

# *UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum* **Annual Report 2003/04**

## **Chairman's Report on behalf of the Council**

### **Overview**

The report covers a period of nine months, from July 2003 to March 2004, this short financial "year" occurring because of the change made to the Forum's financial year to fit better with other annual constitutional commitments. Future financial and reporting years will run from April to March.

The Forum has maintained its good working relationship with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). It has to be noted, however, that FCO has given little financial support to Forum cross-UKOT projects over the past couple of years. This seems to be related to two features: the continual rapid turnover of FCO staff, so that a large amount of time from the Forum has to be spent in briefings just to maintain existing levels of awareness; and the frequent reorganisations of the funds over the past two years. It is an ongoing process for Forum directors to raise the awareness of issues regarding funding. The Forum has worked with both FCO and Department for International Development (DFID) to help create the new Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP). Whilst it seems likely that some projects by the Forum will be part-funded by OTEP, the core work of the Forum remains largely unfunded, and with no contribution from UK Government. As a result, the Forum has had again to cut the time of core work that it can pay for. Two years ago, the Forum had to halve the amount of this, from one full-time equivalent. Now, it has had to reduce further to one day per week, and even this results in a deficit budget at the start of the year. The essential and important core work of the Forum continues only because of very substantial amounts of time donated without charge by the Chairman and some other Council members and others. That work essential for conservation in UK's Overseas Territories, globally important for biodiversity, has to depend on such an unsustainable source of volunteer effort by a few people is a sad indictment of UK's lack

of commitment to its own responsibilities to global conservation.

Despite these problems, the Forum has completed the facilitation of a one-year project to help the Turks and Caicos Islands fulfil its first commitment under the Environment Charter: to develop a strategy for action to implement the Charter. The Forum is grateful to FCO for part-funding this project, which was completed by facilitators Dace Ground and Mike Pienkowski in their own time. The wider objective of this work was to provide a model for other UKOTs to develop strategies for action to implement the Charters signed in 2001 between the governments of UK and of UKOTs.

TCI Executive Council adopted as government policy the Strategy for Action to implement the Environment Charter in December 2003. Senior TCI government officials have indicated that it might be useful for the



*Ann Pienkowski discusses environmental issues with students as part of the Environmental Charter process on St Helena*

Forum facilitators to have a continuing role in monitoring and advising on the progress of implementation.

The facilitators completed the guidelines for other UKOTs in February, and published this on the Forum's

web-site [www.ukotcf.org; click Environment Charter on the main side-menu, and then Strategy Devel on the sub-menu.] It is considered that all UKOTs would require some sort of facilitation for the process, but the guidelines should considerably reduce the amount of work required in each case.

Informal help and advice has already been given to other UKOTs, and this also had the benefit of testing the wider applicability of the approach. In addition, the Forum Chairman visited the Falklands in January 2004, this giving him the opportunity to advise an on-going project there with similar purposes, and to glean from any initial experiences in that situation. The organisers of the South Georgia Association Conference asked the Forum for input to try out experimentally the initial stages of an Environment Charter strategy development process within discussions at that conference. St Helena have set up a committee to progress the Environment Charter and the Chairman will be visiting St Helena via Ascension, later in 2004 to help take this initiative forward.

Following on from the Forum's successful conference in Bermuda in March 2003 ("the best organised conference he had ever attended"

according to one senior FCO official), delegates indicated an overwhelming wish for another conference in the future. Although many wanted a shorter time-period, a three-year time interval was thought to be appropriate, so that work could progress in the mean time but that the gap was not too long that the momentum was lost. A venue in or



*Loose flowered or Jersey orchid  
once widespead, now confined  
to two sites in Jersey.*

near the UK was considered preferable. Both the Government officials and NGOs in Jersey are showing serious interest in hosting the next conference, which is proposed for October 2006, and this is potentially a very cost-effective option. The Chairman has visited Jersey to explore this initiative, and FCO indicated initial support. An application to OTEP for an essential contribution to conference costs was made (and awarded, after revision, as this report goes to press).

**Relationship with UK Government and government agencies**

In addition to the work on developing and helping implement strategies for action required to implement Environment Charters noted in the Overview, the Forum has worked in collaboration with UK and other

governments and stakeholders on a range of issues, some of which are noted below.

In late December 2003 Defra awarded the Forum a contract, originally indicated publicly as an intention by Defra three years earlier but delayed due to a change of rules requiring a competitive tendering process. This project is to review actual and potential "Ramsar" sites (Wetlands of International Importance) in UKOTs and Crown Dependencies. The first consultation stage was circulated by the Forum to all the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies (excluding British Antarctic Territory, which is not included in UK's ratification of the Ramsar Convention) at the end of December 2003. The contract does not include a budget for travel to the UKOTS, but the Chairman used visits to the Falklands and to TCI to strengthen the information base and local ownership of the issue.

The Chairman and representatives of member organisations and other Council members have been able to discuss environmental issues relating to the UKOTs with Tony Crombie the new Head of FCO Overseas Territories Department. The Chairman and others have also briefed new governors designate; these included Alan Huckle (Anguilla) and Deborah Barnes Jones (Montserrat), as well as Russell Jarvis, new Head of the Governor's Office for Montserrat and other officials.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) has confirmed that all the necessary paper work has been submitted to the World Heritage Convention secretariat for the inclusion of Inaccessible Island as a World Heritage Site. This will be considered at the meeting that is scheduled to take place in China in July 2004. There are two sites in the UK Overseas Territories that are already on the tentative list, the Fortress of Gibraltar site, which DCMS indicated will go forward for consideration in 2006 and the Anguilla Fountain Cavern Site which will be visited and then possibly



*Inaccessible Island*

put forward for 2007. The UKOTs should be considering potential sites to add to the forthcoming revision of the UK tentative list. An article on the World Heritage Site nomination process was published in *Forum News 24*.

The Forum has continued to maintain regular contact with the FCO, at frequent informal discussions and at the more

formal half yearly meetings. The Bermuda conference proved particularly effective in UKOT personnel making clear to FCO the importance of a dedicated fund for environmental matters in UKOTs, as recognised in the Environment Charters; the re-instatement of this fund in the months after this conference was a crucial outcome. As noted in the Overview, the Forum has helped develop the new Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) fund, and continue to advise on the development of the programme.

OTEP was officially launched on 10 December 2003, at the annual Overseas Territories Consultative Council following authorisation from Ministers of FCO and DFID to establish OTEP as a jointly managed funding programme to support implementation of the Environment Charters. It provides £3m up to March 2007 for projects that support the implementation of the Environment Charters, and environmental management more generally, in the UK Overseas Territories. The first bidding round has now concluded in line with the published timetable. The Forum was instrumental in using its networks to support this process. It will continue to advise FCO and DFID in respect of further improvements in operation of this programme.

Proposals were assessed by a nine-person selection panel comprising: officials from FCO, DFID, Defra and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee; specialists from UK



*Masked Booby and chick in the newly established Ascension mainland colony, following removal of feral cats*

academic and scientific institutions, and consultancies; and representatives of the NGO community through UKOTCF.

It is important that the OTEP projects demonstrate good value for money so that further FCO/DFID money can be secured after the initial two-year period of the funding. Decisions on this would, of course, be taken well before the end of the two years, and indeed are likely to start in the coming year. It is imperative that examples of the positive impact that the fund has had, to habitats, species, and to the local population can be made readily available. The Forum has responded to an invitation from FCO and DFID and is in discussion regarding the development and implementation for OTEP of a Communications Strategy.

In other funding areas, an application for Follow-on funds for the TCI biodiversity management Darwin Initiative Grant,

was turned down. This was the second time that the Darwin Fund had specifically invited an application for this widely acclaimed work, the resulting application being unsuccessful in both cases. Similarly, as this report was completed, Falklands Conservation heard that its bid for invertebrate studies to Defra's Darwin Initiative had been unsuccessful, for reasons that are factually incorrect. Thus, this is another round with no successful UKOT projects. These are not isolated examples re UKOTs, and it has been noted that colleagues in UKOTs have a low opinion of the Darwin Initiative, partly because of its apparent disregard of the value of the limited time available to UKOT personnel; in some cases these UKOT personnel have indicated that they are disinclined to make further applications to the Darwin Initiative. These matters and the generally low support for UK's globally most important biodiversity, i.e. that in the UKOTs, are being explored with Defra.



*Large numbers of night-emerging Brown Widow Spiders are part of the extremely rich invertebrate biodiversity of Prosperous Bay Plain, St Helena, which will need careful protection if the plans for an airport proceed*

### **Working Groups and other links with UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and their NGOs**

The Forum has been collaborating with Mike Doig, of FCO Overseas Territories Department, who has been appointed to investigate the potential for European Union (EU) funding for the UKOTs. The European Commission (EC) confirmed on 3 December that there were still adequate funds remaining in the Regional Funding envelope to allow further bids to be lodged. However the deadline for applications was 31 December 2003. FCO requested Forum assistance in putting together applications on behalf of UKOT Governments. With the Forum co-ordinating work over the Christmas period, a bid, albeit rather outline in view of the shortage of time, was submitted to EC by the governments of the Turks and Caicos Islands, Cayman Islands and British Virgin Islands, in support of nature conservation work centred on protected areas and linked to sustainable tourism. The proposal has successfully passed the eligibility criteria stage and the Commission has requested further details.

In tandem with the above proposal, an EU-funded environmental project on invasive species, as suggested by the Forum's South Atlantic Working Group, was developed. However, the shortness of time prior to the Christmas break

and the deadline did not allow for full consultation and despite the best efforts of a number of people, it did not fulfil the necessary criteria to be successful. Further work on the proposal with full consultation is taking place and the proposal is to be resubmitted, as another subsequent deadline has been set.

Following the workshop organised by the Forum at its Bermuda conference, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) has undertaken to carry out a review to look at all non-native and invasive species in the UKOTs. The first phase of the exercise, a desk survey on information available in the UK has been completed. The Forum was represented at a successful workshop held at JNCC in January. A data set of invasives produced is now being circulated more widely. The resulting spreadsheets could be used to help with preventative measures for introduction of alien species as well as implementation of eradication.

The increasing participation by the Crown Dependencies in the Forum has been a welcome development in recent years, to the mutual benefit of these Dependencies and the UK Overseas Territories. Following the Bermuda conference, the Crown Dependencies expressed some interest in exploring the possibility of extending the concept of Environment Charters to Crown Dependencies. After considerable consultation by colleagues in Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man with the Department of Constitutional Affairs (the UK Government Department which leads on links with the Crown Dependencies), it was decided not to pursue this at present. However, all these parties stressed that their involvement in the joint Forum/Government meetings and related contacts have helped achieve better dialogue between the various government departments and others involved.

Working Groups continue to prosper and have met on a regular basis continuing to maintain contact between the Territories themselves, Territory government representative and others assisting in these area. Reports from the four working Groups follow this report.

### Conservation Priorities

A number of major conservation issues have either been dealt with by the Forum as a whole or through Working Groups or member organisations.

Following many constructive interactions between the Forum (and its member organisations, especially RSPB and Falklands Conservation) and UK Government to resolve some administrative blockages, the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels (ACAP) was ratified by UK early in April 2004, and announced by the Defra Minister for the Environment at the Global Waterfowl Conference in Edinburgh. UK's ratification includes British Antarctic Territory, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, and the Falkland Islands, with the announced intention of extending to Tristan da Cunha as soon as possible.

Resulting from issues surrounding the export of rockhopper penguins from Tristan (see the South Atlantic Working Group report), UK Government has undertaken to draft guidelines on advising UKOTs on conservation-related matters, and to seek the Forum's comment before issuing these.

The Wider Caribbean Working Group has continued to view with concern major developments, such as cruise-liner facilities and intensive resorts, which appear still to be developed without adequate planning consideration or even analyses as to whether such developments benefit the local communities. The Forum is, however, supportive of appropriate eco-tourism and other sustainable developments, and Forum member organisations have been working on such initiatives with partners in Anguilla, BVI and Cayman amongst others. The Forum's programme of joint work on *Biodiversity Management and Sustainable Development around the Turks and Caicos Ramsar Site* continues, with the first of a series of trails and integrated interpretative leaflets being completed during the year.

The Territories have also been beset with natural problems. On 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> July 2003 the dome of the Montserrat volcano collapsed, spewing several centimetres of ash all over the island. On 5 September 2003 Hurricane Fabian hit Bermuda. Work to assess and repair damage to both these events is continuing.



A Brown Noddy shelters its chick from the intense sun; the small cays of TCI are some of the most important colonies in the Caribbean for several tern species

Areas not covered by working groups are the Sovereign Base Area in Cyprus and Gibraltar. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS) have established a good working relationship although certain issues still need resolving, mainly regarding the conservation budget and the proposed construction of a generating Station at Windmill Hill. GONHS are very concerned that such a development should even have been proposed, as it will be in direct conflict with the management plan, which had recently been welcomed by MoD.

### Public Awareness and Publicity

After the initial uptake of "Friends of the UKOTs", further recruitment has been slow, mainly due to the lack of awareness within UK of the UKOTs and their unique biodiversity. In order to help raise awareness of the UKOTs in the UK and to recruit "Friends", several directors and member organisations are organising a Forum presence at a range of events. There are plans to have a series of talks at

the Eden Project with links to the Forum, staged around the St Helena exhibit. Further events, venues and partners are still at an exploratory stage.

Royal Botanic Gardens Kew is developing a statement of how RBG Kew has links with the UKOTs and the Forum, and what services Kew can offer to the UKOTs. Other Forum members have been invited to advertise their policy and intentions for the UKOTs in a similar way or through the Forum website.

The Forum set of display boards continues to be used as occasions arise. A selection of the boards was on display at the Global Waterfowl Conference in Edinburgh early in 2004. Those pertaining to the South Atlantic region were on display at the South Georgia Association conference in Cambridge. A copy of the South Georgia display board has reached South Georgia and is being displayed at the museum there. Some other Territories have expressed interest in further copies of their boards.

### **Information Management**

*Forum News 24* was published during the year both in paper copy and on the web. *Forum News* continues to be a major tool to disseminate information between the Territories and the UK.

The proceedings of the conference in Bermuda were published on the website in early July, just 4 months after the conference. Delegates and those who were unable to attend have found the proceedings to be a valuable resource.

Members of the Forum network, as well as the Forum secretariat, have helped populate the Forum website-database, including by the input of many project details. Forum members are encouraged to continue to input data and use this valuable resource. The Forum stores a considerable number of key reports and documents on the Territories that the Forum feels should be accessible by all. The most convenient method would be through the website but considerable amounts of work would be required to make electronic versions of this material. Funding will be sought to convert this literature to the web. Also published on the web-site are various management plans and the guidelines on developing Strategies for Action to implement Environment Charters, as mentioned earlier in this report.

### **Organisational Development**

At Forum meetings there has been continued sharing of information regarding member organisations' activities within the Territories. The Forum was originally formed because several UK organisations realised that, although they have some involvement with the UKOTs, their work in the Territories is not central to any of them. However, as they are parts of the UK, the UKOTs need UK involvement and support. Therefore by combining efforts using the Forum, the Member Organisations can make the most of their shared efforts, as well as maintaining continuity with minimal resources.

The Marine Turtle Research Group has joined the Forum as a full member. The Herpetological Conservation Trust has indicated its indication of joining the Forum in the new financial year.

An Extraordinary General Meeting took place on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2003

to make a number of "house-keeping" changes resulting from a review of procedures. Council has also addressed a range of other issues to ensure good practice in line with guidance documents of the Charity Commission and others.

Funding remains a major challenge for the Forum. The expected deficit for 2003/4 is likely to be less than originally budgeted, largely due to certain Council members donating to the Forum the payments for some of their project work, including some for member organisations. The uptake of "Friends" has been low. One of the biggest problems for recruiting Friends is the low awareness of the UKOTs and the lack of resources that the Forum has to deploy on promoting the "Friends".

The Forum remains very dependent in the future from FCO- (and now DFID-) centred projects. Other avenues for funding and other resources continue to be explored by Council members and others as time allows.

It has to be recognised that, with a very low core income and few new projects, the Forum's core work is depleting its meagre reserves built up over the previous years. However, progress has been made in that the rate of depletion has been drastically reduced, and the performance during the reported year, partly due to further economies, was better than budgeted. The situation for the year 2004-5 is likely to be less satisfactory, and Forum Council is facing the prospect of reducing its already depleted core work for which it can pay, to 1 day per week.

### **Acknowledgements**

The Forum is grateful to individuals and representatives of member organisations who have given many hours of voluntary time to the Forum both in the UK and in the Territories.

Financial assistance as project grants or donations is greatly appreciated, from Bermuda conference partner organisations, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Royal Bank of Scotland Group, Sammermar Charitable Trust and anonymous donors.

The Forum would also like to thank all the "Friends of the UKOTs" for their continued membership and interest in the Forum. The Forum is grateful also to member organisation for allowing meetings to take place at their offices: particularly The National Trust, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Royal Society for Protection of Birds and Zoological Society of London; and to Falkland Islands Government for allowing the use of Falkland House for South Atlantic Working Group meetings.



*Turtle hatchling*

## Report of UKOTCF South Atlantic Working Group

Three meetings have been held in the 9-month period of this Report: in September, December and February.

The Group's membership continues to be small in number, but contains considerable expertise and an in depth knowledge of wildlife and conservation issues in the South Atlantic. Dorothy Evans retired from the Group in January after much hard work, initially as Group Secretary. Her attendance will be missed for the valuable first hand knowledge of the South Atlantic Territories she invariably brought to our meetings. The Group welcomed new members Juliet Rose (Eden Project and Forum Council), Brendan Godley (Marine Turtle Research Group), and John Hughes (Services Ornithological Societies). Frances Marks continued her sterling work as Secretary to the Group.

A number of key visitors have made long journeys to see the South Atlantic Territories for themselves. In particular, Mike Pienkowski, Forum Chairman, visited the Falkland Islands in January 2004, specifically to advise on Environment Charter application there and to learn more of potential Ramsar sites.

These past months have been an eventful time. As ever, much time and effort has been focused on marine issues. Protection of seabirds and the threat from commercial fisheries have featured strongly throughout. A number of serious environmental issues have been tackled and several new important initiatives are being taken forward.

Concern continues at a high level over the threat to seabird populations from extensive commercial fishing activities throughout the South Atlantic. During the course of the past year we have strongly urged the UK Government to ratify the international Agreement on Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, which would lead to greater protection for the globally threatened Tristan Albatross and Atlantic petrel, the Black-browed Albatrosses in Falkland waters, and the Wandering Albatrosses of South Georgia. The Group was delighted to hear on 2 April 2004 that this ratification, including the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, and the British Antarctic Territory, had been effected.



*Sooty Albatross, Phoebastria fusca,*  
nesting in the Tristan group

Legislation for Tristan da Cunha may require updating before this Territory can be included in the Agreement and the Forum will be looking to seeing this progressed as soon as possible.

Worryingly, illegal fishing activities seem to be on the increase, and were a serious issue for St Helena, Tristan da Cunha, and particularly off Ascension Island. One vessel here laid hooked lines to within a mile offshore. These proved a danger to turtles as well as seabirds. Strenuous efforts on Ascension were made to remove the lines, reduce the impact and record the event. However, attempts to follow this up in the UK in order to identify the vessel involved and deter future incidents of this type have met with no success to date. The Group awaits information on the extent of the



*Illegal fishing close inshore  
to Ascension*

illegal fishery from satellite imagery with interest, but is disappointed that there is little indication that resources will be found to prevent this problem. The Group will continue to press for effective action to be taken against such pirate fishing vessels.

In the Falkland Islands, Falklands Conservation, the Forum's member organisation in the Islands, has continued to test measures to reduce seabird mortality from trawlers with a device now being trialled on board fishing vessels. The severe decline in the Black-browed albatross population here is of particular note. A drop of 28% over three years has been recorded at the largest Falkland colony at Steeple Jason Island. Some penguin populations also show drops in their populations. The work by Falklands Conservation on a National Plan of Action for seabirds is to be greatly commended and welcomed. This is a major achievement aimed particularly at reducing the mortality of albatross from both long line and stern trawler fisheries in the Falklands Zone and by Falkland registered vessels. The Plan was produced by Falklands Conservation with support from RSPB and the Fisheries Department. It is one of the first plans to be adopted around the world under guidelines of the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation's International plan of Action for Reducing Incidental Catches of Seabirds.

Against a background of declining seabird populations, it was particularly disturbing to discover in October that 174 breeding Rockhopper penguins had been removed from Tristan da Cunha and sold to a South African aquarium owner. This penguin species is classified as 'Vulnerable' on the IUCN Red List of globally threatened species, with Tristan being one of their most important breeding sites in the world. The current status of the population here is currently unknown with no baseline data available to assess if this action was sustainable. The penguins were destined for commercial zoo collections around the world leading to further worries about their care and survival in transit.

The Forum's strong objections to this transaction were reported to the UK Government but it was too late to halt the export of the birds. However, the Forum has been assured that guidelines ensuring greater consultation are to be put in place for any future proposals for activities potentially impacting conservation issues. In addition, the Group is encouraging the Government to investigate the possibility of penguin species being listed



*Rockhopper penguins*

under CITES to protect them from this unsavoury zoo trading. On Tristan itself the Forum was delighted to note the arrival of Alison Rothwell, the RSPB officer appointed to help prepare a Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for the Island. Collection of data on the Rockhopper penguins has been identified as a priority.



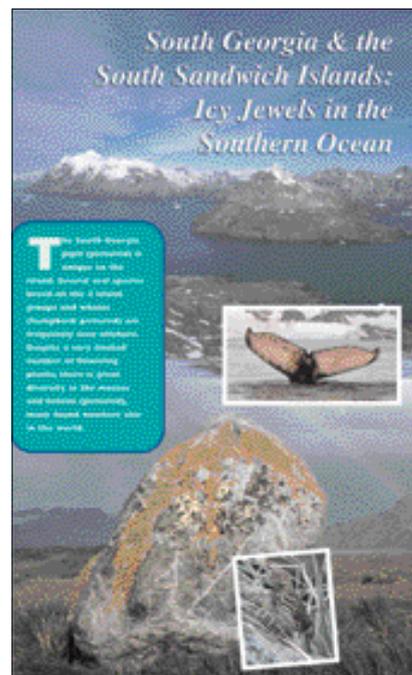
*The spread of this invasive Mexican thorn on Ascension could be slowed by providing fenced areas to enclose the feral donkeys and sheep*

On Ascension Island the RSPB continues its Seabird Restoration Project with encouraging results. Feral cats have been almost eliminated with the result that seabirds are at last beginning to return to old colony sites. Monitoring will continue for some years. The appointment of Stedson Stroud to support Conservation Officer Tara George was greatly welcomed and is making a very significant contribution in effective implementation of the Environment Charter on Ascension. The Group is concerned, however, at proposals to remove sand from beaches which could have consequences for turtle nesting sites. The work to remove Mexican Thorn from turtle nesting beaches is recognised as an important practical step in managing the increasing spread of this invasive plant.

Invasive species is a key topic of interest for the South Atlantic Group. Karen Varnham attended the December meeting to outline work by the JNCC on invasive species in the UK Overseas Territories. This will be a detailed database, leading to greater knowledge of the ecological effects of invasives and their distribution. In recognition of the importance to control and limit their spread, the Forum is in the process of putting together, with the UKOTs concerned, a regional funding bid to the EU to support invasive species control on St Helena, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha and the Falkland Islands.

The Forum has continued to encourage the development of the National Trust on St Helena. Their involvement with the Islands' historic buildings is growing. The Forum is considering how best it can lend more effective support to this work. It was sad to learn of the extinction of the St Helena Olive, despite heroic efforts by RBG Kew to save the last specimen. The need for greater skills and equipment on Territories was highlighted by this event. Having strongly recommended an invertebrates survey prior to finalising any new airport plans, the Forum was very pleased to see the excellent survey report on this by Philip and Myrtle Ashmole and to learn that this will be incorporated into the airport decision-making process.

The Group was well represented at the South Georgia Association Conference. The reported significant reduction in albatross mortality following the introduction of mitigation measures on fishing vessels was particularly noteworthy. A dramatic increase in fur seal populations is leading to significant environmental problems, and rat infestation is a worry that was not likely to decrease. A new management plan is due to be finalised in 2004. The need for an incorporate or complementary heritage plan was raised. Finally, the Forum's information board on South Georgia is now on display in the South Georgia Museum



*The Forum display boards can be exhibited at events to help raise awareness of the rich biodiversity of the UKOTs*

## Report of the UKOTCF British Indian Ocean Territory Working Group

Two significant steps in favour of conservation were taken by the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) Government in the period. A new “Environment (Protection and Preservation Zone)” was proclaimed on 17 September 2003 and the first Chagos Conservation Management Plan (CCMP) was approved in early 2004. The Environment Zone covers a vast area, mainly of open sea, extending to the 200 nautical mile maritime limits of BIOT. It is a welcome declaration of the Government’s intention to “exercise sovereign rights and jurisdiction enjoyed under international law with regard to the protection and preservation of the environment of the zone”.

The CCMP also covers a large area (the whole of BIOT) but it is an operational document setting out specific plans for practical conservation. Its interface with fisheries management provisions will need to be handled effectively. Currently, illegal fishing from Sri Lanka is a significant problem.

The Chagos Conservation Trust or “CCT”, the new name adopted in 2003 by the former Friends of the Chagos, continues its dialogue with the Government in favour of Ramsar designation of most of the Chagos archipelago. The CCT submitted a specific new proposal on the subject in April 2004.

The University of Warwick and the CCT, with official financial support, are promoting a major ship-based environmental and scientific survey of the Chagos in early 2006. Anyone interested in participation should contact Dr Charles Sheppard at Warwick University.

A new edition of the history of Diego Garcia and the Chagos by Richard Edis (entitled *Peak of Limuria*) was published by CCT in May 2004. It contains a new, forthright chapter on the environmental importance of the Territory and is available at £15 from CCT.

## Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

The WCWG held three meetings during the year, and maintained regular contact by e-mail with all members and representatives in the Territories. In addition to activities in particular UKOTs, which are outlined below, a number of new initiatives and projects effected Territories across the region. For example, the Defra-funded review of existing and potential Ramsar sites being undertaken by the Forum will draw on information in all the Caribbean UKOTs. The launch of OTEP was another welcome development, and resulted in seven proposals for new projects in the Caribbean UKOTs attracting funding from FCO/DFID. Some other applicants from the region will be invited to modify and resubmit their proposals. Also of relevance to more than one Caribbean UKOT was an opportunity, which arose at very short notice at the end of 2003, to apply for EU funds. The funding mechanism was such that applications were to be made through UKOT governments. Consequently, a proposal for work on tourism-based nature conservation in TCI, Cayman and BVI was developed with Forum support and co-ordination. This was submitted to the European Commission by Delton Jones (Chief Economist, TCI Government), on behalf of the three UKOTs. The proposal has cleared the first stages of the application process, although the ultimate timescale for its development and possible approval for funding is unclear.

Assisted by funding from RSPB, representatives of each of the Wider Caribbean UKOTs were able to attend the 14<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB) held in Tobago in July 2003. A number of UKOT participants gave presentations, illustrating the contribution that workers in the Territories are making to the conservation of birds and wider environmental issues in the region. From Bermuda, Jeremy Madeiros spoke on the effort to assist recovery of the cahow, and Andrew Dobson

addressed the threat posed to birds by invasive species. Gerard Gray presented the results of research into the decline of the forest thrush on Montserrat, and Clive Petrovic discussed the rapid population expansion of the exotic house sparrow in BVI. Patricia Bradley addressed the Important Bird Area (IBA)



Jeremy Madeiros monitors cahow chicks at artificial nest sites in Bermuda

process, and activities taking place on the Cayman Islands. Mike Pienkowski spoke on the development of a plan for biodiversity management and sustainable development around the Ramsar site in TCI.

Invasive species issues have previously been noted as being of particular concern in the UKOTs. The last year has seen the completion of an initial review of invasive species threats in the Caribbean region as a whole, including UKOTs. The results of this review, which was conducted by Forum member organisation CAB International (CABI), with financial support from The Nature Conservancy (TNC), are available on the web at [http://www.iabin-us.org/projects/i3n/caribbean\\_invasives\\_paper\\_tnc.PDF](http://www.iabin-us.org/projects/i3n/caribbean_invasives_paper_tnc.PDF). Oliver Cheesman (CABI Bioscience) is currently exploring ways in which this initial review can be refined and made more widely available, and CABI are also investigating options for further regional initiatives to counter the threat from invasive species in the Caribbean. Information from the CABI/TNC project has been fed into the JNCC-funded review of invasive species threats across all UKOTs and Crown Dependencies, being conducted by Karen Varnham.

In relation to other work across the region's UKOTs, the Turtles in the Caribbean Overseas Territories (TCOT) project, run by a consortium led by Forum member organisation the Marine Turtle Research Group (MTRG), continues to progress well.

RSPB has obtained funding for Lisa Sorenson (Boston University) to run an environmental education programme in schools in Anguilla and TCI, based on material developed to support conservation of the West Indian Whistling Duck.



*West Indian whistling duck*

## Anguilla

The FCO-funded Anguilla ecotourism project is progressing well. During the year, Sarah Sanders and Steve Holliday (RSPB) have provided support to the Anguilla National Trust in the implementation of this initiative. Tour guides have been trained, and a range of merchandise developed. Uptake by visitors to Anguilla has thus far been slow, suggesting that further marketing strategies needed to be developed.

The issue of extending greater protection to Sombrero Island has been amongst those discussed at regular meetings between the Forum and the UK Government, and is now being progressed locally. The Forum provided a briefing to the new Governor of Anguilla, Alan Huckle, former Head of OTD at FCO.

Amongst the projects that were recently successful in attracting funding under OTEP was one to provide technical assistance for drafting environmental and conservation legislation that will enable appropriate Multilateral Environmental Agreements to be extended to Anguilla.



*Sombrero Lizard Ameiva corvinet*

## Bermuda

Early in September 2003, Bermuda was hit by Hurricane Fabian, one of the worst storms experienced locally for 100 years, with winds gusting up to 150mph. Four lives were lost, and there was substantial structural damage, both to buildings and to the South Shore coastline in particular. A number of sites of importance for nature conservation also suffered damage. Many of the artificial burrows constructed for the cahow (Bermuda petrel) were destroyed. Fortunately, the birds were not nesting at the time. A major volunteer effort, led by Jeremy Madeiros of Bermuda's Department of Conservation Services, worked to repair the damage ahead of the cahow's return to its nesting grounds in November. On a brighter note, Annie Glasspool of the Bermuda Zoological Society noted that, whilst the hurricane had removed many invasive casuarina trees, the native vegetation appeared to have survived the storm relatively well.

Bermuda was amongst the Wider Caribbean Territories that have benefitted from the new OTEP funding, which has been approved in support of a project to develop a practical field guide for the management of woodlands.

## British Virgin Islands

The Darwin Initiative *Assessment of the Coastal Biodiversity of Anegada* project was launched during the year, and is making good progress. The project is a partnership between MTRG, RBG Kew, RSPB, the BVI National Parks Trust,

BVI Conservation and Fisheries Department, and the local H.Lavity Stoutt Community College. The focus is on inventory and monitoring for plants, birds and turtles, and institutional strengthening and capacity building. The project has attracted very encouraging media attention, its first newsletter has been circulated, and regularly updated news of the project is available from the MTRG website at: <http://www.seaturtle.org/mtrg/projects/aneгада/>.

Two projects based in BVI have attracted funding under OTEP, one for a mangrove wetland interpretive centre, and another for the assessment and improved management of new and existing Marine Protected Areas.



*Malpighia woodburyana*, an endemic of the Puerto Rican Bank referred to as “bulldog” on Aneгада, this endangered plant were found flowering for the first time during fieldwork as part of the Darwin Initiative Assessment in 2003.

## Cayman Islands

The blue iguana conservation project is progressing well under the guidance of Forum Council member, Fred Burton. Reports are available at [www.BlueIguana.ky](http://www.BlueIguana.ky).

Like BVI, Cayman will benefit from two new projects funded under OTEP. The first will develop a Red List of the islands’ native flora, while a second will assist in the development of coastal nutrient monitoring capacity.

## Montserrat

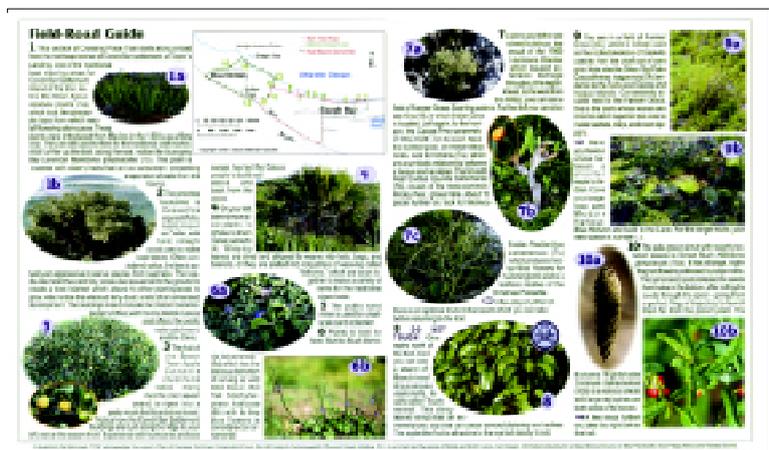
Volcanic activity remains a concern on Montserrat, where important environmental work has continued nonetheless. On-going activities include those co-ordinated by RSPB towards the conservation of the Montserrat Oriole, and environmental education activities led by the Montserrat National Trust.

During the year, the Forum has provided briefings to the new Governor of Montserrat, Deborah Barnes Jones, and the new Head of the Governor’s Office.

## Turks and Caicos Islands

Since late in 2002, the Forum has been acting as a facilitating body, under an FCO funded project, for the development of a strategy for implementation of the Environment Charter in TCI. As well as providing a strategy for action in TCI, this project was designed to serve as a model for similar activities in other UKOTs. The facilitation work has been led by Mike Pienkowski and Dace Ground, whilst the project committee has been chaired by Michelle Fulford-Gardiner, Deputy Director of the TCI Government’s Department of Environment and Coastal Resources. The strategy development involved extensive consultations and workshops, bringing together representatives of the TCI Government, NGOs, the business community and other stakeholders. The strategy document was completed and presented to the new Chief Minister and Minister for Natural Resources and Tourism, the Hon. Michael Misick, in November 2003. A month later, the strategy was presented to Executive Council, and was adopted as TCI Government policy. Although this does not imply that all the actions outlined in the document have Government approval in detail, or that they will be implemented immediately, the strategy provides an invaluable framework for future environmental work in TCI. More than this, the process of participatory strategy development has brought together a very wide range of stakeholders, who have themselves achieved a sense of shared ownership of, and commitment to, the advancement of environmental management in the islands. Guidelines for the development of Environment Charter strategies, based on the TCI experience, are now available on the Forum website.

Another piece of work founded on a participatory approach was the development of the *Plan for Biodiversity Management and Sustainable Development around the Turks and Caicos Ramsar Site*. This Management Plan is available on the Forum website, along with the final newsletter, produced in late 2003, from the Darwin Initiative project that underpinned the development of the document. Like the development of the strategy for Environment Charter implementation, the production of the Management Plan was the beginning of a process, rather than the end. Work is now



Part of the interactive guide to one of the Middle Caicos field-road, TCI

underway to refine the Plan, and put its recommendations into practice. With the support of FCO funding, a set of trails (known locally as field-roads) have been cleared, providing a key part of the infrastructure for visiting eco-tourists, as well as opportunities for locally-based environmental education. A set of field-road leaflets, highlighting the natural and heritage features of particular interest, have now been produced. Work continues to raise funds for the renovation of an old school building in Bambarra, Middle Caicos to serve as a study and visitors centre. As well as donating this building, the TCI Government has approved the transfer of certain Crown Lands, on which some of the field-roads are situated, to the Turks & Caicos National Trust, ensuring the future protection of the habitats and species that these areas support. OTEP funding will assist in the further implementation of the Management Plan. Also during the year, Bryan Naqqi Manco, originally employed under the Darwin project, and now the highly valued Conservation Officer with the Turks & Caicos National Trust, was amongst a number of UKOT participants to complete the herbarium management course held at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.



*A teaching session at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew  
(Bryan Naqqi Manco in floral shirt, back row takes part)*

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## Report of the UKOTCF Pitcairn Working Group

It has unfortunately been another year when Pitcairn has been subject to scrutiny for reasons that are, at best, unfortunate (see last year's report). The first sitting of the Supreme Court took place on the Island in late August. Subsequent sittings have taken place in Auckland. Significant legal issues concerning the Court's jurisdiction have been raised. If and when these issues are resolved, the substance of the outstanding charges will be considered. Perhaps because of concern about these matters, perhaps because of a downturn in the global tourist market, the Wellesley group withdrew its proposals for a tourist venture to Pitcairn. However, the Governor, visiting Pitcairn in November, revived the possibility that an airstrip might be built there, this time using European Union funds. Such a strip would allow ecologically-minded visitors to reach the island, and benefit the island's finances.

During July and August, Noeleen Smyth and Steve Waldren visited Pitcairn to expand work on the nursery project, funded by FCO. Eventually it is hoped that seedlings of native plants, nurtured in the nursery, will be planted in parts of the island where rose-apple, an unwelcome alien, has been cleared. By the end of Noeleen's stay, a large nursery was up and running, and its day-to-day care in the hands of the Islanders. Most exciting has been the re-discovery by Carol Warren of *Abutilon pitcairnense*, a species not recorded for several decades and now under propagation in the nursery and also at Trinity College Botanic Garden in Dublin. Steve and Noeleen also refound the as yet un-named Myrsine species on Pitcairn and have propagated the single known plant; subsequent molecular analyses should help determine the identity of this presumed endemic species.

Completion of the Henderson Island Management Plan was slightly delayed because of difficulties in getting ministerial signatures for the Foreword. This obstacle overcome, the document is now at the printers. Once printing is complete, the plan will be submitted to UNESCO.

Also during July and August, Michael Brooke and Alve Henricson spent 6 weeks on Henderson, one of the most important sites in the world for gadfly petrels *Pterodroma spp.* It is the world headquarters of the globally endangered Henderson Petrel. Studies in 1991/1992 indicated that Pacific rats, which have been present on Henderson for several centuries, were having a severe impact on the petrels, reducing breeding success nearly to zero. If this level of predation occurred every year, it was likely to cause slow, long-term declines of the species concerned. However, it was impossible to tell, on the basis of one year's study, whether the situation observed in 1991/92 was typical or whether rat predation was especially intense that year for some reason. The return visit enabled checking of the intensity of rat predation on one species, Murphy's Petrel, during a second year. It turned out that predation was as heavy as in 1991/92. While Henderson Island holds less than 5% of the world population of Murphy's Petrels, its importance for Henderson Petrels demands that the possibility of eradicating rats from the island be considered very seriously. [The plan is now available on the Forum's web-site: [www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org)]

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Photographs courtesy of Brian Baldwin, Colin Clubbe, Kew, Mike Freeman, Tara George, Frances Marks, Thomas McCarthy, Mike Pienkowski and Peter Ryan.

Correction: In a caption in last year's report, it was incorrectly indicated that the coconut crab was CITES-listed.

## Membership

### THE CURRENT UK MEMBERS OF THE FORUM ARE:

British Ecological Society; British Microbial Biodiversity Association; British Ornithologists' Union; CAB International; Fauna & Flora International; Herpetological Conservation Trust; Marine Turtle Research Group; The National Trust; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; UNEP - World Conservation Monitoring Centre; World Wide Fund for Nature UK; Zoological Society of London.

### CURRENT MEMBERS OF THE FORUM IN THE OVERSEAS TERRITORIES AND CROWN DEPENDENCIES ARE:

Anguilla National Trust; Ascension Heritage Society, Bermuda Audubon Society; Bermuda National Trust; Bermuda Zoological Society; Chagos Conservation Trust; British Virgin Islands National Parks Trust; National Trust for the Cayman Islands; Falklands Conservation; Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society; La Société Guernesiaise; Société Jersiaise; National Trust of Jersey, Manx Cough Project; Montserrat National Trust; St. Helena National Trust; National Trust of the Turks & Caicos Islands.