklandsconservation.com for more information)

Supporting Critical Species Recovery and Horticultural Needs on St Helena (STH501)

It is difficult to imagine a more desperate flora, in urgent need of focused conservation efforts to halt the decline of remnant endemic populations, than that of St Helena Island. Invasive alien species have exploded into action after the eradication of feral goats, and are now squeezing out the last remnants of native vegetation. The low numbers of endemic plants are spread thinly on the ground and cannot compete against the speedy regeneration of the overpowering invasives.

The project is directly addressing this imbalance, by improving the effectiveness of *in-situ* activities while strongly supporting this through increased ex-situ capacity.

The capacity of the Agricultural & Natural Resources Department's Environmental Conservation Section (ECS) has been greatly increased during the first year of the project. Key achievements are:



*A group of seed collectors at a population of rare Tea Plant *Frankenia portulacifolia*, after a two-hour hike and scramble over treacherous boulders called Great Shaking Rocks.*

Photo: Lourens Malan





Prince Andrew School students learning how to plant critically endangered endemic trees. Photo: Lourens Malan

- A dedicated vehicle that is enabling field work activities
- Local Nursery Officer, initially recruited under the project, now a permanent position in ECS to sustain the benefits provided from the project
- Nursery facilities upgraded and improved with two shade-houses fully operational
- Seed banking facilities set up and in use
- Regular seed collecting day embedded in ECS core activities
- Thousands of endemic plants grown, many of which have not been cultivated before now
- Thousands of these plants have now been planted back in carefully managed sites, serving to secure the long term survival of St Helena's fragile flora

An increase in nursery production, through increased species diversity and quantity of plants, is planned for the next year. A Nursery Management plan will be drawn up to allow continuity of successional sowing and planting. The increased production will provide the desperately needed stream of plants in numbers large enough to allow denser, stronger plantings. Plantings of diverse species mix and varying age will support the remnant pockets and increase their strength. We are ultimately hoping for self-sufficient habitats that could stand their ground against the encroaching invasive species with minimal management intervention.

The project actively promotes cooperation between on-island stakeholders. Joint planting projects have been undertaken at the Millennium Forest with staff from St Helena National Trust, St Helena Nature Conservation Group and ECS, with strong community involvement. The aim of these plantings is to diversify the species mix in the Forest by reintroduction of ground cover and forest-edge species and to develop effective *in-situ* sowing techniques.

Training people in sound horticultural techniques is key to providing continued success after the life of the project. The project is taking part in 'Enrichment Studies' in Conservation Programmes for school students and encouraging the use of endemic plants in favour of exotics. Volunteer participation through the regular seed collecting has given us a good example of how community involvement could add strength through teamwork and spells a bright future on the island.

Lourens Malan, Horticultural Support Officer (HSO), Tel: +290 4724, Email: hso@anrd.gov.sh



A Penguin's World

by Ian Strange & Georgina Strange

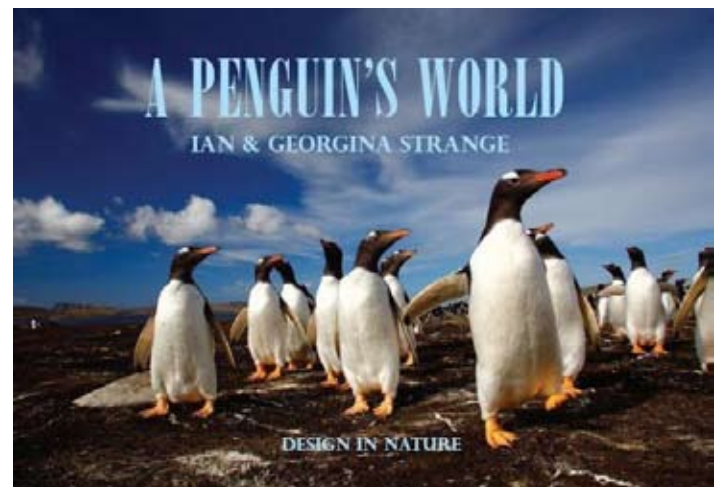
A Penguin's World is a collection of photographs and descriptive text detailing the extraordinary lives of the six species of penguins found in the Falkland Islands.

Ian Strange founded the New Island Conservation Trust in 1972. He and his daughter, Georgina, work tirelessly to protect and preserve important breeding sites around the Falklands. Through her photography, Georgina hopes to raise awareness of how special these islands are globally, in terms of healthy populations of penguins.

The stunning photography in the book captures the essence of the Falklands with its wild coastline and beautiful, but often deserted, beaches while capturing the charm of these charismatic animals in their everyday lives.

The chapters include an overview of the lives of several species that are found in the Falklands, the Rockhopper, Macaroni, Royal, Gentoo, Magellanic and King penguins. The accompanying text demonstrates the importance of habitat in their breeding and foraging behaviour as well as some of the challenges that threaten all penguins' existences such as global changes in sea temperature and climate.

This book is a true celebration of the life and times of penguins in the Falklands. But it also serves as a reminder of how human activities can threaten their very existence. It would be a marvellous addition to any reference collection.



