



FORUM NEWS 33

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• A colour version of *Forum News* is available online at www.ukotcf.org

Designation of Tristan da Cunha's first two Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance

With funding received from the Overseas Territories Environment Programme in 2007, Tristan da Cunha prepared information sheets to allow the UK Government to designate the Gough and Inaccessible Island Nature Reserves (which together form a World Heritage Site) as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. The initiative follows the sites' inclusion in UKOTCF's 2005 *Review of existing and potential Ramsar sites in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies* (<http://www.ukotcf.org/pubs/ramsarReview.htm>), commissioned by the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). The texts were prepared by John Cooper, Honorary Tristan da Cunha Conservation Officer, under contract to the Tristan Agriculture and Natural Resources Department, and with continuing support from UKOTCF. The sites include all the terrestrial parts of the islands and their surrounding seas out to the 12-nautical mile limit of territorial waters.



Eastern Gough Island on a misty day.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Gough Island is one of the largest relatively unmodified cool temperate island ecosystems in the southern hemisphere. The island has been described as "a strong contender for the title of the most important seabird colony in the world." A total of 22 species of birds (several endemic to the island group) and two species of seals breed there, some in very large numbers. The House Mouse *Mus musculus* is the only introduced mammal. The threatened birds Gough Bunting and Gough Moorhen are endemic (although the latter has been introduced to the main island of Tristan da Cunha). The threatened seabirds Tristan Albatross and Atlantic Petrel are practically endemic, with only relict populations remaining on the other Tristan islands.

Twenty-four species of sea and land birds breed on Inaccessible Island. There are no introduced mammals but there are a number of species of introduced invertebrates and plants. Three threatened avian species are endemic to the island: Spectacled Petrel, Inaccessible Rail and Inaccessible Bunting. Additionally,

the Tristan Thrush is a near-threatened endemic subspecies.

The Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross, which nests on both islands, is endemic to the Tristan Group. Numbers of plants and invertebrates are either endemic to one of the islands, or to the island group.

The deep marine ecosystems of both islands are relatively little known. Depths shallower than 40 m support a variety of intertidal and subtidal habitats dominated by seaweed and kelp beds and a range of invertebrates including a commercially-exploited population of Tristan Rock Lobster *Jasus tristani*, demersal and pelagic fish, and (from time to time) at least nine species of cetaceans. Important Ramsar wetland types on the two islands include non-forested peatlands (home to the Critically Endangered Tristan Albatross *Diomedea dabbenena*), permanent freshwater pools, permanent streams,

marine subtidal aquatic beds and rocky marine shores.

The sites are due for designation in October 2008, before the Conference of the Parties to the Ramsar Convention, as *Forum News* goes to press.

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An Inaccessible Rail, the smallest flightless bird in the world and found only on Inaccessible Island, scurries through the vegetation and tide-wrack.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Those wishing to know more about the wildlife of Tristan da Cunha will wish to note two fairly new publications:

The Field Guide to the Animals and Plants of Tristan da Cunha and Gough Island, *edited by Peter Ryan*, was published in 2007 by Pisces Publications. It is available (for about £13) from booksellers.

The Natural History of Tristan da Cunha, by Paul Tyler and Alison Rothwell, was published in 2006 using funding secured by UKOTCF. It was primarily intended to make available for teaching in the local school information gained in recent studies on the island group. It can be downloaded from the Publications section on the Forum's website (www.ukotcf.org).

British Virgin Islands Protected Areas System Plan

In January 2008, the BVI National Parks Trust received the long awaited news that the *Protected Areas System Plan* had been approved by the Cabinet. This is an achievement of national significance and represents the culmination of 27 years of conservation planning and public consultation within the British Virgin Islands (BVI). The preparation of a *Protected Areas System Plan* is mandated by Section 10 of the National Parks Act 2006, and its passage of this *Plan* heralds a new era of protection for the invaluable natural resources of BVI.

The development of a national parks system within BVI began in the 1960s when Joseph R. O'Neal collaborated with US philanthropist Laurance Rockefeller to set aside lands for conservation purposes. Mr Rockefeller developed Little Dix Bay Resort in 1964 as BVI's first major tourist resort and was a pioneer in the Territory for sustainable and environmentally sensitive development. Joseph R. O'Neal and Laurance Rockefeller assisted BVI to provide legally clearly delineated protected areas that are held in trust for the BVI community.

The first system plan for parks and protected areas in BVI was commissioned by the Ministry of Natural Resources & Labour and prepared in 1981 with the assistance of the Eastern Caribbean Natural Areas Management Programme (ECNAMP). The plan was revised a number of times over the next 27 years.

The fourth and final revision was made over the period 2004-2007 under the Sandy Cay III project, which was predominantly an institutional strengthening project that aimed to revise and update key institutional documents and legislation in preparation for the transfer of Sandy Cay from the estate of Laurance Rockefeller to the National Parks Trust, which occurred in May 2008. The final revision of the System Plan was conducted by the Island Resources Foundation (IRF) and the BVI National Parks Trust. Private and public sector stakeholders were involved in this three-year process.

The protected areas within this *System Plan* will be managed by three governmental agencies, the BVI National Parks Trust, the Conservation and Fisheries Department, and the Town and Country Planning Department. These marine and terrestrial sites include national parks, marine parks, fisheries management areas (protected and priority), water areas, forest reserves and environmental protection areas. These areas extend throughout the 60 islands and cays in BVI, representing a total land area of 153.67 km², and total marine area of 82,759 km². At least 33% of the nearshore environment and more than 13% of the Territory's landmass will be under some degree of protection using the legal mechanisms contained within the National Parks Act (2006), the Fisheries Act (1997) and the Physical Planning Act (2004).

Through an extensive process of consultation and refinement, the National Parks Trust and Government departments involved met,



Anegada fishermen providing feedback on the proposed marine protected areas maps. Photo: BVI National Parks Trust

or travelled to the main sister islands within BVI to speak with, fishermen, dive operators, owners of charter companies and other users. The maps of the marine and terrestrial areas that are proposed for protection within the final *System Plan* were amended based on the outcomes of public and stakeholder meetings that were held on Tortola, Virgin Gorda, Jost Van Dyke and Anegada. As some of the land identified for conservation within the System Plan is privately owned, the National Parks Act (2006) allows for the preparation of conservation agreements with the owners of land or other properties of natural or cultural heritage significance.

The implementation phase of the system planning process will require continuing discussion and collaborative management by the relevant government agencies and all stakeholders. The Trust anticipates that this carefully designed network of protected areas will provide the resiliency necessary to withstand the negative effects of human-induced and natural impacts. Management of these protected areas will reflect their unique ecological characteristics, existing stakeholder uses and ultimate conservation goals, in collaboration with the community.

The implementation of the *Protected Areas System Plan* for the British Virgin Islands will assist the Territory in ensuring that the management of natural resources continues to be in tune with the long-standing national goals of sustainable development and the preservation of the environment.

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Sandy Cay - the first declared protected area following the approval of the System Plan. Photo: Bruce Potter, IRF

Indispensable Salinas: prize-winning study by Grand Turk high-school students on these threatened internationally important wetlands

UKOTCF, the Turks and Caicos National Trust, and the Turks and Caicos Museum, have for many years been trying to raise awareness, both within TCI and internationally, of the value of the localsalina (old salt-pan) ecosystems. They have been recognised globally as Important Bird Areas, and qualify for designation as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention (see *Forum News* 32, pp. 3-5), but they have no designated protected status under the Turks and Caicos Islands protected areas legislation. They represent a significant part of the history and culture of the Turks and Caicos Islanders.

Over the last 11 years in which UKOTCF has been working in close partnership with the Turks and Caicos Islands, it has been increasingly saddening that the Grand Turk Salinas are being neglected and degraded, with ever increasing infilling, often for building, with apparently little appreciation of their current and potential value for wildlife, culture and tourism. This activity is also apparently against the physical planning guidelines and certainly against TCI's Environment Charter commitments and the recommendations of TCI's own Environment Charter Working Group.

UKOTCF was therefore delighted to learn of the interest of local students in this issue. The winners of the 2008 Inter-High School Science Fair were the team from the Helena Jones Robinson High School on Grand Turk, who had conducted a study on the salinas. During the course of their study, they became increasingly concerned about the degradation of the salinas, and put forward some recommendations, which they also presented to the Minister of Natural Resources and the Department for Environment and Coastal Resources. These young people clearly, during the course of their study, realised the importance of the Salinas, and the need for protection for them.

They became interested in the Grand Turk Salinas when they noticed that one, which was clearly polluted (smelling of urine, with a lot of solid waste) also had numerous snails. They decided to investigate six of the salinas to see if there was a connection between snails and pollution. They took water samples and measured salinity, pH, dissolved oxygen, turbidity and temperature. Using a quadrat method, they determined snail density, and also recorded other living organisms seen (algae, salt-marsh plants, invertebrates, fish and birds). Although they were unable to come to any concrete conclusions about their original hypothesis (a

connection between snails and pollution), during the course of their studies they did realise the importance of the salinas, and became extremely concerned that they were not valued locally, and were under increasing threat from infilling, development and pollution.

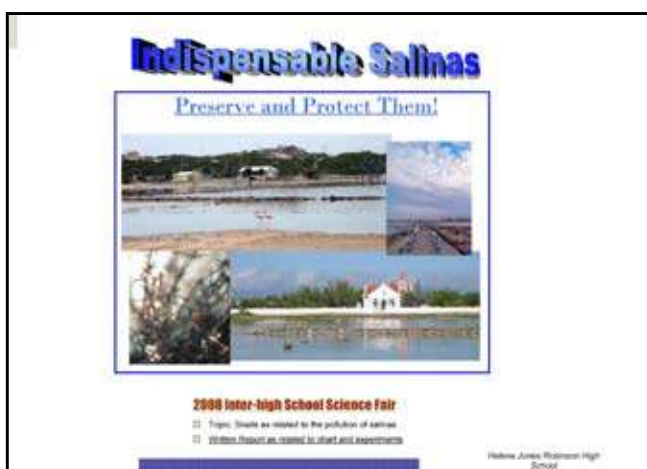
They made some very important recommendations, some of which are recorded below:

- the Grand Turk Salinas should become national parks and sanctuaries
- a scientific study should be conducted of the salinas
- a public awareness campaign should be launched to highlight the importance of the salinas, and counter local opinion that they are worthless
- solid wastes should be removed
- the canal system should be re-opened and cleared where necessary, and properly managed, so that it can support wildlife dependent on the salinas
- the potential of the salinas as a major tourist attraction should be recognised, and plans should be made to make full use of this potential.

In their own words: "Today the salinas are considered so unimportant that they are being filled with rocks and sediments in order to make more land. The heather, the Turks and Caicos national flower, is found only in the TCI and grows along the banks of salinas. We request that very strict

penalties and laws be made for people who pollute the salinas. We also recommend that information about the salinas be broadcast on the radio and television so that people know that our salinas are part of our heritage and are truly indispensable. We should indeed preserve and protect them."

UKOTCF hopes that those in a position to take action on preserving and protecting the Grand Turk Salinas, will take note of the requests of these young people.



Front cover of the winning project report



The salina science team from the Helena Jones Robinson High School on Grand Turk.

Group Members: Chibuchim Otuonye (Team Captain), Christenne Lyons, Andrew Monize, Michael Adams, Khambreal Garland, Ruben Altidor, Rusheena Bryan, Keibren Robinson, Trenisha Smith, Kenlove Taus. Helena Jones Robinson High School, Grand Turk, Turks & Caicos Islands.

With thanks to teachers Ms Cordelia Creese, Mr Eller Javier, Ms Zenaida Linasa, Ms Wilhemina Javier, lab technician Ms Junie Belzi, High School Principal Mr Reinwald Lewis and understanding parents.

TCI's troubled times continue

Hurricanes

In late August, impacts by Hurricane Gustav on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman were followed by Turks and Caicos being hit by two hurricanes a few days apart. Hurricane (initially Tropical Storm) Hanna lingered over TCI for several days, depositing huge amounts of rain, destroying the causeway between North and Middle Caicos and knocking over many trees and poles. In the aftermath, as things start to get back to normal, questions are already being asked about the quality of design (with only a narrow bridge allowing water flow) and build of the new causeway, which was unable to survive a category 2 hurricane.

After only a few days' respite, very strong (category 4/5) Hurricane Ike hit the islands over the weekend of 6/7 September. Grand Turk, Salt Cay and South Caicos were particularly severely impacted, with over 90% of houses destroyed or damaged. There was major damage also throughout the other islands, although (for example) the northern part of North Caicos and the adjacent cays escaped the worst of the effects. Almost miraculously, no-one was killed or seriously injured - remarkable in view of the extent of damage to buildings.

The Royal Navy sent two vessels to give emergency relief, and they started work in Grand Turk as soon as possible after the hurricane passed, although it is reported that their stay was cut short earlier than originally envisaged. Providenciales was able to get back to fairly normal working conditions, with power and internet access restored fairly rapidly. However, at the time of writing in late October, conditions are still very difficult on Salt Cay, South Caicos and Grand Turk, and it will be several months before life becomes easier in these places. We know that South Caicos and Grand Turk were declared disaster areas, but not Salt Cay, which is puzzling to the residents there and those who know how badly this small community, with very limited on-site resources, was hit.

A temporary causeway has been bulldozed between North and Middle Caicos, apparently single lane, only negotiable at walking pace. However, this has allowed power and supplies to be restored to most of Middle Caicos, although the eastern settlement of Lorimers was cut off by extensive inland floods for several weeks. The TC National Trust's Middle Caicos Conservation Centre (MCCC - see *Forum News 30 & 32*) survived mainly intact, with

some roof and water damage. Credit must go to Jannay Arthur (MCCC Officer) and Denis Been (Conch Bar Caves Officer) for boarding up windows and doors prior to Hurricane Ike, and for the high quality structural work by UKOTCF volunteers, Mary and Steve Cheeseman, which enabled the building and most content to withstand the hurricane.

Inappropriate development

In *Forum News 32*, proposed developments in TCI protected areas and some other important natural areas were tabulated. The possible interactions between the hurricane impacts and inappropriate developments are currently being debated. Certainly, it would seem that serious questions need to be answered about the causeway between North and Middle Caicos. Concerns had also been raised about the scale of the development on Salt Cay, with over 80% of the crown land on that island being handed over to a private development company, Devco. It has been reported that the Premier declared that Devco would rebuild Salt Cay following the hurricane, with private money. Local residents have expressed concern about the lack of consultation on this and the question has been raised whether this is the reason Salt Cay was not declared a disaster area. Locals report that Devco finally arrived on Salt Cay four weeks after the hurricane, with some materials and a crew to help with home roofing, but that most of the work had already been done by energetic local residents, 66 of whom stayed on the island during the hurricane. Alarm has also been expressed from Salt Cay that Devco will very rapidly re-deploy their work force to start on the unpopular development, and in the wake of the hurricane they will be able to proceed at will.

Commission of Inquiry

The Commission of Inquiry (see page 8) has potential implications, including for the conservation of important natural areas. It has extended its time-frame until mid February 2009. The Commission will issue press statements on its web-site, www.tciinquiry.org, summarising its progress at about fortnightly intervals, and renews its invitation to all who can assist it in its inquiry, to do so. Sir Robin Auld, heading the inquiry, repeats that those who wish to provide information to the Commission in confidence should say so. Neither the information nor its source, nor anything that might suggest its source, will be made public without their express consent.

Pine problems

From 27 February to 3 March 2008, the Pine Rocklands Working Group Conference was held in Miami, Florida, and Andros, Bahamas. The conference, hosted by The Nature Conservancy and the Bahamas National Trust entitled *Rockland Forests in a Changing World*, focused on conservation and management of the habitats where tropical pine trees occur: in Florida, The Bahamas, and the Turks & Caicos Islands. This year marks the first time that TCI was represented in the conference. Turks & Caicos National Trust (TCNT) Executive Director, Ethlyn Gibbs, and Senior Conservation Officer, Bryan Naqqi Manco, represented the Turks & Caicos Islands, along with Martin Hamilton, the UK Overseas Territory Coordinator for the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew (UK) and Michele Sanchez, also from Kew Gardens.

On 27 February, conference participants were shown several examples of pine rockland in south Florida and the Florida Keys. This type of habitat, locally called 'pine yards' in the Turks & Caicos Islands, was interpreted by the Nature Conservancy, the US National Parks Service, the US Forestry Service, and the



Turks & Caicos National Trust Executive Director Ethlyn Gibbs (left foreground) with Martin Hamilton and Michele Sanchez of Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, explore the Well Fields pine yard in North Andros.

Photo: Bryan Naqqi Manco

US Fish and Wildlife Service as a fire-dependent ecosystem that requires periodic burning in order to support the rare plants and animals that occur there.

The conference on 28 February heard a number of presentations focused on pine rockland-related subjects, especially the use of fire and controlled burning to maintain habitat integrity. The TCNT Senior Conservation Officer and Kew Gardens representatives opened the day with three presentations focusing on the pine tortoise scale infestation that is killing the Caicos pines. Conference attendees were shocked at the rate of decline of the Caicos pine and many offered ideas and possible solutions, while also generating discussion to protect other pine populations from this introduced pest.

After the conference, a field trip and workshop was hosted on Andros in The Bahamas by the Bahamas National Trust. Several field trips to different types of pine yards and coppice habitats showed healthy, fire-managed ecosystems with astounding numbers of wildflowers, birds, and other wildlife.

TCNT made a number of important contacts, and many Pine Rocklands Working Group members have offered their assistance in training, habitat management, and other conservation work in relation to the pine yards and the other habitats associated with them. Since the workshop, TCNT and RBG Kew have received funding to work on the pine-scale problem in TCI, although the scheduled start of intensive work was delayed by the hurricanes.

UKOTCF Cross-territory Environmental Education project

The background to this project, and its purpose, were reported in *Forum News 31*. In essence, this project is creating elements within the UKOTCF website to enable people in the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies (CDs) to share experiences and information. Furthermore, the project aims to help raise awareness and promote the unique importance of the UKOTs and CDs more widely. Sadly, even within UK, there is very poor knowledge and understanding of the UKOTs and CDs; UKOTCF works continually to try to correct this. This OTEP-supported project (XOT406) forms part of UKOTCF's awareness-raising programme, and is developing, on the UKOTCF website:

1. An environmental education resources section. This will provide information on existing environmental education resources, and thereby promote sharing and development of locally relevant environmental education materials.
2. A "virtual tour" of each territory. This will consist of photo-presentations of key aspects of each UKOT, both to raise awareness of sister territories within the UKOT family, and also to a wider audience.
3. An on-line discussion forum, to enable sharing of information, concerns and issues between territories.

As we approach the final period of the set-up phase of this project, which an OTEP grant funded, it is timely to report on progress and actions to date, and how the project will continue in the future.

The environmental education resources database is modelled on the existing UKOTCF database, which is being modified to fit more appropriately the information needed for this particular purpose. Requests for information about existing environmental education resources have been circulated to all UKOTs and CDs, and I am very grateful to all of the people who have already sent me information. As this information is received, it is being collated ready for input to the education resources database as soon as this is ready. I am always on the look-out for additional resources, such as teaching materials, public awareness raising ideas and resources. So please tell me about any that you know of.

All UKOTs and CDs were also consulted about the structure and content of the virtual tours. We agreed that these should have a standard format, with sections about:

- Location and map
- Outstanding natural history
- Other interest (eg cultural)
- Threats
- Opportunities
- Current projects etc
- Organisation
- Links throughout to other websites.

I am collating ideas from territories and elsewhere as to which items and issues to include under each heading for each territory. Photographic material to illustrate these sections is also being collected. I would be pleased to hear also from anyone who has photos which they are happy for us to use (with credits, of course).

The on-line discussion forum is in its final pilot version. The pilot has been widely viewed, and we have received very positive comments about its value. Although aimed especially at young people, we welcome participation from anyone who is interested. At the time of writing, the pilot version is not linked from the UKOTCF main website. During the pilot stage we have learnt a great deal about attempted infiltration of such on-line discussion sites by people who would like to misuse sites for their own commercial purposes. Fortunately, our discussion forum allows us to set up security and moderation procedures which prevent such use. However, we want to make sure that we have covered as many of these attempts at unauthorised use as possible, before making it accessible from the UKOTCF main website. The target date for this is early in the New Year. In the meantime, if you would like to access the discussion forum, the link is: www.ukotcfgroup.org/forums/

I would be very happy to receive comments and suggestions about the discussion forums, so please take a look, and give me your views.

The future

The on-line discussion forum, the environmental education resources database, and the virtual tours will be maintained and further developed after the funding from OTEP finishes in March 2009. This will be achieved through the continuation of the voluntary aspect of this project – but if you know of any funding opportunities which could offer further support, I would be delighted to hear about them.

This project has received help and advice from many people throughout the UKOTs and CDs, and I thank them all for their contributions. However, I would particularly like to thank the students from Jersey, and the students and staff at Prince Andrews Secondary School, St Helena, for their continued support and active involvement in the pilot discussion forum.

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Enhancing co-ordination of environmental work in the Crown Dependencies

Following the establishment of the UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group in 2007, two important meetings have taken place in recent months, to encourage greater co-ordination of environmental work in the Crown Dependencies and UK Territories in Europe. In March, the Isle of Man Government hosted a two-day workshop organised by JNCC, attended by participants, mostly from governmental bodies, from Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, Isle of Man and the Sovereign Bases Areas in Cyprus. Defra was also represented. Issues discussed included marine mapping, economic valuation, agri-environment schemes, resourcing for projects, knowledge gaps and research needs. It is hoped that this meeting might become a regular event, with greater NGO involvement, perhaps addressing specific topics in more detail. Liz Charter (Chief Wildlife & Conservation Officer for the Isle of Man and Chair of the UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group) said "Conservation issues are often similar between small island jurisdictions, and it is very valuable to get together and compare notes. I hope the new connections made at this meeting will lead to a greater degree of communication, co-operation and support, both between jurisdictions and between JNCC and these territories."

In September, an informal one-day "inter-island" meeting for the Channel Islands was convened in Guernsey by Charles David of La Société Guernesiaise. This attracted participants from governments and NGOs in Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark. Topics addressed during lively discussions in the morning included monitoring of seabird populations, prospects for linking biological recording efforts across the islands, energy policy and tidal power projects, aspects of environmental legislation, and invasive species. During the afternoon, visits were made to a number of sites across Guernsey. It was also agreed that regular meetings of this kind would benefit those working in the environmental sector in the Channel Islands, providing a platform for exchange of experience and sharing of skills. Oliver Cheesman, who attended the meeting on behalf of UKOTCF, said "Charles has done a great job in bringing this group of people together, and I hope that these meetings will become a regular fixture. This is just the kind of co-operation and mutual support that the Forum seeks to encourage."



Participants in the "inter-island" meeting for the Channel Islands held in Guernsey in September 2008. Photo: Richard Lord

UKOTCF at the British Bird Watching Fair

In 2008, the British Bird Watching Fair celebrated its 20th anniversary, at Rutland Water on 15-17 August. It continues to draw an impressive crowd. Every year, the proceeds support an international conservation issue. For 2007-2008, this has been *Preventing Extinctions: Saving the World's Critically Endangered Birds*. Each stand was assigned an endangered species and given a poster with a description of the bird. The UKOTCF stand was given the St Helena Plover *Charadrius sanctaehelenae*, locally known as the Wirebird, an endemic and Critically Endangered species, with approximately 200 individuals remaining. On our stand we provided some interpretation of UKOT and Crown Dependency conservation issues and a collection of books which were available for purchase. Many of the visitors were still surprised by the wealth of biodiversity in the UK Territories and Crown Dependencies. We are planning to review the contents of our stand for the future, and would welcome some input and suggestions on how we can best use it to educate and promote some of the projects and issues in the Territories. Thank you to Nigel Crocker, Oliver Cheesman and Frank Ward for their time and effort at the three-day event, and to Mike and Ann Pienkowski for preparation and set-up.

Catherine Quick, UKOTCF Co-ordinator, cquick@ukotcf.org



On the Forum display stand at the Bird Fair, Oliver Cheesman (left) and Catherine Quick (right) discuss Overseas Territories with Derek Gifford, renowned folk-singer, ornithologist and tireless supporter of conservation.

Photo: Frank Ward

Important Bird Areas in the Caribbean: key sites for conservation

This book, edited by David C. Wege and Verónica Anadón-Irizarry, was published in September 2008 by BirdLife International. UKOT chapters are Anguilla (Karim Hodge, Steve Holliday & Farah Mukhida), Bermuda (Andrew Dobson & Jeremy Madeiros), British Virgin Islands (Clive Petrovic, Esther Georges & Nancy Woodfield Pascoe), Cayman Islands (Patricia E. Bradley, Mat Cottam, Gina Ebanks-Petrie & Joni Solomon), Montserrat (Geoff Hilton, Lloyd Martin, James 'Scriber' Daly & Richard Allcorn) and Turks & Caicos Islands (Mike Pienkowski). The opportunity has been taken to correct some editing errors in the 2006 volume on UKOT IBAs. Available from www.nhbs.com (price not available as *Forum News* goes to press).

UKOTCF Review of Member Organisations' Views

In the article on UKOTCF activities and achievements in *Forum News* 32, mention was made of an internal review that was in progress, based on a consultation with member organisations. This exercise was co-ordinated by John Cortes (Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society), Rob Thomas (Royal Zoological Society of Scotland) and Oliver Cheesman (UKOTCF Secretariat). The 'Review Team' designed a wide-ranging questionnaire to gather views on the Forum and its approach, which was circulated to all Full and Associate member organisations, and a number of former member organisations. The response rate was an impressive 74% and feedback was received from all but three of the 19 UKOTs/CDs. The Review Team analysed the results, and submitted a report to UKOTCF's Council, making recommendations in a number of areas. The report, and Council's response, has now been circulated back to member organisations.

There was overwhelming support from member organisations for the Forum's stated purpose: "to promote the conservation of the rich and unique biodiversity, natural environment and related heritage of the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies of the United Kingdom (UKOTs/CDs)." Most felt that the Forum had met this purpose 'well' or 'very well', providing the hub for a network of organisations, reducing the sense of isolation of Territory-based bodies and enhancing collaboration.

Many member organisations expressed no strong opinion on the Forum's strategic approach (outlined in *Forum News* 31, p.19). However, the majority of those that did felt it had been 'effective' or 'very effective', often noting that it had focused the Forum's limited resources on sensible priorities. Member organisations identified capacity building in UKOT/CD-based NGOs as the most important future strategic priority. Identification of local priority needs (and development of strategies to address these), raising awareness in the UK of environmental issues affecting the Territories, and exchange of information, were next on the list. This suggests that the strategic elements already embraced by the Forum are essentially the right ones. Council has undertaken to develop a brief document, outlining a refreshed Forum strategy and steps towards its implementation, as recommended by the Review Team. Council also proposes to arrange individual meetings with Territory-based member organisations to help identify their local needs more precisely.

In its response to the Review, Council stressed that its proposed actions would need to be prioritised and fitted into the Forum's wider programme of work as resources allowed. The Forum, like many of its Territory-based member organisations, is a very small body, heavily reliant on voluntary inputs from Council members and others. Respondents to the consultation had already recognised this, noting that the Forum's current level of core activity was not sufficient for it to meet its purpose fully, and suggesting a range of options for additional resourcing. Member organisations overwhelmingly approved of the Forum's approach to projects, one current source of income, which concentrates on cross-Territory activities and partnerships with (particularly in-Territory) member organisations. None felt that the Forum was in competition with their organisation for funding, and the Review Team stressed the value of collaborative projects for building relationships across the Forum network, as well as for providing income and advancing broader strategic priorities such as capacity building.

In considering UKOTCF's governance and structure, there was strong support for the current approach, where Council comprises individuals with the skills necessary to run the Forum, rather than representing individual member organisations. While many expressed no strong opinion, those that did (particularly in the

Territories) felt that Council nonetheless represented the interests of member organisations 'well' or 'very well'. Respondents also supported the Forum's pragmatic but flexible approach, whereby all organisations in the Territories could be considered on their merits as potential Forum members, but only NGOs and similar bodies in the UK were eligible. Maintenance of the Forum's independence from (particularly UK) government was seen as an important principle. There was a desire to see continuation of the trend for Associate Members in the Territories to move to (subscription-paying and voting) Full Member status, and for clarification of these two membership categories. Council has undertaken to explore with Associate Members their individual preferences in this area.

The majority of member organisations rated their relationship with the Forum (as well as the Forum's relationship with its member organisations in general) and the Forum's internal communications as 'good' or 'very good'. Positive feedback was strongest from Territory-based organisations. However, both the Review Team and Council recognised that there was room for improvement. Although member organisations generally felt that they received adequate notice of (and feedback from) the various meetings held by the Forum, participation in UK-based meetings is clearly difficult for those based elsewhere. Although teleconferencing is an increasingly viable option for remote participation by some, it is not a universal solution. The Review Team recommended that a clearer system of reporting from Council meetings should be considered, and that greater member organisation involvement in other types of meetings should be encouraged. Those members who had raised issues through Forum meetings had invariably been satisfied with the outcome. Regional Working Groups were seen as a particularly important point of engagement for participants in the Forum network that needed to be used more effectively. The Conferences organised by the Forum on a roughly three-yearly basis, however, attracted a very high rate of approval. Overall, participation in the Forum network was seen as variable, and heavily constrained by lack of time and resources available to many member organisations. As one put it: "when organisations have so many competing priorities it is inevitable that they will tend to engage only with issues in which they have a concern".

Forum News was a highly valued resource among member organisations, as was the UKOTCF website, although a number of potential improvements were suggested which Council intends to explore further. Positive relations with governments were seen as important, although difficult to maintain given the range of Departments involved in the UK and the diversity of administrations across the UKOTs/CDs. It was also suggested that the Forum should do more to promote its own achievements, and this is another area that Council proposes to pursue.

As a separate exercise, Council asked lawyers familiar with charitable companies to examine and recommend amendments to UKOTCF's constitution (the Memorandum and Articles of Association - M&As). It is good practice to do this every few years, and particularly appropriate now because of the new UK Companies Act 2006 and Charities Act 2006. The former is said to be the largest Act ever passed by Parliament and the latter the first comprehensive revision of charity legislation since the reign of Elizabeth I, over 400 years ago! The lawyers proposed amendments to bring UKOTCF's M&As into line with the new legislation and associated best practice. The Charity Commission approved these changes and the main parts were adopted at a General Meeting of member organisations in early October 2008, so that they are now in force.

UK Parliamentary Committees – Friends of the Overseas Territories?

There are a number of ways in which the UK's bicameral Parliament (House of Commons and House of Lords) can examine and influence the elected government of the day. One is through Select Committees, made up of Members from the main political parties, which scrutinise the government's performance and approach in a wide range of policy areas, generally reflecting areas of ministerial responsibility. Anyone can submit evidence to a Select Committee inquiry, and submissions made by UKOTCF and some of its members have been reflected in a number of Committee reports.

Recently, a number of Select Committee reports have been critical of the UK Government's approach to and support for environmental management in the Overseas Territories. In January 2007, an Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) report on *The UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* found it "distasteful" that the UKOTs had been left largely to deal with environmental challenges "from their own resources", given the lack of capacity to do so in many Territories. It went on to say that it welcomed recognition from the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) of the challenges faced by the Territories, and concluded that "Given this and our international, not to mention moral, obligation to prevent biodiversity loss in the UKOTs, the Government must now move towards increased and more appropriate funding for conservation and ecosystem management there."

In May 2007, the EAC reported on *Trade, Development and Environment: the Role of the FCO*, and found that UK Government support for environmental management in the UKOTs was still inadequate, particularly the contribution made by Defra. It concluded that "If the Government fails to address these issues it will run the risk of continued environmental decline and species extinctions in the UKOTs, ultimately causing the UK to fail in meeting its domestic and international environmental commitments." In its responses to the EAC reports, the UK Government has been keen to stress the funding for environmental work in the Overseas Territories made available, in particular, through OTEP and the Darwin Initiative. UKOTCF has always welcomed these sources of funding, whilst arguing that a mechanism for resourcing significantly larger projects, such as Species and Habitat Action Plans (normal in Britain) was needed.

Most recently, the EAC has conducted an inquiry into *Halting UK Biodiversity Loss*, assessing the prospects for the UK Government achieving its aims under the 2010 Biodiversity Targets. The Committee's report is awaited with interest, not least by those who hope it will again take a robust approach in highlighting the needs of the UKOTs.

In July 2007, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) launched an inquiry into "the exercise by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) of its responsibilities in relation to the Overseas Territories" with particular reference to matters of security and good governance. Governance issues, of course, can be very important when it comes to environmental matters.

It soon became apparent to the FAC that there were serious concerns over governance issues amongst those in some Overseas Territories, but that some potential witnesses were reluctant to come forward. The Committee responded by assuring those who might not otherwise submit evidence that their submissions would remain confidential. Members of the FAC also visited Ascension, the Falklands, Bermuda, Cayman and the Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI), to see the situation on the ground and to talk to local people.

The FAC published its report in July 2008. It expressed particular concerns over allegations of corruption and "the palpable climate of fear" in TCI, and recommended that a Commission of Inquiry be established to investigate these. This Commission is now in place, led by Sir Robin Auld QC, who said that the allegations, if true, could "seriously damage the sinews of commerce and environmental protection" on which the continued development, reputation and welfare of TCI depended (see *Forum News* 32, p.3). Other conclusions of the FAC report also have implications for environmental management in individual Territories. For example, in considering the British Indian Ocean Territory, the Committee concluded that there was "a strong moral case for the UK permitting and supporting a return of the exiled Chagossians." In relation to Ascension, they concluded that the UK Government had "raised expectations that permanent rights would be granted to those living and working on the Island and that it had lost the trust of residents when it carried out a U-turn on this" (see *Forum News* 28, p.1).

In relation to environmental governance generally, the FAC shared the concerns previously expressed by their EAC colleagues, concluding that "The environmental funding currently being provided by the UK to the Overseas Territories appears grossly inadequate." They regarded the failure of the UK Government to carry out a strategic assessment of funding requirements for conservation and ecosystem management in the UKOTs as "highly negligent" given the vulnerability of biodiversity in the Territories. The FAC recommended that the UK Government should increase its financial support for environmental work in the UKOTs, and carry out a strategic assessment to ensure that this increased funding was appropriately targeted. Responding on behalf of the Government, the Secretary of State for Foreign & Commonwealth Affairs acknowledged that more could be done to help the Territories address environmental issues, but denied the accusation of negligence and again drew attention to the small funding mechanisms that were available.

Select Committees like the EAC and FAC have an important role to play in reminding the UK Government of its responsibilities and highlighting areas of concern. Their way of working, through open invitations to submit evidence to their inquiries, provides a mechanism by which we can all contribute to this process. The recent examples summarised here suggest that these bodies can, indeed, be friends of the Overseas Territories, advocating better co-ordination and resourcing of conservation and supporting environmental protection in the UKOTs, from the heart of the UK's parliamentary system.

Documents referred to above can be found via the following links:

EAC report on The UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmenvaud/77/77.pdf

UK Government response to EAC report on The UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmenvaud/848/848.pdf

EAC report on Trade, Development and Environment: the Role of the FCO: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmenvaud/289/289.pdf

UK Government response to EAC report on Trade, Development and Environment: the Role of the FCO: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmenvaud/1046/1046.pdf

FAC report on Overseas Territories: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmcaff/147/147i.pdf

UK Government response to FAC report on Overseas Territories: www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/pdf1/OST-response-fac

The European Union and its Overseas Entities: Strategies to counter Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss, the Réunion conference

This conference was held on Réunion Island on 7-11 July 2008, and this note focuses on some issues of main significance to UKOTs. The conference conclusions, as drawn up by the organisers, is available at www.reunion2008.eu.

The conference was a project of IUCN, the idea in part arising from discussions in *Bioverseas*, the network of umbrella conservation bodies of the Overseas Territories of France, the Netherlands and UK. IUCN undoubtedly set itself a major challenge in organising a conference within about one year. *Bioverseas* partner organisations gave strong support despite reservations over the short lead-in time. IUCN later secured the adoption of the conference by the French Presidency of the EU. This had advantages in terms of prominence and finances but gave major additional problems for the logistics.

The Réunion Conference was an important initiative for a number of reasons: it was a highly significant event of the French Presidency; it was the first high level conference to profile together Europe's Outermost Regions (ORs) and Overseas Countries & Territories (OCTs).

Two French Ministers gave rousing speeches that lifted the mood of the conference and appeared to commit the French Government to a range of practical measures that would help secure the future of Europe's islands and their populations. Many participants welcomed the point made by the French Ministers that biodiversity conservation is at least as important as climate change, because without the former, there is no chance of addressing the latter.

At an informal meeting convened in the margins by UKOTCF, UK and UKOT participants at the conference expressed unanimous disappointment that FCO were not represented. This was in contrast to the approaches of several other countries. The single UK Government representative, Eric Blencowe of Defra, played an active and constructive part in the work of the conference.

Strategies to advance sustainable development: The Net-Biome project was welcomed by delegates. Issues that emerged during discussion supported the need for a coordinated approach to research activities in the ORs and OCTs of Europe:

- Enhancing the scope for regional and thematic cooperation.
- Improving mechanisms for data exchange.
- Clarification and review of research priorities.
- Protection and 'mainstreaming' of historic databases (archives of nature).
- Protecting indigenous knowledge.
- Building the research capacity of locally-based conservation organisations.

Towards a permanent working platform focused on the environmental challenges in ORs and OCTs: This workshop followed presentations from a number of conservation organisations, including UKOTCF. The following discussion considered that:

- Diversity was an important feature of the policy landscape because it reflected the complex nature of the issues involved and the grass-roots origins of many organisations.
- There was a general resistance to the creation of yet another organization and considerable support for the idea of developing the existing networks (such as OCTA for OCT governments, the equivalent for ORs, the Bioverseas initiative for NGOs).
- One of the fears expressed during the meeting, though not voiced during the formal session, was the threat that a new 'policy platform' might marginalize the smaller and more specialised interests.

What partnership between ORs, OCTs, the EU member states and the European Commission to promote the protection of habitats and species?: This session developed the idea, explored over the previous couple of years between Bioverseas and the European Commission, for OCTs and those (French) ORs not included in the EU Birds and Habitats Directive to establish a voluntary scheme for the protection of species and habitats, inspired by the *Natura 2000* approach. This was strongly supported by the Chair (Ladislav Miko, Director, Protecting the Natural Environment, DG Environment, European Commission) who had been involved in the earlier discussions. Any scheme should be flexible, adapted to the local situation, balance conservation and development needs and take into account existing mechanisms and tools. The workshop also stressed NGO involvement and the need for small funds (in EU terms; large in ours) being available. The implementation of the scheme should be based on local commitment and major contributions of European Commission financing.

The implementation of the scheme should be based on local commitment and major contributions of European Commission financing.

Climate Change: A recurrent theme was the increased fragility of the precious biodiversity in OCTs and ORs, with its high degree of endemism, in the face of climate change. The conference noted that issues of biodiversity loss and climate change cannot be addressed unless the link between people, biodiversity and climate is recognised. There was emphasis on the need to involve civil society, the private sector and the general public as well as policy makers and scientists. Climate scenarios needed to be developed for each OCT and OR, supported by regional modelling, as a basis for territory-specific climate change vulnerability assessments and adaptation plans. The conference called for the EU and its Member States to strengthen their involvement in regional cooperation efforts and pay more attention to the challenges facing OCTs/ORs in international negotiations.



UK, UKOT
& Crown
Dependency
participants at
the conference.
Photo: Andrew
Dobson (right)

Tackling South Atlantic Invaders – Project update

The EU-funded South Atlantic Invasive Species (SAIS) Project being implemented by RSPB on behalf of the St Helena Government has now been in operation for almost two years. Actions are now underway on all of the South Atlantic Territories, and there are plans for many more activities in the final year of project operation.

One of the most exciting project activities in the last year was the organisation of an aerial eradication training visit to New Zealand. The programme for this visit was organised jointly by the SAIS project and the Pacific Invasives Initiative, headed at the time by Alan Saunders. The visit included the chance to see bait being dropped by a helicopter in an actual eradication attempt. Participants included Trevor Glass from Tristan da Cunha, Raymond Benjamin from Ascension, and Dion Poncet from the Falklands, all of whom are well aware of the damage that invasive rodents can cause in island environments. It was great to get some South Atlantic people together, and hopefully this will be the start of more regular regional networking.

Throughout these first two years of project operation, it has become apparent that the issues facing each of the UKOTs in the South Atlantic are very different on each island or archipelago. However, there are also common themes – all Territories are concerned about improving their offshore risk management capacity, and all are in need of improved access to good baseline information.

Initially, stakeholders on St Helena and Ascension identified a list of priority “problem plants” for which they wanted control strategies and actions. However, little was recorded about the abundance or distribution of these plants on the islands, making it impossible to design management plans. Working with Kew, a baseline botanical survey has now been designed and implemented on both islands. The information from this survey will be available through on-island GIS systems, and will also be lodged at RBG Kew. Voucher specimens for all new plants identified are also being lodged at Kew for the benefit of future researchers. In addition, RBG Kew has now supported development of invasive species management plans for key species through their work on the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation.

One of the unexpected outcomes of the botanical survey was the rediscovery of *Bulbostylis neglecta*, the “neglected” sedge on St Helena. This plant had not been seen for more than 200 years until the survey team (Dr Phil Lambdon, Andrew Darlow and Pat Joshua) came across it. Despite the global population being “small enough to fit in a sports bag” according to Phil, the species seems to be holding on in several locations on the island. However, its continued survival will depend on invasive species control.

On Ascension, one of the priorities of the project has been to assist with the control of invasive plants on Green Mountain, where they are threatening the survival of the island’s remaining endemic plant species. A large wood chipper has been provided, and on-island training has been carried out. This equipment has allowed Stedson Stroud from the AIG Conservation Department to expand the area available for cultivation of endemic plants, reducing their chance of extinction.

Tristan da Cunha, as the world’s most remote inhabited island, is also one of the more challenging places to undertake project work. Karen Varnham visited Tristan at the start of 2008 to carry out some work related to rodents. She managed to establish a grid of bait-stations at the Settlement and Patches to improve ongoing rodent control efforts. She also visited Nightingale Island to advise on contingency planning and monitoring, should there ever be a threat of rodent invasion. A new project officer has been



Tristanians marking the grid for rodent bait stations on Tristan da Cunha.
Photo: Karen Varnham

appointed for Tristan, and will hopefully travel there in December 2008 to assist with implementation of further project objectives.

On the Falklands, invasive mammals continue to have a high profile, and the SAIS project has provided support to projects to eradicate rats

from several islands. In September 2008, a workshop was held in the Falklands to revisit the priorities for rodent eradication work that were suggested by Derek Brown in 2001. A new list of islands was suggested for the short-to-medium term, but island surveys were recognised as the highest priority, as the rodent and wildlife/botanical status of many islands remains completely unknown.

Invasive plants are also gaining more recognition as a problem in the Falklands, and the SAIS project has recently drafted an Islands-wide management plan for calafate *Berberis buxifolia*. This species has the potential to become a significant pest in the Islands, where it can change grassland ecosystems into shrubland. Its thorny structure makes it a problem for livestock, especially for sheep where it can contaminate fleeces.

Even on South Georgia there are problems with invasive species. The SAIS project has been continuing work to attempt eradication of wavy-leafed bittercress *Cardamine flexuosa*, currently present in only a very small area on the main island. It is also hoped that baseline survey work will be possible on South Georgia, and improvements to quarantine facilities are planned.

During the last two years, the SAIS project has been fortunate to work with many OTEP project leaders, and would like to thank Trevor Glass, Sally Poncet, Rebecca Upson, Ann Brown, Vince Thompson, John Cooper and many others for allowing us to fit our work into their programmes. Hopefully this will bring long-lasting benefits to the UKOTs in the South Atlantic. The project has also benefited from a high level of support from RBG Kew, especially from Martin Hamilton and Colin Clubbe. We could not have achieved our objectives without this support.

For more information on the project, please contact Clare Miller (clare.miller@rspb.org.uk).



Brian Summers kitted out for bittercress control on South Georgia.
Photo Clare Miller

Callous killings of Blue Iguanas in Cayman

The Blue Iguana *Cyclura lewisi* is a Critically Endangered species, endemic to Grand Cayman. It has become an iconic creature, symbolising the need for greater awareness and conservation of the wildlife of the Cayman Islands. This striking lizard grows to over five feet (1.5 m) in length, and its imposing appearance and characteristic colouration has led to it being known as the 'Blue Dragon' in some quarters.

The Blue Iguana, like many island species, has suffered from the destruction of much of its natural habitat, the introduction of invasive species, and other impacts of human activity. Twenty years ago, so few of these animals were left in the wild that the extinction of the species appeared to be imminent. The National Trust for the Cayman Islands and its partners now run a well-established Recovery Programme for the iguana, and manage a captive breeding facility in the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park on Grand Cayman. The Programme is led by Fred Burton, an old friend of the Forum.

In a shocking development earlier this year, the facility was broken into and seven iguanas were killed in a vicious and callous attack – some were females, preparing to lay eggs. The local authorities and public alike were appalled by this mindless act of destruction. Schools, businesses and individuals have responded, raising funds to establish a reward for information leading to the arrest of those responsible and to enhance the security system for the captive breeding facility. As the news has spread, support has come from further afield, with expressions of outrage and offers of help received from around the world.

Although the brutal killings came as a sickening blow to all those involved in the Recovery Programme, the wave of support that followed has been a source of some solace and has encouraged the team to redouble their efforts to conserve this magnificent species.

Visit the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme website (<http://blueiguana.ky/>), where you can find further information about the species and the Programme, and sign up to receive regular newsletters.



Fred Burton, Director of the recovery project, inspects one of the breeding blue iguanas before the attack. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Sorry, Bermuda - but well done again!

In *Forum News* 32 (p. 10), we made the classic slip of the brain, by referring to the endemic Bermuda Petrels (Cahows) as "Bahama Petrels." Sorry! What's more, four, not three, translocated cahows have returned to Nonsuch Island.

In the same short article, we referred to additional protected areas in Bermuda, and we are pleased to note further progress in the *Buy Back Bermuda* campaign. On 3 October 2008, 7.5 acres of open space was given to the campaign by Sharon Vesey in memory of the Vesey family name. The Bermuda Audubon Society and the Bermuda National Trust welcomed this generous gift, saving this piece of Bermuda's natural heritage in perpetuity and for the enjoyment of all. It will help the *Buy Back Bermuda* committee to realise their vision of not only saving Bermuda's precious open spaces but implementing management plans that enhance their reserves. By tackling the daunting issue of invasive species and making available habitats for wildlife and walking trails, resting spots and interpretive signs for people, the quality of the reserve and the experience for its visitors will be enhanced.

This gift is an example of outstanding care and consideration



David Saul (Chairman of the Buy Back Bermuda committee) receiving the deeds to the new Vesey Nature Reserve. From left to right: Sharon Vesey, Dr David Wingate (Bermuda National Trust), Mrs Henry Vesey, Dr David Saul, Andrew Dobson (President, Bermuda Audubon Society). The coastal section of the reserve can be seen in the background.

for an island under the intense pressures of development and a people whose quality of life will ultimately be impacted by that pressure.

To be named the Vesey Nature Reserve, the parcel of land extends from the verges of Evans Pond in Southampton over the ridgeline of Skroggins Hill to the shoreline of Little Sound. It borders the Government-owned Evans Bay Nature Reserve and is adjacent to the railway trail. The site is predominantly lush untouched woodland, with many live cedars and rare native flora. Evans Pond in the bottom of the valley is a tidal saltwater pond bordered by mangroves and arable farmland. Such features are key to the survival of local flora and fauna and are an integral part of Bermuda's natural history and culture. Overgrown quarries occur along the northwest slope of the valley and are of great interest for the native and introduced ferns they support.

The woodland within the valley is a relatively high quality mixed secondary woodland, dominated by fiddlewood, allspice, Brazil pepper, Japanese loquat, Surinam cherry, Japanese pittosporum, Chinese fan palm and lucky nut, but with a high percentage of surviving Bermuda cedars and other native flora. The scrubby upper slopes of the ridgeline support the only known surviving population of *Rhacoma crossopetalum* on Bermuda. A rare shrub confined to the valley is *Pavonia spinifex*. Both black and red mangrove grow around the edge of the pond. The pond itself supports a diverse and unique marine community which includes a small population of the endemic Bermuda killifish. Various heron species roost in the mangroves.

The vegetation on the wide ridgeline is dominated by invasives 6 feet (2 m) to 15 feet (5 m) in height, but still supports a host of native flora, including many healthy young Bermuda cedars, Jamaica dogwood and the rare *Rhacoma*. Casuarinas have self-colonised along the Little Sound shoreline and may require culling in the future.



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 ninth in a series of supplements to *Forum News* as part of this initiative. Although *Forum News* itself is under the editorial control of the Forum, 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 summaries of those projects that were successful in the 2008 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 2008

Ascension Island Endemic Plants Conservation (ASC 503)

The AIG Conservation Department, together with Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, would like to develop species action plans for all endemic plants found on Ascension. In preparing the plans, seed bank collections will be improved and the current IUCN Red List will be updated. In addition, horticultural protocols for each species will be outlined and used to improve local collections and further develop *ex-situ* plant collections. Training will be provided to AIG staff in monitoring of threatened and invasive plant species, horticultural protocols, red-listing, collections management and plant material collection.

Susanna Musick, Conservation Officer, Ascension Island Government, Ascension Island (UK), South Atlantic Ocean ASCN 1ZZ, Tel: +247 6359, Email: conservation@ascension.gov.ac

Development of an Invasive Species Action Plan for Bermuda (BDA501)

To develop a coordinated, prioritised, achievable plan of action for promoting the prevention, control and eradication of invasive



alien species (IAS) in Bermuda through:

- A dedicated effort to develop a coordinated implementation framework
- The engagement of key stakeholders and the wider community in strategic planning sessions
- An audit of resources and needs assessment
- The development of a coordinated plan

Indian Laurel Ficus retusa growing out of roof. Photo Annie Glasspool

of action including the identification of an emergency response procedure

- The launch of an IAS action plan
- Increased capacity for implementation
- The publication and distribution of this plan locally and to other OTs and SIDS.
- The publication of supplementary guidance material for the public through printed materials and multimedia including a web-based interactive facility.

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Email: afglasspool@gov.bm

BIOT Environmental Information Leaflet (BIO501)

The BIOT Administration has commissioned the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) to produce a leaflet, mainly for distribution on Diego Garcia, outlining the global environmental importance of the Chagos archipelago and identifying ways in which individuals visiting and residing in BIOT could best protect this. Stocks of the original leaflet are now exhausted and the BIOT Administration has suggested that CCT produce a further print run.

David MacLennan, member of CCT Executive Committee, Tel/Fax: +44 1 787269500, Email: maclellan@byndes.fsnet.co.uk

Jost Van Dyke's Community-based Programme Advancing Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development, British Virgin Islands (BVI503)

The community of Jost Van Dyke, fourth largest of the inhabited British Virgin Islands, faces the challenge of balancing economic growth with sustainable use of its natural resources. As it wrestles with development changes, there is little scientifically based information for the community to employ in evaluating the short and long-term impacts of growth.

The proposed project will bring a fresh approach to community awareness and understanding of the local environment. Phase 1 will focus on development of an *Environmental Profile for Jost Van*

Dyke and the nearby islands of Little Jost Van Dyke, Sandy Cay, Sandy Spit and Green Cay (the last three proposed as protected areas under the BVI's Protected Areas System Plan). The *Profile* will provide a detailed characterization of the natural resource base and current state of the environment. It will be supported by the Caribbean-based Island Resources Foundation, the Jost Van Dykes Preservation Society (JVDPS), and a to-be-established JVD Environmental Advisory Group.

Phase 2 will draw upon *Profile* findings to disseminate information in several formats to JVD residents, stakeholders, visitors, and BVI government agencies, and initiate a long-term programme of education, outreach and environmental monitoring to be supported by the JVDPS.

Bruce Donath, Board Member of the Jost Van Dykes (BVI) Preservation Society (JVDPS), Great Harbour, Jost Van Dyke, B.V.I., Tel: +1 6179741368, Email (preferred for contact): bruce@jvdps.org

Falkland Islands Shallow Marine Programme (FAL501)

The project will provide baseline data about the wildlife of the shallow marine environment of the Falkland Islands. By having this knowledge, the Falkland Islands Government (FIG), industry and non governmental agencies will be able to plan and manage more effectively current and future events or developments that may adversely impact the Falkland Islands' shallow marine and coastal environments.

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. It is one of the eight key knowledge gaps that have been identified for the Falkland Islands.

The project aims to redress this critical gap in our knowledge by:

- i. conducting comprehensive marine surveys in areas not surveyed by the 1996 baseline survey
- ii. monitoring for marine invasive species
- iii. conducting inshore and coastal seabird and water bird surveys to define their marine utilisation
- iv. designing and implementing a long term monitoring programme for one National Nature Reserve
- v. advising FIG on appropriate management policies and potential mapping and zonification of the inshore environment.
- vi. educating and involving the community

Dr. Paul Brickle, Wetjens Dimmlich and Stephen Cartwright, Shallow Marine Surveys Group, c/o Fisheries Department, PO Box 598, Stanley, Falkland Islands, Tel: +500 27260, Fax +500 27265, Email: pbrickle@fisheries.gov.fk



Shallow Marine Surveys Group in front of their expedition yacht Damien II on Staats Islands, West Falkland. Photo: Paul Brickle

Enabling Montserrat to implement the Conservation and Environmental Management Act (MNT501)

The project will develop regulations to enable Montserrat to implement effectively the Conservation and Environment Management Act (CEMA). It will build on the consultations that took place to develop the CEMA and include outreach and training so that Montserradians are aware of their rights and responsibilities under the legislation.

Gerard Gray, Department of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Land, Housing and the Environment, PO Box 272, Brades, Montserrat WI, Tel: +1664 491 2075, Fax: +1664 491 2975, Email: grayg@gov.ms



Female endemic Montserrat Oriole Icterus oleri in the Centre Hills. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Enhancing CITES implementation in Montserrat (MNT502)

This project will enhance the implementation of CITES in Montserrat through the input of expert support from CITES authorities in the metropolitan UK (representing the UK Management Authority, Scientific Authorities and an enforcement agency, HM Revenue & Customs). This support will include a critical internal analysis of Montserrat's current legislation, systems and practice with recommendations for any improvements, along with training in CITES implementation and enforcement.

The analysis and recommendations will be considered by a workshop of local stakeholders, including all relevant government agencies and NGOs. Together they will develop an action plan and timeline to enable Montserrat to put into place measures to properly implement and enforce the Convention at levels commensurate with current and likely trade levels and with available resources. Actions will include revising Montserrat's CITES legislation to enable it to move from Category 2 to Category 1 in the CITES national legislation project, thus contributing to the effectiveness of the UK's implementation of the Convention overall.

Gerard Gray, c/o Department of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, Land, Housing and the Environment, PO Box 272, Brades, Montserrat WI, Tel: +1664 491 2075, Fax: +1664 491 9275 Email: grayg@gov.ms

Preparing for rat eradication on Henderson Island World Heritage Site, Pitcairn Islands (PIT501)

Henderson Island World Heritage Site supports an array of endemic and threatened flora and fauna in a nearly pristine ecological community. It is one of the most important biodiversity sites in the UKOTs.

The major threat to the biodiversity of the island is the presence of Pacific Rats, which have contributed to enormous declines in several of the globally important seabird populations – including the globally Endangered endemic Henderson Petrel. Their wider impact on the island's ecology is likely to be large and negative.

OTEP Project PIT401 reported that eradication of rats from Henderson is probably feasible, and will deliver major conservation benefits. However, the feasibility



study describes two issues that need to be resolved before eradication can proceed. Firstly, how to avoid bait consumption by land-crabs from preventing all rats from taking a lethal dose of poison. Secondly, whether about 50 Henderson crakes can be captured and maintained in captivity during a poison-bait drop (since they are likely to be vulnerable to the poison).

This project will conduct field investigations on Henderson, in order to resolve these issues, finalise the Operational Plan for rat eradication, and remove the final obstacles to eradication planning.

Dr Geoff M Hilton, RSPB, The Lodge, Sandy, Bedfordshire, SG19 2DL, UK, Tel: +44 1767 693292, Fax: +44 1767 683211, Email: geoff.hilton@rspb.org.uk

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

The project will provide much needed investment for the implementation of a capacity building programme to support critical species recovery and horticultural needs on St Helena.

Specialist technical input will be sought from Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) Kew to provide for the undertaking of a capacity audit to inform detailed programme activities for the project and the Terms of Reference for the engagement of a Horticulture Production Officer (HPO) at the Agriculture & Natural Resources Department (ANRD). A Nurseries Officer will be recruited locally for the majority of the project to work with the HPO and will eventually become part of the ANRD Environmental Conservation Section (ECS) team to sustain the benefits provided from the project.

Upgrading of the nursery at the ANRD ECS and Peaks, the development of seed banking facilities and the procurement of a suitable vehicle for the ECS will support the requirements of wider species recovery work on the Island. Formal plant production documentation will be developed to support best practice and future training requirements.

A skills development programme through training to address medium to long term species conservation and plant production requirements will be implemented for ECS, volunteers and the private sector, to support plant production requirements from the Air Access and the EU Invasive Species Projects and any future developments.

The urgency of this project is highlighted by the fragile position of St Helena's endemic flora. Many species are down to critically low numbers in the wild, or exist only in cultivation. The recent extinction of the endemic St Helena Olive and the precarious position of the endemic Bastard Gumwood provide testament to urgent support needed for arguably the UK's most valuable flora.

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Heart Shaped Waterfall – public access and amenities, St Helena (STH502)

This project will clear invasive species from the approach to the Heart Shaped Waterfall, thereby creating access to one of St Helena's foremost geological features and landmarks of natural beauty. It is proposed as one of the National Protected Areas and seen as an 'icon' with the potential to support the anticipated tourism growth which is expected post airport construction.

The land recently came into the ownership of the National Trust as the result of a private donation. The valley floor was, in living memory, used to cultivate food crops and cattle fodder. Plantation terraces, constructed for this purpose using dry stonewalls, are still evident and in some cases useable.

Neglect of the area has allowed invasive species and vermin to colonise the valley floor. There is now a dense growth of vigorous alien species making access to the waterfall extremely difficult. The island's Nature Conservation

Some rare endemic species still survive on the face of the waterfall - but only just! Photo: Vince Thompson

Group (affiliated to the St Helena National Trust) has opened up a trail to the waterfall; however use of this trail is contemplated by only the most energetic and adventurous.

The Nature Conservation Group supports this project and is willing to assist further with clearance of invasive scrub and trees from the valley floor. The St Helena National Trust will contract two additional forest workers to undertake the majority of clearance work.

The St Helena Development Agency is planning to participate in a separate programme aimed at increasing the number, knowledge, skills and techniques of nurserymen in St Helena. The plantation terraces will be used to cultivate suitable species endemic to the island, particularly those that naturally colonised the area in the past. The plantations will be used as an information and education tool for school visits to the Heart Shaped Waterfall. The plantation terraces are seen as areas for training nurserymen.

Geological and historical information boards will also be provided together with simple picnic facilities for visitors.

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Control of alien mice and plants at the Gough Island World Heritage Site, Tristan da Cunha (TDC502)

Gough Island, part of the Tristan da Cunha group, is one of the UKOT's most important sites for biodiversity, as recognised by the island's status as a World Heritage Site, Site for Zero Extinction and Endemic Bird Area.

The major threats to Gough Island are the presence of invasive species, especially the House Mouse and the plant *Sagina procumbens*, as well as the impact of long-line fishing mortality on albatrosses and petrels. Research has established that mice are responsible for unsustainable breeding failures of the Tristan Albatross and Atlantic Petrel, accounting for the mortality of upwards of 400,000 chicks each season. Recent population estimates of the endemic Gough Bunting indicate that this species is in rapid decline as a result of mice. Long-line mortality at sea impacts upon at least five species of Gough's resident seabirds, including the Tristan Albatross. A recent evaluation of these threats has led BirdLife International to re-grade both the Tristan Albatross and Gough Bunting to Critically Endangered, and re-grade the Atlantic Petrel to Endangered. Five other bird species on Gough are Globally Threatened.

The plant *Sagina procumbens* is currently restricted to coastal cliffs near the weather base, where it was discovered in 1999. A long-term eradication programme is underway to prevent this species spreading and to eliminate it from Gough Island. If *Sagina* were to spread to upland areas, there would be far reaching consequences to Gough's unique invertebrate and plant communities, as well as



to the island's status as a World Heritage Site.

This project will place a two-person team on Gough Island for one year. Four key objectives will be met:

1. to undertake the key research necessary to determine the best approach for a mouse eradication;
2. to continue with the containment and eradication of *Sagina*;
3. to repeat long-term monitoring of Gough's breeding bird populations to assess trends and the impact of current threats;
4. to continue demographic research on the Tristan Albatross and Gough Bunting to determine the impact of mouse predation on these two Critically Endangered species.

By placing a team on Gough for one year this project will resolve key issues identified by OTEP project TDC 203, allow the continuation of OTEP project TDC 403 at a critical point in the control of *Sagina*, repeat long-term monitoring of bird populations as supported by the UK FCO, and complete key research activities previously supported by the RSPB and University of Cape Town. Through utilising the South African National Antarctic Programme supply vessel the S.A. *Agulhas* to access and undertake work on Gough, the project will not impact on berth requirements for Tristan da Cunha, or necessitate the expense of chartering a dedicated vessel.

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

Scoping Study for GSPC Targets 1 & 2 in the Caribbean (CAY402)

The Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC), adopted by the Convention on Biological Diversity, outlines sixteen targets towards halting the current and continuing loss of botanical diversity worldwide. See the GSPC website for more information: <http://www.cbd.int/gspc/>.



Epidendrum montserratense, endemic to Montserrat and candidate Critically Endangered. Photo: Royal Botanic Gardens Kew

Targets 1 and 2 are foundation requirements necessary for the achievement of the other fourteen targets of the GSPC:

- Target 1: "a working list of all known plants species"
- Target 2: "a preliminary assessment of the conservation status of all known plants species"

A lack of baseline species data and information was identified as a major constraint to achieving both targets, at the Caribbean Regional GSPC Workshop, hosted in Montserrat 2006.

Despite identification of these two targets as top priorities by all attendant countries, half had not yet achieved one/both, and some considered themselves lacking in expertise or capacity to achieve them.

In the spirit of cooperative working, representatives from four

capacity-enabled countries attending the meeting, Dr Tracy Cummock (Institute of Jamaica), Dr Mike Oatham (University of the West Indies), Dr Colin Clubbe (Royal Botanic Gardens Kew), and Dr Mat DaCosta-Cottam (Cayman Islands Department of Environment), offered to collaborate in developing strategies and methodologies to attain Targets 1 & 2 in capacity-limited countries across the Caribbean.



Agave caymanensis, endemic to the Cayman Islands and listed as Vulnerable. Photo: Royal Botanic Gardens Kew



Collecting data in TCI for red listing assessments.

Photo: Royal Botanic Gardens Kew

Robbins, has successfully developed a toolkit to enable countries lacking internal botanical expertise to produce a working Red List. This is done by compiling data from herbarium records, determining range from publications, preparing a candidate Red List and undertaking targeted fieldwork to provide those data necessary to enable a full assessment to be undertaken.

To maximise accessibility, we developed a website, <http://dps.plants.ox.ac.uk/bol/?crp>, which brings together essential country-specific botanical data, including completed Red Lists, key resources for practitioners, and guidelines to producing a Red List. The Scoping Study also provided expert support and collaboration in the field, with these methodologies evaluated in Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Initially focusing on Caribbean UKOTs, a Red List for Cayman is now complete, and one for Bermuda is in its final stages. Candidate Red Lists have been completed for Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Building on the success to date, it is envisaged that this project will continue to develop and expand to other UKOTs, and beyond.

Dr Mat Cottam, Cayman Islands Department of Environment, Mat.Cottam@gov.ky

Dr Colin Clubbe, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, c.clubbe@kew.org

Beaver Island Group Restoration Project (FAL403)

The Beaver Island Group is one of 22 designated Important Bird Areas in the Falklands highlighted for its ecological significance by BirdLife International. Nine islands in the Group are earmarked for restoration via eradication of Norwegian rats and South American grey foxes. The islands range in size from 4 to 300 hectares.





The Beaver Island Restoration Group fieldwork team on Channel Islands, August 2007.

Eradication of these two invasive species will enhance the recovery of native bird populations and their habitats, in particular tussac birds and the endemic Cobb's wren which are currently restricted to just a handful of predator-free islands. Highlighting the value of restored tussac islands and of the process of restoration itself is another aspect of this project. This is being achieved via the project's capacity to provide employment opportunities in restoration for landowners and farmers, and for them to gain experience in eradication and restoration techniques.

The project was initiated in September 2006 with support from Helen Otley, the Falkland Islands Government's Environmental Officer and a start-up grant from the FIG's Environmental Studies Budget. Additional funding for wildlife monitoring was received from the local conservation charity, the Antarctic Research Trust (ART). This was followed in April 2007 by a two-year grant from OTEP, which covers the majority of eradication costs. In-kind donations come from Falklands Conservation, the South Atlantic Invasive Species Programme and volunteers. The project is coordinated by Sally Poncet of Beaver Island Farm, West Falklands, who is also the landowner and has been involved in conservation and eradication projects in the Falklands and South Georgia for the past 20 years. Programme advisors include Steve Ebbert of the US Fish and Wildlife Service Alaska and Derek Brown, a New Zealand invasive species consultant.

Derek Brown visited the islands in April 2007 to advise on the overall eradication plan. The first year's rat eradication work was successfully carried out in August 2007 when seven islands were baited by hand-using diphacinone wax blocks. Five local people were employed to do this and are now trained up in island restoration principles and rat baiting techniques. We checked bait stations on one of the seven islands in March 2008 and found no signs of rats. Wildlife monitoring surveys were carried out in February and November 2007 and will be repeated in November 2008 and February 2009.

The next stage of the rat baiting programme will take place on Governor Island in August 2008 and will be carried out by a team of eight locals and Derek Brown. During this period we will also be checking for rat sign on all the islands baited last year. Fox eradication on Tea Island gets underway the following month, with guidance from Steve Ebbert who visited the islands in March 2008 to advise on the programme.

Sally Poncet, Project Coordinator Beaver Island Restoration Group Project. sallyponcet@horizon.co.fk

The South Georgia Petrel Survey 2005-2007 (SGS201)

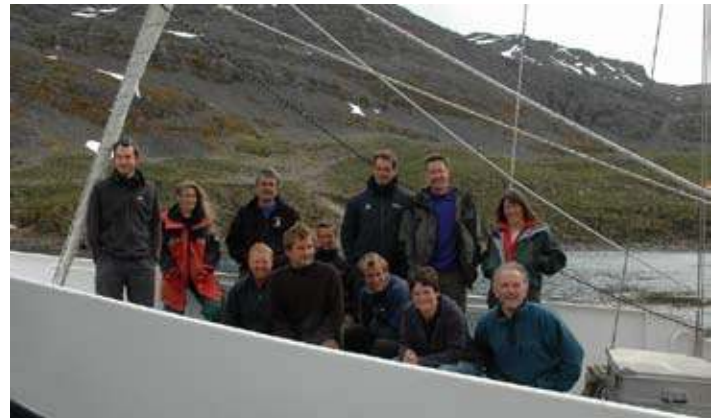
In 2005, the South Georgia Government commissioned an island-wide survey of the island's northern and southern giant petrels and white-chinned petrel populations with the aim of updating population estimates, distribution data and assessing land-based threats for these species. Funding was provided by the UK's Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) and the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, with additional support from Peregrine Adventure's Protect Our Poles Programme.



Raising awareness of the conservation aims and efforts by Government to protect seabirds was also a project aim. Ben Sullivan from RSPB/BirdLife International's Save the Albatross Campaign and Dame Ellen MacArthur (a well known British yachting personality) joined the survey team at South Georgia in December 2005 for two weeks. News items featured regularly on their websites and a documentary about Ellen's voyage and the birds (in English and French) was produced for British and French TV.

The research programme was organised by South Georgia Surveys (SGS) and conducted in collaboration with the British Antarctic Survey (BAS). Richard Phillips (BAS) coordinated ground censuses of the giant petrel populations on Bird Island; Dr Tony Martin (BAS) carried out the white-chinned petrel survey; Sally Poncet (SGS) led the boat-based giant petrel surveys. Over the course of two breeding seasons 2005-06 and 2006-07, we surveyed virtually all of South Georgia's coastline, working from the 20m yacht *Golden Fleece*. The counts were done by a core group of four people (Sally Poncet, Tony Martin, Andy Black and Leiv Poncet) assisted by up to six fieldworkers who were a mix of volunteers and professional researchers.

In total, we made over 300 landings, walked over 1000 km, steamed 3500 km up and down the coast on all sides of the island and surveyed over 95% of South Georgia's giant petrel population, obtaining individual nest counts and a dataset of GPS-linked environmental variables (including coordinates, altitude, vegetation, presence of fur seals, rats or reindeer) for most of them. Provisional populations estimates are around 17,000 breeding pairs of northern giant petrels, nearly 9,000 southern and just over one million pairs of white-chinned petrels. We also reviewed population changes over the past twenty years and found that there has been a significant increase (possibly as high as 37%) in northern giant petrels; southern appear to be stable or slightly increasing, and white-chinned petrel numbers are down 50% on the previous estimate.



The South Georgia Petrel Survey team at South Georgia, December 2005.

This research project owes its success fully to the hard work and commitment of the boat crew and all the fieldworkers: Dion Poncet, Russell Evans, Stevie Cartwright, Ken Passfield, Kilian du Couedic on *SV Golden Fleece*; BAS fieldworkers Richard Phillips, Tony Martin, Robin Snape, Catrin Thomas and Ash Morton; South Georgia Surveys fieldworkers Sally Poncet, Leiv Poncet, Andy Black, Carolina Mantella, Micky Reeves, Olly Watts, Ronnie Reyes-Arriagada, Christophe Barbraud, Ellen Macarthur, Ben Sullivan, Fran Prince and Andy Whittaker.

Sally Poncet, Project Coordinator for the South Georgia ACAP Petrel Surveys 2005-07 sallyponcet@horizon.co.fk

Developing and integrating cross sector management of nature trails and tours both terrestrial and marine (STH201)

The OTEP Nature Trails project has provided training for tour guides which has equipped them with the skills to deliver informative tours in a responsible and professional manner. As a result of this project the walking experience of both visitors and locals will be enhanced.

A new walks book provides information on all 21 Post Box walks, along with water-proof literature for the diving and snorkelling enthusiast to help them enjoy the magic of our pristine underwater world.

To support the tour guides and in the interest of their customers safety, all have been trained in Emergency First Response and how to use a VHF radio, as a lot of the walks are to remote parts of the Island. VHF radios have been ordered and will be available for the tour guides to rent.

There is still concern about liability issues which could occur when guiding the walks and there is only minimal maintenance being undertaken on some of the paths.

Overall, the project will enhance the walking experience on St Helena and we are very grateful to OTEP for their support.

Pamela Young, Director of Tourism, St Helena Island; director@tourism.gov.sh

The St Helena Environmental Information System, SHEIS (STH302)

The original SHEIS project was scheduled for completion in March 2006. During the final months of the project, it became clear that there were areas that needed further development. The Department for International Development (DFID) was approached about the possibility of extending the project for a further 6 months. They agreed and provided additional funding to invite the previous consultants back to St Helena to enhance SHEIS.

The consultants had a range of tasks outlined for them. They provided additional training in the use of SHEIS to managers, stakeholders, and other users. They identified further potential uses of SHEIS to St Helena by providing training to the Island's GIS Manager so he could train new users as the system expands. The consultants delivered training in portal applications for the Prince Andrew School. They participated in a public consultation on how to progress towards a National System to incorporate other government departments with the private sector and NGOs. Discussions took place with the St Helena Government (SHG) IT Department on issues surrounding long term security, systems back up, and general IT support.

The training the consultants provided was delivered using a computer suite at the AVEC Centre. This enabled 15 staff from Legal, Lands and Planning Department (LLPD), Agriculture & Natural Resources Department (ANRD), Environmental Planning Department (EPD), and St Helena National Trust (SHNT) to participate during one session. An additional one-to-one in depth training was provided to the SHNT Project Officer.

Discussion with the Prince Andrew School staff resulted in exchanges of ideas about the potential uses of SHEIS for A-Level students. Problems accessing the browser were investigated and solutions identified.

As the use of SHEIS expanded, it was identified that there was the need for a more powerful and efficient network system. The funding provided by DFID allowed for the purchase of an air conditioning unit, new browser software packages, printers, and UPS units to protect against power failures.

The ongoing development of GIS and its potential for St Helena has been recognised by all stakeholders, GIS Office, LLPD, SHG IT staff, and the SHNT. In order to secure its future, a 5-year business case and budget forecast has been presented to SHG to seek future funding to continue and expand this service to various departments and organisations on the Island.

Taken from Annual Report St Helena National Trust 2007-2008

Vince Thompson, Director St Helena National Trust email: sth.natrust@cwimail.sh

Ridding Tristan da Cunha's outer islands of alien plants (TDC201 and TDC403)

Like many other oceanic islands the Tristan da Cunha Islands in the South Atlantic have suffered from the introduction of alien species.

Thankfully, Tristan's feral goats, pigs and cats are now gone, leaving rodents as the remaining mammalian problem. However, invasive alien plants remain a threat to the island group's natural communities, including on the largely unaltered outer islands.

Both Inaccessible and Gough Islands in the Tristan Group are nature reserves and together form a World Heritage Site. The third outer island, Nightingale, is not a proclaimed nature reserve, but is effectively run as one, with a management plan in production. All three islands have active alien plant eradication programme funded by OTEP.

Inaccessible Island

The major effort is directed at removing New Zealand Flax *Phormium tenax* thought to have been introduced in the 1930s. The plant grows on high coastal cliffs that require qualified rope-access technicians to scale in safety. Two expeditions, in 2004 and 2007, have succeeded in removing all but a few plants, and a follow-up visit to remove the last few plants and any new seedlings is planned for 2009.

Nightingale Island

Again, efforts have been directed at New Zealand Flax. Most plants had been removed previously by Tristan Islanders, and in 2007 the remaining 20 plants were removed. Additionally, the alien Australian Brass Buttons *Cotula australis* was weeded out. This species is out-competing the endemic Nightingale Brass Buttons *C. moseleyi* and further eradication efforts are required.

Gough Island

Here, the main alien plant issue is with Procumbent Pearlwort *Sagina procumbens*. This diminutive plant only occurs along a short stretch of coastal cliff near the meteorological station, and rope-access technicians are required to work in safety. It was first discovered ashore in 1998, and since then eradication efforts have been undertaken, utilizing mechanical removal, herbicides and heat treatment to kill the seed load in the soil. On several other southern oceanic islands this species is highly invasive. So far, efforts on Gough have contained the plant at decreasing densities but eventual eradication remains problematic and will require an ongoing effort for a number of years yet.

A management plan for alien plants

In tandem with the above eradication efforts in the field, the project team is producing a management plan and identification guide for Tristan's invasive plants; the former to include a quarantine manual to reduce the risks of further species arriving at the island group. Necessary quarantine activities will include inspections of ships



*Brian Schultz, level-three rope-access technician, descends the coastal cliff at Transvaal Bay, Gough Island, searching for the alien plant *Sagina procumbens* in December 2007.*

Photo: John Cooper



and their cargos in home ports for propagules (seeds and living plant material), as well as persuading passengers travelling to the islands to ensure their footwear and field gear have been adequately cleaned. For this, a bio-security officer is required in Cape Town, Tristan's main supply port. Quarantine controls are also required to avoid alien plants present on the main island from reaching the three outer islands.

John Cooper, Niek Gremmen and Peter Ryan, Project Management Team, Email: John.Cooper@uct.ac.za

Marine Turtles, the UKOT Environment Charters and relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements (XOT003)

Turtles in the UK Overseas Territories (TUKOT) aims to progress the conservation, research and management of marine turtle populations and their habitats in the UK Overseas Territories, whilst highlighting the importance of the Environment Charters and the relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs).



*Fieldwork in Anguilla
Photo: Peter Richardson, www.mcsuk.org*

TUKOT Anguilla

On 26th September 2001, Anguilla and the UK Government signed the Environment Charter, both parties making commitments to environmental conservation. A great deal of background regarding the Environment Charter can be sourced at www.ukotcf.org. Of the MEAs most relevant to marine turtle conservation in the region, Anguilla is signatory to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands and the World Heritage Convention.

The status of marine turtles in Anguilla was recently reviewed. Anguilla hosts annual nesting of at least three species (leatherback, green and hawksbill turtles) but the populations are critically low. Foraging green and hawksbill turtles are widespread and appear to be locally abundant at some sites. Since 1995 all marine turtles in Anguillian waters have been protected by a temporary moratorium on turtle fishing. This moratorium was due for review at the end of 2005. The nesting populations in Anguilla have been subject to survey work of increasing detail in recent years and monitoring and research has expanded into the foraging grounds. Partners in this project are The Department of Fisheries and Marine Resources (DFMR) and the Anguilla National Trust (ANT).

This ummary was taken from the Marine Turtle Research Group at <http://www.seaturtle.org/mtrg/projects/tukot/>. There is also further information on TUKOT in Ascension Island, BVI, Cayman Islands, Montserrat and TCI.

To contact the TUKOT team e-mail tukot@seaturtle.org



*A black-browed albatross
Thalassarche melanophrys (one of
the listed ACAP species).
Photo: Sarah Crofts, Falklands
Conservation*

ACAP - coordination of by-catch fisheries issues in the South Atlantic (XOT401)

In 2004 the United Kingdom, including on behalf of its South Atlantic Overseas Territories (SAOTs) – Falkland Islands, South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, British Antarctic Territory and Tristan da Cunha - ratified the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP). Of the 26 species presently covered by the Agreement, 12 occur as breeding species in the SAOTs. For most of these, the SAOTs host significant proportions of the global breeding population, three of which are endemic as breeders to the Tristan da Cunha group. Albatrosses and petrels of the South Atlantic face a range of threats both on land and at sea. Chief among these is fisheries-related mortality. In most cases, this is exacerbated by a suite of other threats, the most critical of which is the impact of introduced predators, which is especially severe at Gough Island where introduced house mice prey on chicks of the Tristan Albatross and other seabirds.

A number of initiatives have been funded and undertaken to address the range of threats at international, national and local levels. These initiatives are collaborative in nature, involving a range of Government departments both in the UK and the SAOTs, Non-Government Organisations, research institutions, industry and private landowners. As a result of constructive interaction with the fisheries industry and strong collaboration with the research and NGO community, mitigation measures to reduce seabird by-catch have been developed, tested and implemented, leading to substantially reduced levels of seabird by-catch in the fisheries of the Falkland Islands and South Georgia. Indeed, these two SAOTs are world leaders in the development and research of by-catch technology. However, in spite of these successes, the populations of most albatross and petrel populations continue to decline, indicating sustained or increased mortality in foraging areas. The vast foraging movements of these seabirds take them on to the High Seas and the national waters of other nations. This highlights the importance of engaging with other nations to promote an ecosystem approach to fisheries management, which includes minimising seabird and other by-catch.

In March 2008, Anton Wolfaardt was appointed on a three-year contract to coordinate activities in the SAOTs and metropolitan UK in implementing ACAP, and will be based in the Falkland Islands for the duration of this contract. Initial work has focussed on fulfilling the ACAP reporting requirements, conducting and contributing to reviews for ACAP Working Groups, preparing for the fourth meeting of the Advisory Committee of ACAP, which took place in Cape Town, South Africa in August 2008, and reviewing the specific needs of SAOTs in relation to ACAP. Whilst there are differences between the SAOTs in terms of albatross and petrel conservation, there are also many similarities, and the cross-cutting nature of this project has already led to coordination efficiencies and opportunities for sharing lessons and experience. The ultimate objective of ACAP is to achieve and maintain a favourable conservation status for albatrosses and petrels, and this project is being implemented to ensure that the UK and the SAOTs help meet this objective.

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Making the Right Connections: a conference on conservation in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island communities

Grand Cayman, 30th May to 5th June 2009

Please note that this is the last *Forum News* before the deadline for conference bookings. Readers are advised to book soon if they wish to attend.

The conference (announced in *Forum News* 31, with more details in *Forum News* 32) is being organized by UKOTCF in consultation with the Cayman Islands Department of the Environment and the National Trust for the Cayman Islands. It is supported also by the Overseas Territories Environment Programme of the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development. It will be the fifth such conference following the first held in London in 1999, the second in Gibraltar in 2000, the third in Bermuda in March 2003 and the fourth in Jersey in October 2006. The proceedings of the Gibraltar, Bermuda and Jersey conferences can be seen on the Forum's web-site (www.ukotcf.org).

The conference will provide a forum for government environmental bodies and NGOs to discuss key conservation issues, to highlight success stories, exchange ideas, and to forge partnerships. The overall aim is to draw on similarities and differences in experience across the territories, to provide insights into common challenges, leaving participants better equipped to address local needs.

The main topics have been determined after wide consultations amongst conservationists working in the Overseas Territories. Main sessions are likely to be:

- Opening and introduction to Cayman experience
 - including field visits in Grand Cayman
- Maintaining momentum - setting the scene and reporting progress since the Jersey conference, including:
 - Progress on Environment Charter implementation
 - Environmental education
 - Invasive species
- Raising our profile - engaging policy-makers and the public
- Joined-up thinking - institutional arrangements for environmental management
- Enhancing capacity - how on earth are we going to cope with the workload?
- Spatial planning, protected areas and international standards – assets or liabilities?
- Climate change – impacts, adaptation and mitigation
- Regional Working Group sessions

This outline programme is provisional and may change up to the last minute. It will be amplified and updated periodically on the web-site (www.ukotcf.org). Participants should plan to arrive in Grand Cayman on Saturday 30th May 2009 and leave on Friday 5th June.



West Indian Woodpecker, one of several bird subspecies endemic to the Cayman Islands, at the Botanic Park, which the conference plans to visit.
Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Further details and a booking form are available on the UKOTCF web-site (www.ukotcf.org). It is recommended that bookings be made as early as possible, to secure places. You will be advised as soon as possible whether a place is available. In order to secure your booking, a non-returnable deposit is required at the time of booking. The balance will be due by 31st January 2009. Soon after, rooms have to be released to the hotel and so may not remain available. Even if rooms are available later, the concessionary price may not be available. Because the conference will be liable for costs after this time, refunds cannot be made. Participants are advised to take out appropriate travel insurance. Accommodation, breakfast, lunch and meetings will be at the conference hotel on Seven Mile Beach, although a few events and the conference dinner are expected to be held elsewhere.

Conference format: In response to feedback from participants in the previous conference, the duration of this conference will be one day longer (although shorter than the conference plus workshops of 2006), allowing for more priority topics to be addressed at reasonable length. In order to develop an integrated programme, speakers will be invited. However, all participants are invited to offer posters (see below). In response to feedback from participants in previous conferences, it is envisaged that all or nearly all sessions will be in plenary, rather than using parallel sessions.

Posters: Poster presentations may be offered by any participant, including those invited to make a presentation in some other form. The latter may find a poster useful to present information which does not fit readily into their spoken presentation slot. The subjects of posters are not restricted to the topics of sessions. There are constraints – which we are trying to overcome – on display board space available. Therefore, the conference organisers cannot guarantee to accept all posters offered, but will do their best to do so. (Making the requests early will maximise the chances of this.) A summary of any poster should be sent by 31 January 2009 as an email attachment to cquick@ukotcf.org, so that it can be included in the conference pack. The summary may be from a paragraph to about a page in length.

Proceedings: We plan to publish the proceedings on the Forum's web-site.

Costs: The present costs for the conference (arriving Saturday 30th May and leaving on Friday 5th June) are £790 per person in a room shared with one other or £1190 per person for a single occupancy room. These rates (which include some support from the conference budget) cover accommodation, transfers from and to airport, transfers to other conference venues, field visits, tea/coffee breaks, breakfasts, lunches, dinner on two nights, and conference costs. Participants should budget to meet separately the costs of drinks and any additional costs such as telephone calls, gratuities and laundry, as well as dinners on other days. There are a range of dining options at or near the hotel. All participants will be responsible for paying the hotel for any extras such as meals not included in the conference cost, drinks, laundry, telephone calls and gratuities.