This A5 size, hardback book with dust jacket has 80 pages in full colour. This book is available in the Falkland Islands, but copies are also available in the UK and postage overseas can be arranged. Please contact Ian Strange directly for more information furseal@horizon.co.fk. The cost is £9.99 / US\$18.00 / €12 plus any postage that may be required. ISBN: 978-0-9550708-2-2

Réunion Conference proceedings

The proceedings of the July 2008 conference on *The European Union and its Overseas Entities: Strategies to counter Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss* (7-11 July 2008) are now available (partly in English and partly in French) at:

www.iucn.org/about/union/secretariat/offices/europe/places/overseas/

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Victory for environmental campaigners in BVI

Early in 2007, the then BVI Government granted approval for a major resort development and golf course on Beef Island. This caused much controversy, notably over the likely environmental impacts. Local concerns are even said to have influenced the outcome of the subsequent general election, which resulted in a new administration taking office. Angry local groups came together under the banner of the Virgin Islands Environmental Council (VIEC), and mounted a formal challenge to the development approval. Central to their argument was that approval had been given in contravention of the Fisheries Regulations (2003), which included provisions limiting developments that would adversely impact marine protected areas. After months of legal wrangling, the case came before the High Court in April 2009, and judgement was finally handed down on 21st September. Justice Indra Hariprashad-Charles ruled that there was good reason for quashing the development approval, on grounds of illegality. As VIEC had argued, a key aspect was the status of Beef Island's Hans Creek as a fisheries protected area. Local news sources reported that "During

the hearing, novel areas of law were judicially considered which is expected to affect the future of sustainable development, planning policy, and the status of protected areas in BVI and throughout the Caribbean."

VIEC sources noted that this was the first time that Virgin Islanders and residents had come together to take such a public stand on an environmental issue, and expressed great satisfaction that their position had been vindicated by the court. Whilst this victory does not prohibit all future development on Beef Island, it does reinforce the fundamental concept that for developments to be approved they must conform to BVI's environmental laws. The Beef Island case has been the main focus since the group was formed, but VIEC feels there are many other serious environmental challenges to be faced in BVI.

The full history of the Beef Island case, and updates on this and related issues, can be found on the website of the BVI Heritage Conservation Group. See: <http://www.bvihcg.com/index.shtml>

Gentoo Penguin chick mortality on South Georgia

In January 2009, a monitoring survey on South Georgia saw a near 100% Gentoo Penguin chick mortality along the NE coast. This is not unprecedented, as it has been seen in previous years when food has been scarce. Gentoo Penguins feed on krill, which is transported around South Georgia by Antarctic Circumpolar Current (ACC). The Antarctic Convergence lies to the north of the Island, where the cold ACC meets warmer oceanic currents. Changes in the sea surface temperature, which mean that the krill is not available around the coast of South Georgia, will inevitably devastate the population of Gentoo Penguins living on South Georgia - and may not allow for the population to recover from any further unsuccessful breeding seasons.

*From the presentation at the Cayman Conference by Darren Christie, Environment Officer, Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands. env@gov.gs
<http://sgisland.gs>*

Gentoo Penguin and chick Photo: British Antarctic Survey



Award for botanic species recovery in Pitcairn



The Forum would like to congratulate Noeleen Smyth from the Botanical Gardens, Dublin on the grant received from the Mohammed Bin Zayed Conservation Fund for \$20,000 in order to continue species recovery work on Pitcairn. The work will focus on the Yellow Fatu *Abutilon pitcairnense* (pictured) which is one of five species identified as critically endangered on the island. Read more at www.botanicgardens.ie/herb/pitcairn.htm. The MBZ fund is a significant philanthropic endowment established to: provide targeted grants to individual species conservation initiatives; recognize leaders in the field of species conservation; and elevate the importance of species in the broader conservation debate. Read more at <http://www.mbzspeciesconservation.org/>

Photo: Noeleen Smyth

Pitcairn supports whale protection

The Governor of the Pitcairn Islands recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding to protect whales and dolphins in the Pacific region. The signing, which follows a unanimous agreement by the Pitcairn Island Council, took place at the second meeting of signatories to the Convention of Migratory Species MOU for the Conservation of Cetaceans and their Habitats in the Pacific Islands region held in Auckland on 28th-29th July.

Governor Fergusson said "Notwithstanding Pitcairn's small size and limited resources, this is an exciting opportunity for us to signal our support for the conservation of whales and dolphins in the region, to share information and gain from the knowledge and expertise of neighbouring countries"

Humpback whales are thought to have started migrating to the Pitcairn Islands around 15 years ago and its waters are used as a calving ground during the austral winter. A survey in July/August 2007 revealed around 60 sightings of single humpbacks, mothers and calves. There have also been sightings of pilot whales and

other species. It is hoped that contacts with other MOU signatories, including Australia and New Zealand will assist in follow-up surveys and exploring opportunities for responsible whale-watching as part of a developing tourism industry on Pitcairn.



Humpback whale Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski