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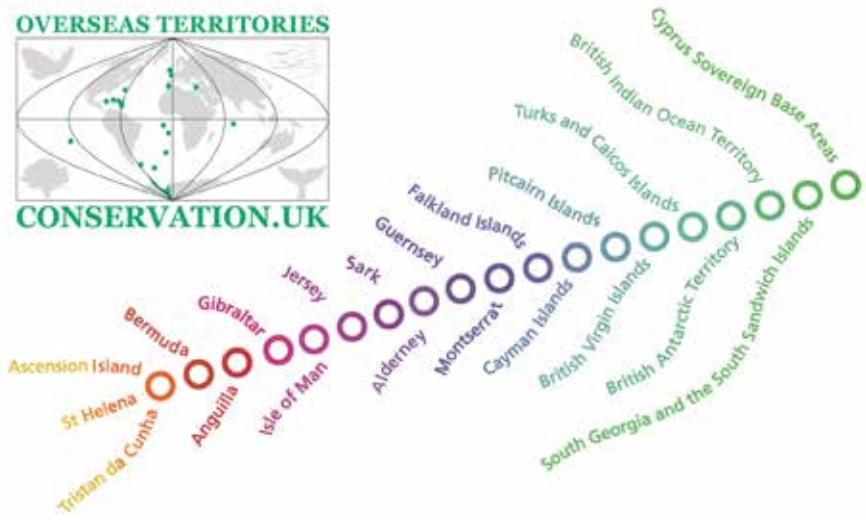
FORUM NEWS 63

NOVEMBER 2025 • www.ukotcf.org.uk

UKOTCF online conference, Monday 13 to Thursday 16 October



In this issue, we include the first reports of UKOTCF's 7th conference, held online 13-16 October. These include summaries of sessions by the rapporteurs of those sessons, the conference photo, and recommendations. The conference team is working on the full proceedings. Videos of conference sessions are being made available to those who registered for the conference.

Probably the most frequent question that UKOTCF is asked by partners in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies is "when is the next UKOTCF conference?" The conferences bring together governmental, NGO and other organisations in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, and other stakeholders in conserving the environment in these and some similar small countries. They draw on similarities and differences in experience, to provide insights into common challenges, leaving participants better equipped to address local needs, and to build a sense of collective identity and endeavour across the territories. The conferences are working meetings to develop capacity, exchange information on best practices, to take forward conservation issues that have already been identified and to plan positive actions, as well as integrating conservation into other sectors of the economies, especially in the context of sustainable development and international commitments.

The conferences have become recognised as a key element in the delivery of international commitments and local conservation needs. The first such conference was held in London in 1999, the second (and the first with UKOTCF leading the organisation, with organisation starting before that of the London conference) in Gibraltar in 2000, the third in Bermuda in March 2003, the fourth in Jersey in October 2006, the fifth in Grand Cayman in May/June 2009, the sixth in Gibraltar in 2015 and seventh held online during the pandemic in 2021. The proceedings of all (and soon that of this conference) can be seen at https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/our-conferences/.

Because of time-zone differences across the territories, the main conference sessions ran from about noon to evening in UK. (At that time of year the time-zones of most territories range from 2 hours ahead of UK time to 6 hours behind – with apologies to Pitcairn, which has a 9-hour time-difference).

Territories were consulted widely for over a couple of years, especially via regional working groups, on preferred session topics. In addition to the talks and discussions, there were poster presentations, and the 3rd Sir Richard and Lady Dace Ground Lecture.

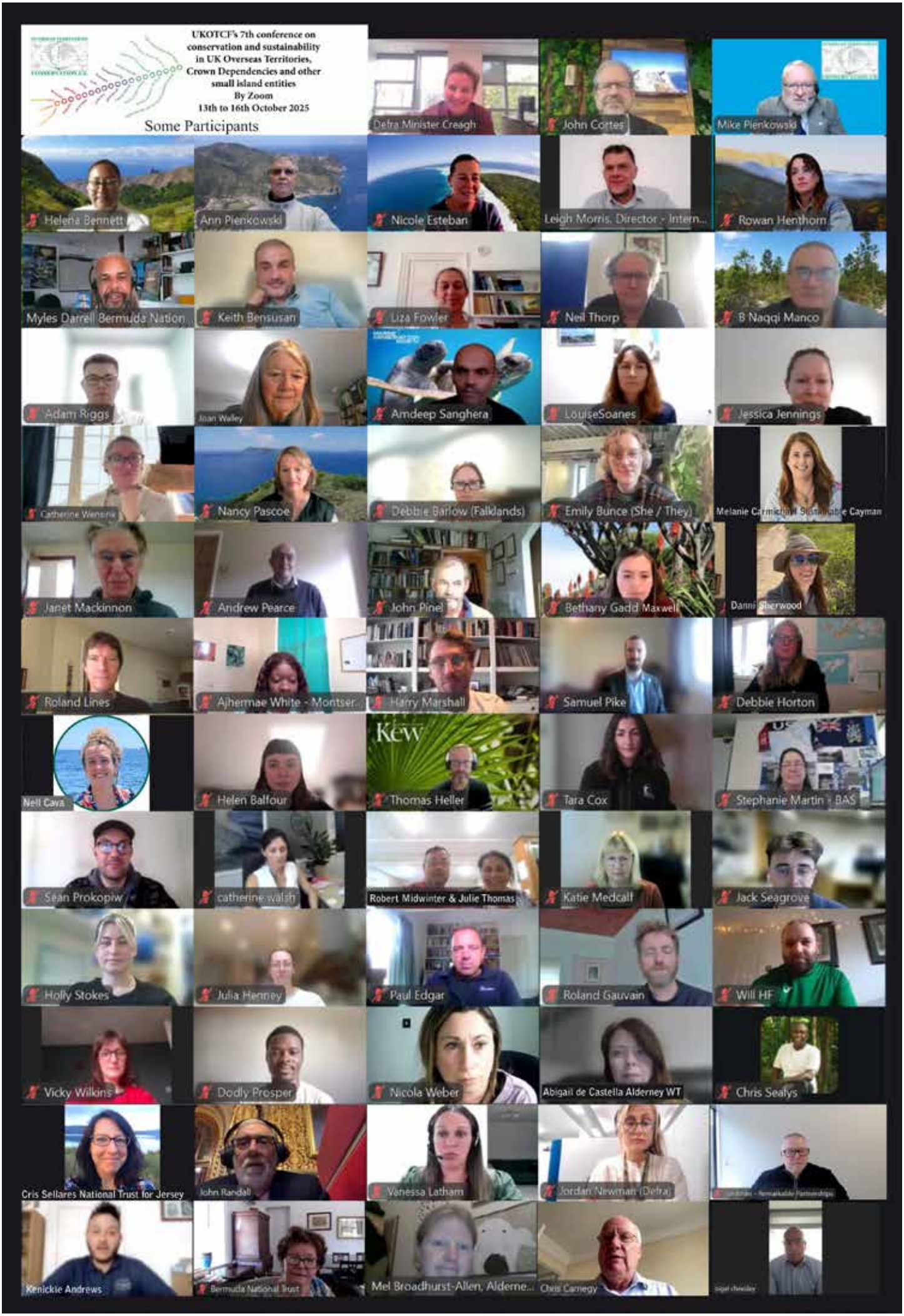
Further announcements will be made as more information becomes available. These will be made available on https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/online-conference-2025, and via circulations through UKOTCF Working Groups.

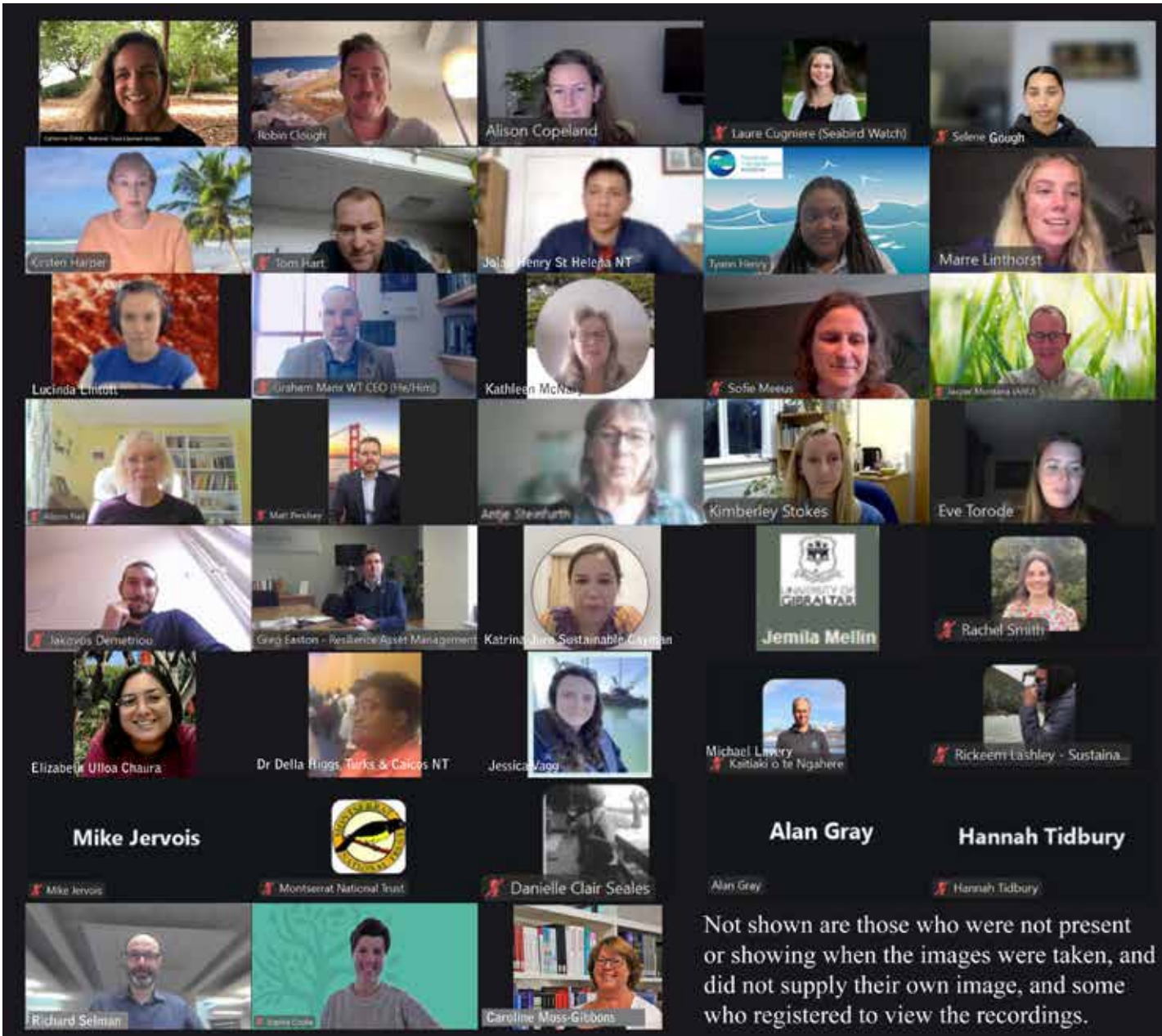
In respect of this conference, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum wishes to acknowledge the financial support of JNCC Support Co, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the University of Gibraltar, UKOTCF itself and its member and associate bodies Amphibian & Reptile Conservation, Bermuda National Trust, Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society, Manx Wildlife Trust, the National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, and St Helena National Trust.

Below and on the following pages, we present the conference photo for those partcipants for whom we had images(compiled by Ann Pienkowski), the session summaries (by the session rapporteurs), and the recommendations.

Ministerial session *(Rapporteur: Dr Keith Bensusan, Gibraltar)*

The session was opened with welcoming remarks and introductions from Dr Mike Pienkowski, who acknowledged the presence of distinguished guests, including Mary Creagh MP, Minister for Nature (Defra) and former Chair of the UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee; and Minister John Cortés, Minister for Education, Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change, Heritage & Transport at HM Government of Gibraltar, and Chair of the Council of Environment Ministers of UKOTs & CDs.


UKOTCF's 7th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island entities
By Zoom
13th to 16th October 2025
Some Participants
Defra Minister Creagh
John Cortes
Mike Pienkowski
Helena Bennett
Ann Pienkowski
Nicole Esteban
Leigh Morris, Director - Intern...
Rowan Henthorn
Myles Darrell Bermuda Nation
Keith Bensusan
Liza Fowler
Neil Thorp
B Naqqi Manco
Adam Riggs
Joan Walley
Amdeep Sanghera
LouiseSoanes
Jessica Jennings
Catherine Wenstrom
Nancy Pascoe
Debbie Barlow (Falklands)
Emily Bunce (She / They)
Melanie Carmichael Sustainable Cayman
Janet Mackinnon
Andrew Pearce
John Pinel
Bethany Gadd Maxwell
Danni Sherwood
Roland Lines
Ajhermae White - Montser...
Harry Marshall
Samuel Pike
Debbie Horton
Neil Cava
Helen Balfour
Kew
Thomas Heller
Tara Cox
Stephanie Martin - BAS
Sean Prokopiw
catherine walsh
Robert Midwinter & Julie Thomas
Katie Medcalf
Jack Seagrove
Holly Stokes
Julia Henney
Paul Edgar
Roland Gauvain
Will HF
Vicky Wilkins
Dodly Prosper
Nicola Weber
Abigail de Castella Alderney WT
Chris Sealys
Cris Sellares National Trust for Jersey
John Randall
Vanessa Latham
Jordan Newman (Defra)
Kenickie Andrews
Bermuda National Trust
Mel Broadhurst-Allen, Alderne...
Chris Carnegy



Not shown are those who were not present or showing when the images were taken, and did not supply their own image, and some who registered to view the recordings.

We are pleased to acknowledge financial support for this conference from anonymous donors and these following organisations:

THE BERMUDA NATIONAL TRUST

GIBRALTAR ORNITHOLOGICAL AND NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY

SAINT HELENA NATIONAL TRUST

UNIVERSITY OF GIBRALTAR

Manx Wildlife Trust
Treisht Bea-Feie Vannin

amphibian and reptile conservation

JNCC

Garfield Weston FOUNDATION

NATIONAL PARKS TRUST OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

OVERSEAS TERRITORIES
CONSERVATION.UK

Minister Mary Creagh *(above)* began by expressing her pleasure at joining the conference and emphasised the importance of the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and Crown Dependencies (CDs) in the global effort to tackle biodiversity loss and climate change. The Minister warmly welcomed Minister Cortés and noted how valuable it was to have him participating in the session.

Reflecting on the importance of the event, Minister Creagh stated that the UK Government remains firmly committed to supporting its Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. She highlighted that environmental protection is not a side issue, but central to the UK's global environmental responsibilities. The Minister spoke also about the significance of grassroots efforts, stating: "Everybody's environment starts at their own front door."

Minister Creagh shared several positive developments from within the UK, such as the reintroduction of wild beavers, the creation of the Western Forest, and the banning of harmful pesticides to protect pollinators. She underscored these initiatives as not just policy-decisions, but promises to future generations.

Turning to international commitments, she announced the extension of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to Guernsey, and detailed how the UK's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), published in February, includes commitments for both UKOTs and CDs. The strategy reflects collective ambitions to meet all 23 global biodiversity targets under the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, which will be reviewed at COP17 in Armenia next year.

Minister Creagh confirmed also the UK Government's continued investment in the Darwin Plus programme, which has now supported over 380 biodiversity-projects across UKOTs. The most recent funding round, announced days before the conference, added over 40 new projects, with a combined value of more than £7 million. The Minister confirmed also that the UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy, developed through extensive consultations with the territories, had now been cleared for publication.

Further, the Minister addressed the UK's role in negotiating a global treaty to end plastic pollution, her engagement with international climate diplomacy (including participation in New York Climate Week and the forthcoming COP in Brazil), and the pressing need to explore innovative financing options for nature conservation, including private sector engagement and blended finance models.

During a Q&A session, Minister Creagh answered a wide range of questions from delegates. Topics included:

- Extending biodiversity-frameworks to more UKOTs;
- Challenges in land-acquisition for conservation in high-cost island jurisdictions;
- Supporting the implementation of biodiversity-goals with realistic time-frames;
- Spatial planning and climate-resilience;
- The role of Parliament and public awareness in securing long-term support for UKOT biodiversity;
- Financing opportunities beyond public funds, including nature-based solutions and sustainable investment partnerships.

Minister Creagh acknowledged the financial challenges territories face and encouraged smarter approaches to land-use and conservation-storytelling. She stressed also the need for better coordination across UK departments and improved engagement with MPs to increase awareness of UKOT biodiversity-issues within Westminster.

Following Minister Creagh's remarks, Minister John Cortés of Gibraltar *(above)* offered a complementary perspective from within the territories. He reflected on his long-standing friendship with Minister Creagh and praised her commitment to environmental issues. He acknowledged the progress made in the UK Government's engagement with Overseas Territories, noting how ministerial involvement in such forums has significantly increased over recent decades – a welcome shift from earlier years when such attention was rare.

Minister Cortés discussed the unique environmental challenges faced by small territories like Gibraltar, particularly regarding space, energy-transition, and waste-management. He highlighted Gibraltar's forthcoming 25-year Environment Plan, as well as its efforts in climate-change adaptation and active travel strategies, which seek to balance development and environmental protection.

Drawing on 14 years in the role, Minster Cortés stressed that even small jurisdictions have a responsibility to contribute to global climate-action and biodiversity-protection, noting that local actions, such as adopting renewable energy, often bring direct benefits such as improved air-quality.

Minister Cortés echoed the call to move beyond viewing UKOTs as a "niche" concern, asserting that the territories should be seen both as a collective and in their own right – enriched by diversity but united in purpose. He also praised the growing capacity within the territories, citing institutions like the University of Gibraltar as examples of local leadership in research and education.

Minster Cortés closed by noting the significance of co-creating the forthcoming UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy, describing it as a transformation in the way environmental policy is developed – no longer imposed from above, but shaped by the territories themselves.

Opening and Topic 1: Sharing Experiences across territories
(Rapporteur: Adam Riggs, St Helena)

The first day of the UKOTCF conference got off to a strong start. Following an initial introduction from Mike Pienkowski thanking participants, presenters and organisations supporting the conference, with a special mention to St Helena for having the most participants and Gibraltar for most content, the morning session

Helena Bennett (Executive Director, St Helena National Trust and UKOTCF Council) chaired Topic 1.

opened with a series of presentations showcasing conservation initiatives across the territories.

Rowen Henthorn kicked off the conference presenting the four-year Manx Blue Carbon Project, highlighting how marine habitats store carbon and support biodiversity. With 85% of the Isle of Man's territory being ocean, marine habitats are crucial natural carbon-sinks. Research revealed that the Western Irish Sea mud belt is a major carbon-store, but it is vulnerable to fishing. To assess the impacts of mobile fishing-gear, three areas were closed to fishing for three years. Mapping of eelgrass meadows showed that 39% of these habitats lie outside protected areas, highlighting an urgent need for enhanced management. Despite lower carbon-density compared to other regions, these habitats remain ecologically important.

Questions from the audience prompted a valuable discussion on stakeholder-engagement with emphasis on the importance of close collaboration with fishers, transparent communication and the use of visual storytelling to engage both the fishing community and the wider public in blue-carbon protection.

Neil Thorp, Kenickie Andrews and Jolan Henry shared encouraging findings from St Helena, where masked boobies have naturally recolonised Sandy Bay after a long absence. Once driven from the mainland by predation and human activity, new colonies were first recorded in 2009. Monitoring under a Darwin Local Project (DPLUS00033) showed fledging success rates comparable to Ascension Island, despite ongoing threats from feral cats, rodents and myna birds. Capacity-building through training local staff in ringing techniques has been key for further long-term study of the species. A further Darwin Project will include the use of drones and machine-learning to enhance coastal monitoring. The team noted that seabirds remain deeply valued by islanders, particularly by fishers who rely on them as indicators of fish.

Staying with St Helena, Liza Fowler presented her work surveying and learning more about St Helena's endemic cloud -forest invertebrates. Through ecological studies, DNA-analysis and red-listing of 106 species, the project has revealed important relationships between habitat-type and species-richness. Restoration sites have shown the highest diversity, with species such as the silver grass-miner moth and ammonite snail tied closely to native plants. However, some non-native vegetation, including whiteweed and flax, also supports a surprising range of endemic invertebrates. Discussions after the presentation highlighted that invasive-plant removal must be approached gradually to avoid unintended ecological loss.

Whiteweed *Austroeupatorium inulifolium*

Research on sea-turtle ecology in the Chagos Archipelago revealed the region's global importance as a nesting and foraging refuge for over 6,000 hawksbill and 20,000 green turtles annually. Satellite-tracking shows green turtles foraging across the western Indian ocean, reaching as far as the Seychelles and East Africa, whereas hawksbills tend to remain local, feeding in deeper mesophotic reefs. Questions from the audience addressed the pressing issues facing turtles today. While plastic pollution has been found on nesting beaches, impacts on foraging turtles appear minimal, so far. Additionally, the region's relatively cool, vegetated beaches help maintain balanced sex-ratios which is helping to mitigate impacts of climate-change.

The later sessions turned the spotlight on community-engagement and education. Presentations from Gibraltar Botanic Gardens showcased how embedding environmental awareness, especially for young people, can have positive impacts to highlight rare and

vulnerable species. Using different methods, such as education-tours, gardening clubs, bird and butterfly identification, can help make sure these activities are not instruction-heavy.

On East Caicos, a goal of developing a community-vision for the island has helped to involve many people and empower communities. Through workshops and interviews identifying areas of importance and mapping community-values.

Amdeep Sanghera presented on a community-voice method and how this approach has advantages to traditional consultation-methods, explaining the five stages of project design, research, deliberation, reporting and action. The use of this method can be positive and has been demonstrated throughout several Overseas Territories.

Next, the team led by UKOTCF and Montserrat National Trust sumarised aspects of their series of projects over recent years in "Healing Landscapes; Community, Culture and Conservation in Montserrat's Botanical Heritage."

Finally, Jess Vagg from the Zoological Society of London presented on the work carried out as part of the South Atlantic plastics project showcasing the community-led interventions as

well as working with the community to improve the understanding of the importation, use and disposal of single-use plastics.

Overall, the sessions stressed that community involvement is an effective way to educate and get positive outcomes from conservation-projects that involve the whole community, especially on islands.

Topic 2: 3rd Sir Richard & Lady Dace Ground Lecture *(Rapporteur: Dr Keith Bensusan, Gibraltar)*

The 3rd Sir Richard and Lady Dace Ground Lecture: ***Whose environment is it anyway? Models of Intergenerational Stewardship in Bermuda by*** Myles Darrell, Head of Natural Heritage, Bermuda National Trust

The first day of the conference ended with the third 'Sir Richard and Lady Dace Ground Lecture', delivered by Myles Darrell. Anyone familiar with Myles knows that he's a gifted communicator, and this lecture did not disappoint.

Before Myles began, Mike Pienkowski explained the background to the Ground Lectures, including the very significant contributions made by Sir Richard and Lady Dace to the environment in Grand Cayman, Turks & Caicos and Bermuda. Lady Ground was meant to have co-chaired the session, but unfortunately, she was unable to do so due to illness, for which she was receiving treatment. The conference wished her a speedy recovery. Ann Pienkowski *(top of next page)* – who, for many years has worked with Dace to run UKOTCF's Wider Caribbean Working Group – then introduced Myles, who began his lecture by emphasising the incredible impact that the Grounds had in Bermuda.

Several themes ran through Myles' inspirational lecture. The first was social responsibility. He emphasised the importance of volunteers in environmental work – and of valuing volunteers – to make conservation work truly sustainable. Another theme that stood out was the importance of community: putting 'we' before 'me'. Linked to community was inclusivity. Ensuring that every sector of society can engage with conservation is essential

in an ethnically and economically diverse society and, moreover, serious social challenges are not separate from the environment; they interact. For example, in a space as small as Bermuda, making open space accessible isn't just environmental work, it's social work.

Much of the lecture's emphasis was on working with and empowering young people. Bermuda has an impressive volunteer-base and a significant proportion of this are young. Youngsters must complete 25 hours of community-service at school, including environmental work such as planting native species and monitoring breeding birds using digital technology. This seems a useful policy for other territories to adopt.

Intergenerational connections were also highlighted. Community-knowledge survives through such relationships: older people have the knowledge and skills; the youth have energy, curiosity and the power to act. Harnessing all these leads to the most successful outcomes.

Myles *(above)* illustrated each of these with inspiring examples: a grandmother and granddaughter who, for the first time, planted a tree together; a young lady who turned an area of invasive vegetation into a thriving pollinator-garden by inspiring a group of young people to participate; a young man who volunteered beyond his Duke of Edinburgh work, helping to mentor other young people; habitat-restoration funded by the private sector; university projects that have produced effective action-plans;

citizen-science programmes that maximise participation and lead to informed decisions; meeting multiple needs by planting native species but also crops that are donated to social charities.

Finally, a structured and measurable framework was presented in which volunteers and students are integral to every plan, package and outcome. The Bermuda view is that stewardship is the shared responsibility of all generations, led by volunteers, rooted in community and looking towards the future.

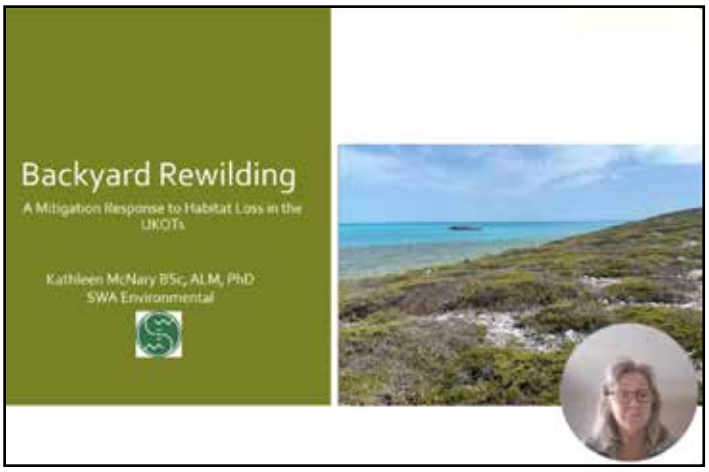
Day 2

Topic 3: Achieving Biodiversity & Sustainability Targets *(Rapporteur: Mike Jervois, Falkland Islands)*

Joan Walley, UKOTCF Council Member and former Chair of the House of Commons Environmental Audit Select Committee, chaired Topic 3.

Danni Sherwood and Daryl Joshua shared their taxonomic work on St Helenian spiders. They have discovered several new spider species, including one endemic wolf-spider that is found only on Mt Vesey – it may be one of the most restricted invertebrate species in the world. Contributing to St Helena's long-term invertebrate programme, they are gathering important information about invertebrates in order to conserve them.

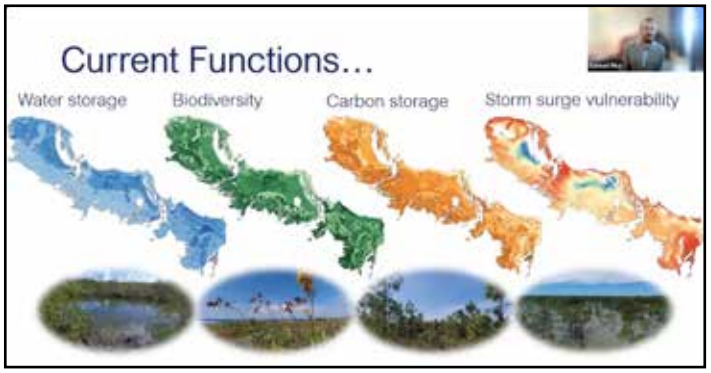
Kathleen McNary shared her experience and unique philosophy of backyard rewilding: applying social-science principles towards ecological restoration. The phrase 'more-than-human' encouraged a conservation-mindset that is inclusive of people and wildlife,



and of urban areas not exclusively for the use of people. Her experiments in rewilding showed that biodiversity recovered if we are patient and humble – an important lesson for us all.

David Bellamy from Manx Wildlife Trust (MWT) shared his story of restoring land and sea on the Isle of Man. MWT owns several nature reserves that contribute to 30-by-30 targets. He encouraged a transition from 'nature conservation' to 'nature recovery.' Embracing this approach, MWT is moving towards landscape-scale projects where they can have a larger impact. Collaboration with the central wildlife trust provides funding that helps achieve goals.

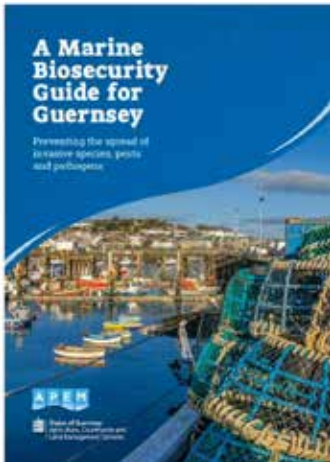
Samuel Pike, from Environment Systems Ltd, spoke of the benefits of datasets and how local knowledge is essential for informing conservation-priorities. The challenge is to be able to adapt datasets to be meaningful for small islands. Opportunities exist for looking creatively at the available data and applying it to help solve problems on the ground. But he stressed that the most important thing is being able to connect science with people.



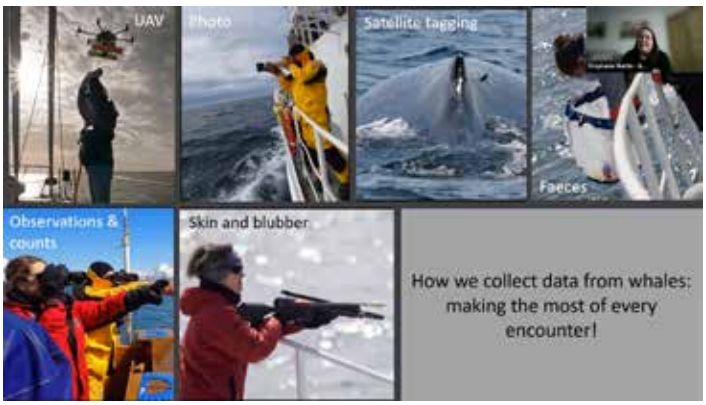
Adam Riggs *(top of next column)*, from St Helena, shared his work in mapping invertebrates in order to conserve them. He used location-data from existing records and computer-software to determine where species occur. He found that St Helena's

protected areas support the majority of invertebrate-habitats. His findings will benefit the management of protected areas and could even be used as evidence for their future expansion.

Julia Henney and Lucinda Lintott presented Guernsey's new marine biosecurity plan. Preventing invasive species from entering the island is the main priority. The plan was developed in consultation with stakeholders. Actions include control, research, monitoring and creating new laws. The next steps include integrating the plan into daily life and securing funding to deliver it, particularly for new infrastructure and the development of legislation.



Stephanie Martin shared exciting news about the recovery of baleen whales in South Georgia as part of the Wild Water Whales project. Whaling had devastated populations over the past 100+ years but numbers are increasing steadily. Data are being gathered about their range, diet, age and genetics to inform recovery efforts. This information is also helping to ensure South Georgia's marine management is as effective as possible.



Quentin Groom and Sofie Meeus, from Meise Botanic Garden in Belgium, presented their work on the Global Biodiversity Information Facility. Highlighting the importance of collecting, storing and managing data, they urged that having robust biodiversity-data is essential for informed decision-making about the environment. They advocated for free-access data-sharing, rather than sovereignty of data. Citizen-science data-collections are also incredibly valuable tools.

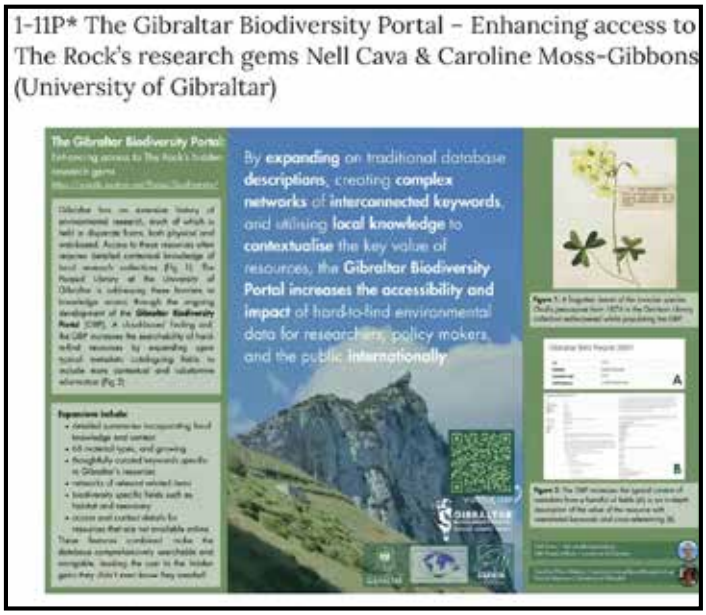
Lastly, Tyann Henry from the Fisheries Transparency Initiative (FiTI), spoke about fisheries transparency in small islands. FiTI is supporting coastal countries to enhance the accessibility, credibility and usability of national fisheries management-information. Tyann considered that a lack of basic transparency is a huge factor for illegal fishing, and having publicly available information is essential to achieving sustainable fisheries. FiTI does not currently work with UKOTs but is interested in any opportunities to do so.

Topic 4: Online Posters Session *(Rapporteur Dr Jodey Peyton)*
(* indicates student poster)

Catherine Wensink *(above)* opened the session with the first poster for the ***Topic 1 Theme Sharing Experiences***, *1-10P Managing the effects of Human Impacts on our marine environment (Leeann Henry, St Helena Government)*, which was an initiative looking to protect the marine environment from tourism.

The second poster, presented by Nell Cava, was on *1-11P* The Gibraltar Biodiversity Portal – Enhancing access to The Rock's research gems (Nell Cava & Caroline Moss-Gibbons, University of Gibraltar)* which looks to make biodiversity-data easier to access.

The next poster in the theme Sharing Experiences, was *1-12P Isle of Man bats (Nick Pinder, Manx Bat Group)* which outlined the



work of the Manx Bat Group. All UK species of bats, including those found on the Isle of Man, are insectivorous and highly sensitive to environmental changes, making them effective indicators of nocturnal insect populations and wider ecosystem-health. This poster highlighted the broad range of work the Bat Group is doing.

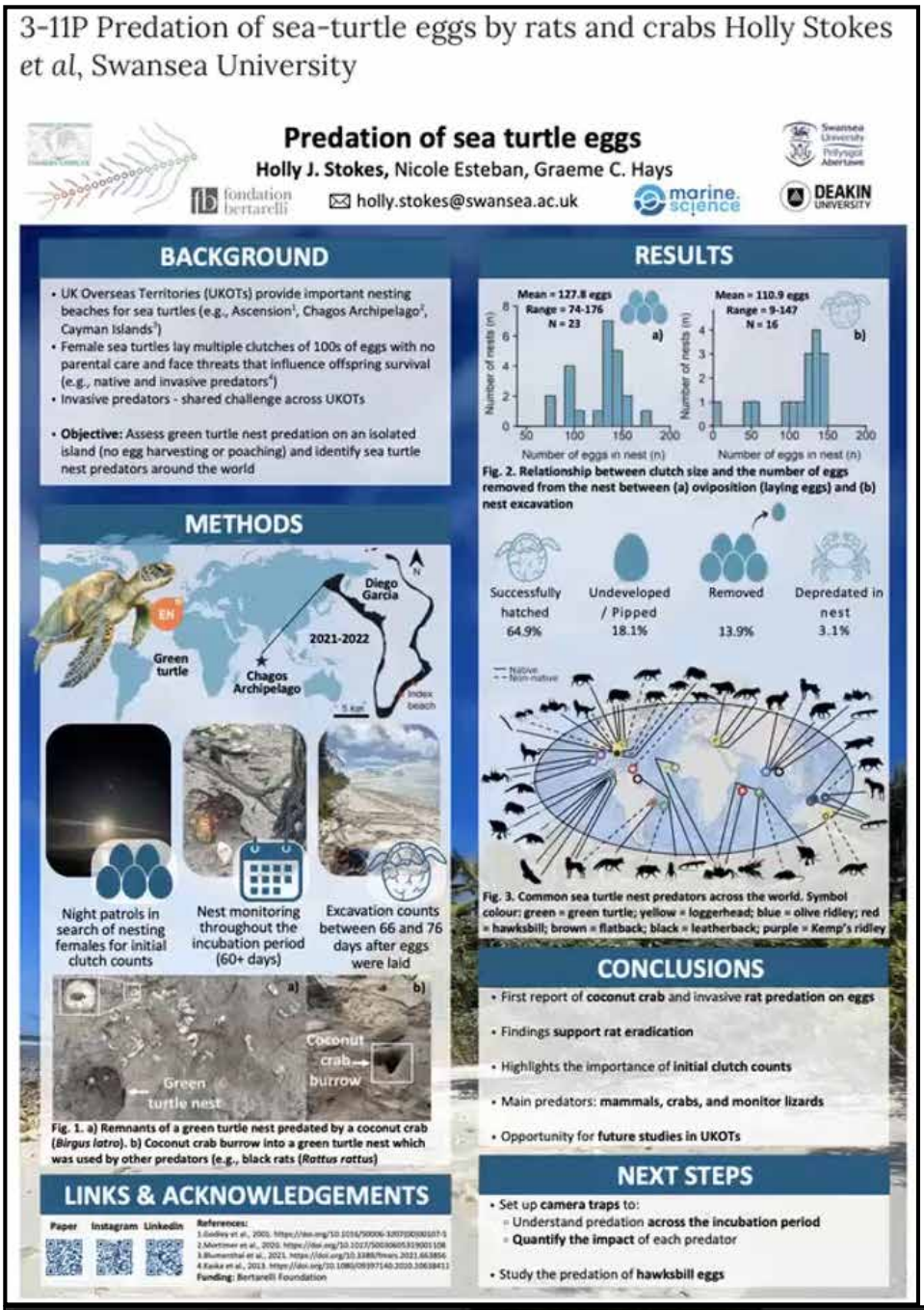
The next two posters were from the Falklands, *1-13 Managing Calafate* Berberis microphylla *in the Falkland Islands: A Strategic Approach to Landscape-Scale Invasive Species Control (Michael Lavery, Kaitiaki o te Ngahere & Indigena Biosecurity International)* and *1-14 Calafate & Community in the Falkland Islands (Erica Berntsen, Department of Agriculture, Falkland Islands Government)*. These posters both show the challenges experienced on these islands in managing this problematic species but how, alongside a systematic control strategy, working closely with an engaged community can enable large-scale invasive non-native species control.

The next set of posters was in the ***Topic 3 Theme: Achieving Biodiversity & Sustainability Targets***. The first of these posters was actually a fold-out guide: *3-10P Grasses of Montserrat (Virginie Sealys, Montserrat National Trust et al.)* and it shows a really nice example of a communication aid that will support plant-identification. There is a lack of field resources for Montserrat on their flora and this guide forms part of a toolkit of resources to help Montserratians to support biodiversity on their island.

We then moved to poster *(top of next page) 3-11P Predation of sea-turtle eggs by rats and crabs (Holly Jayne Stokes, Swansea University et al.)*. I was personally delighted to see Dr Holly Stokes as she was undertaking her PhD in Diego Garcia in 2022 when I was there. This fascinating poster reported for the first time the predation of green turtle eggs by coconut crabs and rats, and highlights the importance of making initial clutch-counts.

The next poster, *3-12P Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (Catherine Wensink, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum)* highlights the growing importance of Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures for supporting not only global biodiversity-targets but also ecological sustainability and social equity.

Poster *3-13P Restoring Biodiversity with urban pockets (Katrina Jurn, Sustainable Cayman) (see next page)* was a fantastic example of piloting nature-based solutions in urban areas to create pockets of land more resilient to the rapidly changing environment due to climate-change. What is particularly inspiring about this work is that it is youth-led and is being done at a very affordable scale locally. There was an accompanying video for this poster here:



https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/3-13P_Katrina-Jurn.mp4.

The final poster for this topic, *3-14P Manx Birdlife (Allison Leonard, Manx Birdlife)*, showed the wonderful range of projects being undertaken by Manx Birdlife including the Hen Harrier and Chough censuses, the Birds of Conservation Concern and Education and Citizen Science. This work is providing both the evidence and the community-engagement so essential for successful projects!

The next poster was the first linked to ***Session 5: Using technology and data to inform and monitor conservation and novel approaches to address threats to biodiversity*** and the first in the series of posters was *5-09P* Tracking Change: Phytoplankton Trend Analysis in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters (Marre Linthorst, University of Gibraltar et al.)* on her work undertaking a standardised sampling strategy for phytoplankton in Gibraltar. What stood out in this talk was that the work, as with many other examples in the posters, is filling a critical knowledge gap for the marine environment.

Poster *5-10P* The Dietary Dynamics of Red Foxes* Vulpes vulpes *amidst Changing Rabbit Availability (Jemila Mellin, University of Gibraltar, et al.)* highlighted the importance of baseline-data on both rabbit and fox populations in Gibraltar, offering insights into their abundance, behaviour and dietary patterns. The video to accompany this poster can be seen here: https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Jemila-Mellin-Conference-Poster-with-audio.pptx.

The next poster, *5-11P Ecological insights and conservation challenges for the Orange Cup Coral* Astroides calycularis *in the Western Mediterranean (Awantha Dissanayake, University of Gibraltar)* celebrated a range of efforts to conserve the Orange Cup Coral in Gibraltar, including the successful transplantation of 79 coral colonies alongside engagement with 500 divers.

Poster *5-12P* Establishing a Baseline Characterisation of Marine Benthic Taxa and Trophic Structure in Guernsey: Evaluating the Ecological Impact of Local Fisheries (Eve Torode, University of Gibraltar)* showed again the importance of baseline-data in understanding the ecology of systems. Less than 1% of waters around Jersey are protected and this work is helping scientists understand what is needed to support marine biodiversity.

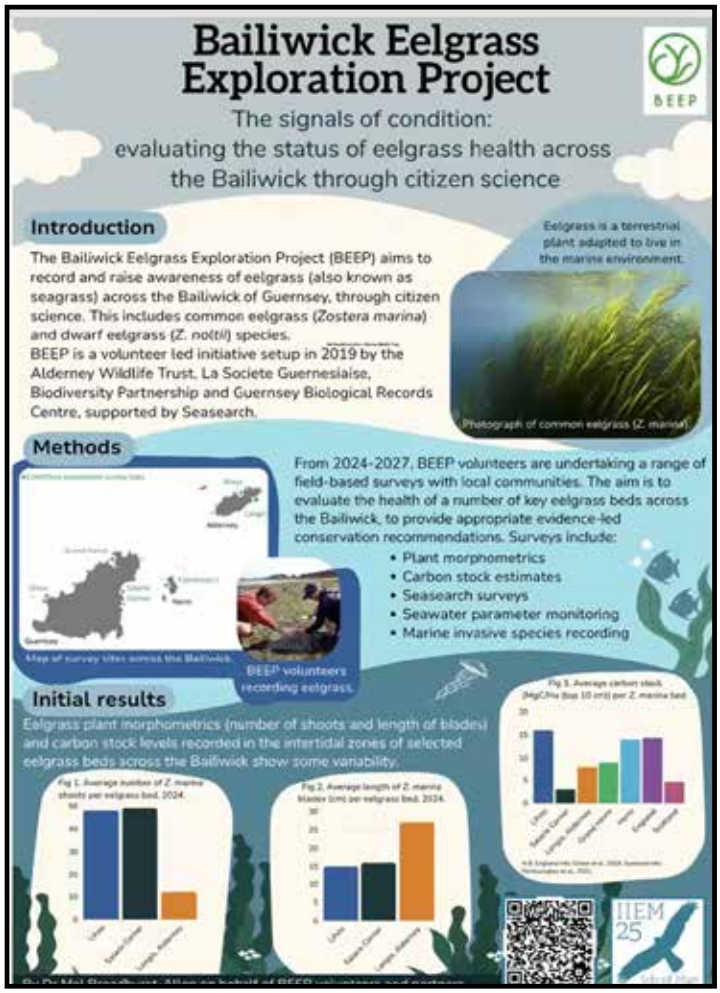
The next poster *5-13P* Invasive Species dominate tree canopies in Bermuda's protected areas (Alison Copeland, Durham University et al.)* gave a fascinating insight into the plant

community composition around Bermuda. It showed staggering levels of invasion of both inland and coastal areas and indicated where conservation-management priorities should be given to protect endemic and native trees.

5-14P Ants of the Akrotiri UK SBA, Cyprus (Jakovos Demetriou, Joint Services Health Unit, et al.)* showed, as with many of the posters, the importance of getting out and surveying for species on the ground. The surveys found that the Akrotiri SBA holds 59% of the ant-fauna of Cyprus, with more invasive non-native species being found in urban areas and more endemic species found in natural areas.

Poster *5-15P Persistence, Accuracy and Timeliness: Finding, Mapping and Managing Non-Native Plant Species on the island of South Georgia (Bradley Myer, Indigena Biosecurity International)* gave an overview of the inspiring work of the Government of South Georgia and Indigena in eradicating and managing invasive plants on South Georgia. Since 2016, seven species are no longer present after successful control and 10 species have been discovered and prevented from establishing further. This work is ongoing as the risk of emergence from the seedbank is high.

Poster *5-16P Bailiwick Eelgrass Project, BEEP (Dr Mel Broadhurst-Allen, Alderney Wildlife Trust)* was presented on behalf of multiple organisations in the Bailiwick of Guernsey. The BEEP project was set up in 2019 and using a range of techniques to monitor the sea-grass, volunteers from the community are getting involved.



5.17P *Bugs in our drawers (Laura McCoy, Manx National Heritage)* was a wonderful poster looking at the major effort to conserve their entomology collection – the largest natural science collection in its care, with over 78,000 insect specimens, mostly pinned and historically significant.

Poster *5-18P Sea turtles at shallow depths (Kimberly Stokes, University of Swansea)* was the last in this Topic and showed several fascinating discoveries. The first was that hawks-bill turtles in the waters around Diego Garcia were spending a lot of time in shallow lagoons, avoiding predators in the deeper water of the lagoon. The second finding, from tracking female green turtles across the western Indian Ocean, was that they spend a lot of time in shallower water (3 times their body depth on average), which helps to conserve energy. This relationship was also seen in other taxa.

The only poster in ***Topic 7 Theme Funding/resourcing*** was *7-08P* Evidence of Barriers to Marine Conservation in UK Overseas Territories: A Practitioner-Informed Study (Natalie Muirhead-Davies, University of Gibraltar)*. This poster highlighted the importance of enabling existing initiatives through sustainable financing and for these to be supported in-house rather than relying on external support. The poster gave examples of multiple barriers including limited funding and resources, data-gaps, and weak enforcement-capacity, governance-challenges, political disputes, and low community buy-in.

The results of the voting (above) were totalled ad announced on the last day of the conference.

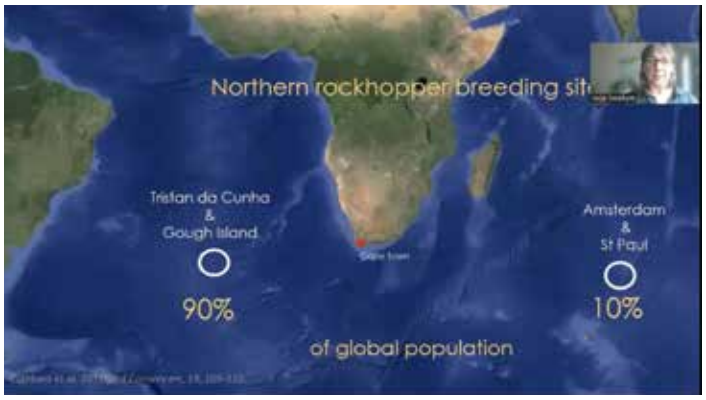
Topic 5: Using technology and data to inform and monitor conservation and novel approaches to address threats to biodiversity *(Rapporteur: Dr Keith Bensusan, Gibraltar)*

Andy Pearce, UKOTCF Council-member and former Governor of Montserrat chaired Topic 5.

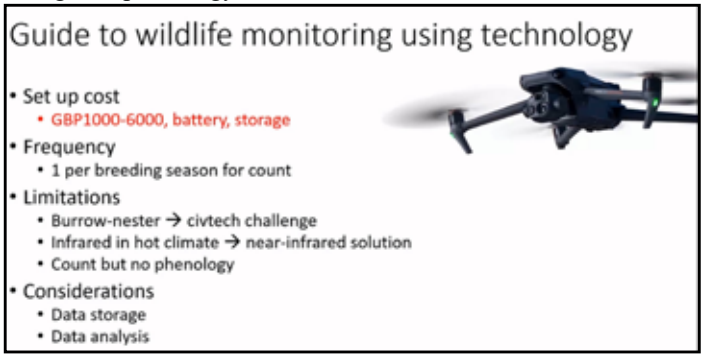
This session on the cutting edge of biodiversity conservation introduced subjects relating to novel technology. It didn't focus only on how it aids science and conservation: the first talk by Jasper Montana outlined social considerations too. Although

satellite-technology has led to huge advances in research and monitoring, people need to remain at the forefront of users' minds, e.g., data may reveal geographic location, but not ownership of land or significance for local communities. People in the places we seek to care for must be key to our thinking and planning.

From there, we explored applicability of technological advances. A survey of Northern Rockhopper Penguins of the Tristan Archipelago, by Antje Steinfurth and colleagues, relies on classic data-collection techniques consistent with long-term data.



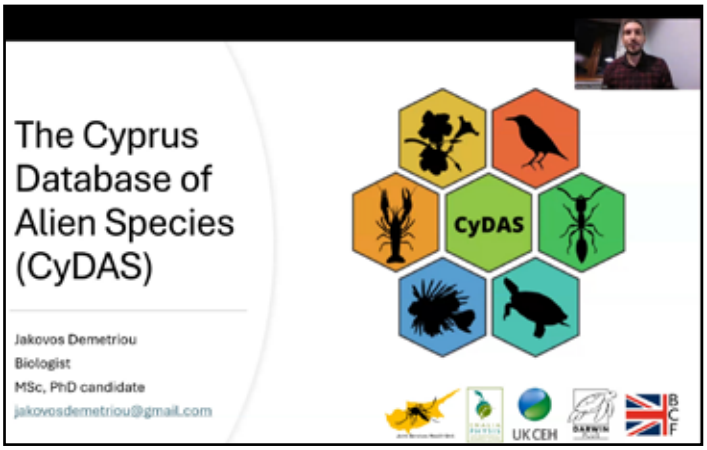
Traditional monitoring has its limitations, and Tom Hart & Laure Cugnière's gave an exciting exposition of the possibilities available using fixed cameras, drones and AI. Imaging, remote sensing, citizen-science and computer-training are being used to monitor nesting ecology of penguins at several sites in the Southern Ocean. This efficient and relatively inexpensive new approach is yielding extremely useful data, e.g., on climate-related changes in phenology.



Thomas Heller & Nancy Pascoe showed how a multidisciplinary approach in BVI, harnessing new technology, can successfully assist biodiversity protection, climate-change modelling and development-planning. The study relied on field-data, GIS-modelling, genomics and seed-biology of the flora of BVI *(top of next column)*.

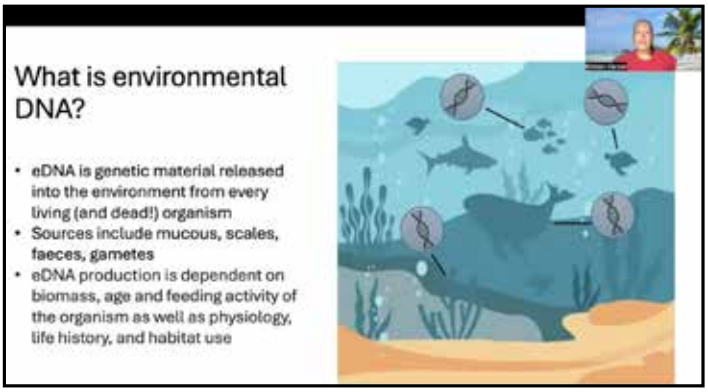
Another database was introduced by Jakovos Demetriou and colleagues: the CyDAS database of invasive species in Cyprus. Such data are important to islands, with their fragile ecosystems

with high levels of endemism. The data are used to ask important questions about exotic species and native ecosystems that are relevant to their management.



Selena Gough & Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks introduced iRecord St Helena, a biological data-recording platform tailored for St Helena, with citizen-science capabilities. It works via a website and mobile app, is open source, and links to other platforms such as iNaturalist. This shows how, with a sufficiently powerful, user-friendly tool and community-engagement, citizen-science can help build biological databases, effectively manage data and support evidence-based decision-making in a small territory.

eDNA sequencing is one of the most exciting advances in biodiversity-research. Kirsten Harper and colleagues showcased its use in an ecological study of the marine environment around the Pitcairn Islands. They highlighted the advantages and



disadvantages of a multi-species approach. Lack of detection of elasmobranchs was offset by detection of patterns in use of depths and habitats, as well as accessing difficult-to-sample habitats at significant depths.

A practical example of the use of virtual technology in marine conservation was highlighted by Katie McPherson: the use of virtual markers to highlight 'Areas To Be Avoided' (ATBA) around the Tristan archipelago. These alert large vessels along busy shipping lanes to the ABTAs, which helps to protect internationally important seabird colonies and marine ecosystems from accidents at sea. There has been a marked decline in vessels sailing close to the islands since the declaration of the ATBAs.

New technology is exciting and, although costs can be prohibitive, they are becoming more accessible. The session illustrated the methods and expertise available in the UKOTs and their networks, and we have no doubt the talks have provided a renewed impetus to harness the scientific methods of the digital age.

Topic 6: Identifying and preparing for future challenges and opportunities *(Rapporteur: John Pinel, Jersey)*

Dr Mike Pienkowski stood in to chair Topic 6 becuse, unfortunately local challenges prevented Mrs Sarita Francis from joining.

Roots of Resilience: How Nature Fights Climate Change in the BVI (Katie Medcalf, Nancy Pascoe & Samuel Pike , Environmental Systems & National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands)

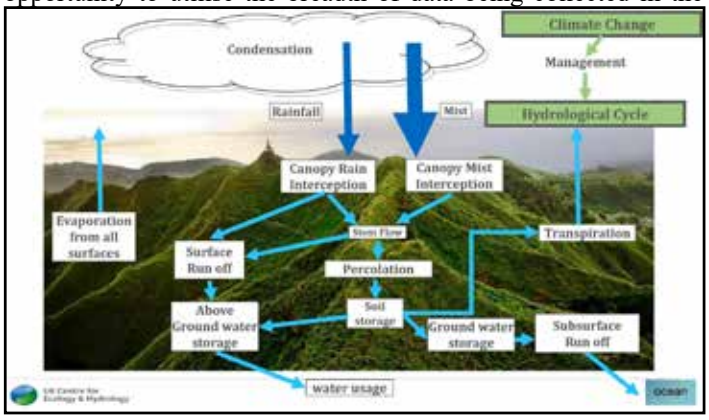
Katie described how our natural ecosystems provide a powerful ally to combat the impacts of climate-change. She spoke about the damage caused by hurricanes in recent years and summarised the impact of a warming climate, particularly on small islands. She explained the benefits of robust ecosystems; how native trees provide shade, and how native vegetation prevents erosion and contributes to ground-water resources to alleviate flooding, stemming sediment and pollutants from harming the reef systems. Their team used 500 data-sets, including; climate; remote sensing and tidal data, working with local experts and stakeholders at all stages of project, to develop robust data and visual aids, such as maps to educate locals and build capacity, as well as cartoons to help educate younger people.

What the future could be – Changes in breeding success of Gough Island's seabird populations in response to the house mouse eradication attempt in 2021 (Antje Steinfurth et al RSPB Centre for Conservation Science, & Tristan Conservation Department,)

Antje presented the results of a mouse eradication programme on Gough Island, describing it as 65 sq km of beauty (and about the size of Guernsey). There are 8 million birds from 24 species (22 sea-birds and 2 land-birds), many of them endemic. Non-native mice arrived in 19th C, leading to an annual loss of some 2 million sea-bird eggs and chicks. More recently there has been mortality in adult birds too. This very complex undertaking in 2021 unfortunately saw a mouse recorded in December and, by April 2022, the population had increased again. However, despite the lack of success in complete eradication, the drop in mouse-numbers enabled 6 of the 7 species monitored for breeding success to increase recruitment, with MacGillivray's prion showing the greatest increase of 76%. New eradication proposals are currently being developed.

Ecosystem Integrity Assessments, GBIF (Alan Gray, UKCEH, & Rebecca Cairns-Wickes, St Helena)

Alan introduced the concept of Ecosystem Integrity (EI) Assessments to the conference. He described EI as the "intactness of ecosystems with their associated ecological properties". The methodology assesses change over time, compared against a set of predefined indicators. A wide range of data types can be used, with more data necessary for more complex systems being studied. Alan described a wide range of opportunities for using EI assessments, from red-listing, to climate-change impacts. Alan discussed the opportunity to utilise the breadth of data being collected in the



UKOTs. The presentation prompted a number of questions, which Alan answered by explaining that;

- as much data as possible can be used to make the assessments more robust;
- that it can be applied at scale;
- and that his view is that longer-term funding is important, not just for EI, but for many projects which often are not provided with longer-term funding for monitoring and improvements.

Alan Gray and Mike Pienkowski agreed that the UK administration does not generally recognise the international opportunity that the UKOTs provide by their importance, as the UK could again be a world-leader in conservation as relatively small financial contributions from the UK could be major at island-scale.

Education and Youth Participation in the National Trust for the Cayman Islands (Catherine Childs, Environmental Programmes Manager, National Trust for the Cayman Islands)

Cathy Childs introduced the conference to the wide range of educational activities that the National Trust are conducting in Cayman. Their programme includes everything from a smart phone app, which can be used by visitors and locals alike to explore the island, to the 'Heritage Heroes' programme, which empowers young people in conservation and heritage activities. The programme takes students out of the classroom to experience their local heritage, from nature conservation to interviews with older residents in order to share experiences and island history. Catherine expressed their desire to make the material widely available and much can be found on their website, here: https://nationaltrust.org.ky/our-work/education/ed-programmes/. Catherine summed up by explaining that their objective is to make young people feel empowered, to feel that their voices matter, and to take ownership of the best things about Cayman. Catherine answered a number of questions around funding, explaining that the phone app was developed with Darwin Plus funds, whilst the Heritage Heroes programme is funded by local businesses with whom the National Trust develops close working relationships.

Main topic 7: Funding/ resourcing (Rapporteur: Dr Jodey Peyton)

7-01 Fundraising for South Georgia – obstacles and opportunities (Alison Neil, South Georgia Heritage Trust). Alison gave a wonderful overview of the range of work undertaken on South Georgia and the importance of a diversity

Leigh Morris chaired Topic 7.

of funding mechanisms. These include auctions and paper donation forms for boat-visitors and legacy-gifts. Donors and supporters are frequently given updates on the incredible range of work done, to thank them. What stood out for me was the way that this fundraising supports all the work done, not just the more glamorous but the important behind-the-scenes work. Also, the way that engaging a wide range of stakeholders means there are advocates for your work all over the world. A great example of this is the Friends of the South Georgia Islands who can support the work from the USA. The UK Antarctic Heritage Trust is a regular partner of SGHT and does partnered online auctions. Alison advocates working with other charities as this is often seen as important with funders.

7-02 The Power of Partnerships (Nigel Cheesley, Head of Sustainability for Lloyds Bank International in the Crown Dependencies) Nigel started his talk by giving some history around climate-targets and the development of the Paris Agreement and the initiatives committing to NetZero. He then moved on to the markets around carbon-credits. Nigel highlighted the benefits of Nature-based Solutions for both the environment and people, and went on to talk about the challenges around carbon-credits and the lag in funding until the credits pay back. He shared that, in this case, working with "offtakers" is a possibility to reduce the risks around carbon-credits. Nigel then showed a video about their successful partnership in the Isle of Man.

7-03 Eco-Match: Enabling Corporate Partnerships for Conservation (Leigh Morris & Jodey Peyton, UKOTCF) Leigh started the talk by introducing the background to EcoMatch and the importance of understanding each other's terminologies between conservation and finance. He went on to give examples of commercial organisations where he has seen a real desire to support conservation and that within UKOTCF. He explained that the UKOTCF wanted to make a "dating" platform to link the wonderful conservation projects happening in the UKOTs and CDs with the private sector. Jodey then went on to talk about how the platform was developed and showcased some of the examples. Participants and the wider audience were encouraged to get their projects registered on the page (https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/ecomatch/). You can find out more about this project on pages 21-

22 of this issue of *Forum News*.

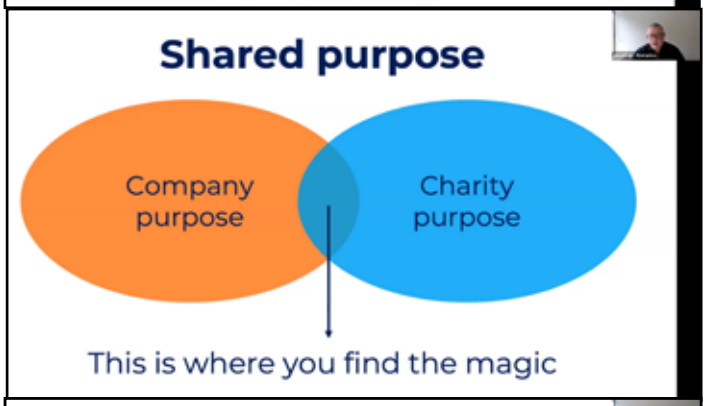
7-04 The importance of sustainable finance and showcase how both UKOTCF and Manx Wildlife Trust are working with him (Greg Easton, MD, Resilience Asset Management). Greg started his talk by recognising the importance of the EcoMatch platform to get projects promoted. He invited conservationists to be ambitious on the scale and scope of their ask. He reiterated that it is important to look forward to see what you would want to look back on and have changed. Greg then went on to talk about how Resilience Asset Management has developed a questionnaire for determining how important different Global Targets are to charities for their financial investment goals. Greg concluded by saying that Resilience Asset Management came from a background where it invested in traditional projects, it now wants the business to be run on sustainable initiatives and so has set aside 10% of their business for conservation!

7-05 Biodiversity NGO Fundraising Structures are Broken: To What Extent Might a Marketing Requirement be the Solution? (Robin Clough) Robin introduced himself; his background as a zoologist and then his move into business and now his role as an advisor to the UKOTCF, RSPB, Marine Conservation Society, ReWild and the African Conservation World. He explained that his Masters thesis with the Harvard Business School was in how marketing might be the solution to the biodiversity crisis. He outlined how the UKOTs and CDs are reliant on government and philanthropic funding and the accompanying burden that this gives for reporting, and the push for writing papers (that might not be visible). Last year, between USD 500-800 billion was given to biodiversity funding. Robin invited participants to think forward about how biodiversity will be in the future, given where it is now. He suggested that, if the vision for the biodiversity-trajectory was not good, we need to be the influencers of change and diversify our funding. He believes we need to reset our work to look at funding at a larger scale. Robin visited a UKOT last year and realised that a lot of the high-wealth visitors were not visiting the local National Trust. Conservation is being outcompeted by social influencers and he wants to change this. His solution is the fact that the ability for us to connect, locally, nationally and globally has never been easier. Working with ReWild, he is hoping to offer conservationists to get the training they need to inform their marketing. Robin suggested really pushing the marketing about the amazing work being done in the UKOTs and CDs. He ended his talk by saying that now is the time to change the tide and put the UKOT and CD heroes on the frontline of promotion. Robin said that he cannot see current funding sources getting higher and there are uncertainties that it will even keep going – he wants everyone to be ready if that ever happens. Robin suggested setting up a call after the event to discuss how this can be done as now is the time for action!

At the end of the first session on this last day, Graham Makepeace-Warne from the Manx Wildlife Trust gave a quick update on a new initiative to support talented young people working in conservation. MWT were gifted a house recently and it is being refurbished by the donor. This house, as well as supporting local conservationists, will allow for one internship each year to be offered for a candidate from the UKOTs and CDs. Leigh Morris added that, if there is an appetite for the scheme, they will hope to offer more places! *UKOTCF will share the information with their Working Groups when it is announced.*

7-06 Lloyds Bank: Partner of Choice for the UKOTs (Matt Pendrey, Head of UK Government & British Overseas Territories, Lloyds Banking Group) Matt kicked off the first of the final two talks for the second session, talking about his UKOTs and Government team. He shared that there are four people in the team focussed on supporting the UKOTs and they want to become the number-one banking partner in the UKOTs. They work with UKOTCF and the FCDO and want to have a greater presence in the UKOTs. They have a huge arm to sustainability and are targeting £30bn between 2025-2027; at £16.1bn as of 30th June 2025. They want their team to lead investment in the UKOTs and help Britain (including the UKOTs) access banking. They work closely with UKOTs currently by working with the territory governments. He mentioned working with the UKOTCF and The Wildlife Trusts to find ways to support the UKOTs and raising the profile of the great work of the UKOTs.

7-07 Collaborate for Conservation (Jonathan Andrews, Remarkable Partnerships) Jonathan gave his talk which gave three examples of where business partnerships are supporting conservation. The first was the LUSH-Sumatran Orangutan Society collaboration. The engagement went beyond the initial donation to expand the awareness of the conservation work. The second was the work between the Marriott Hotel Group and IUCN protecting reefs in Malaysia. The hotels also encouraged tourists to go to see the reefs and support the planting of mangroves for conservations. The final example was Sodexo working with WWF to provide meals and raise funds. Jonathan ended his fascinating talk by giving three recommendations for people looking to work with corporate partners: 1) identify your target prospects; 2) focus on solving the company's pain by asking what their objectives and



challenges are; and 3) share emotionally engaging stories. Jonathan then moved into an interactive session led by Leigh Morris and himself. In this session Jonathan reiterated the importance of Why, because of the fact that so many decisions are made based on emotions and the business justification comes after. The 26 panellists in the meeting then participated in an interactive session where volunteer, Myles Darrell, ran through creating a shared purpose with Jonathan between the Bermuda National Trust and a company Myles had identified he was interested in approaching.

Leigh summed up the session with the following points:

- We need money to do our fantastic and much needed work.
- More and more businesses want to support biodiversity and environmental organisations.
- The timing has never been better to forge corporate partnerships.
- The language of corporates and environmental organizations is very different! This is often a barrier to partnerships being developed.
- Understanding each other is key and EcoMatch aims to help with this.
- To drive partnerships and gain financial support, we need to focus our ask.
- Conservation organisations must make the effort! Businesses will not just write you a cheque because you are a worthy organization.
- Research – Prepare – Deliver

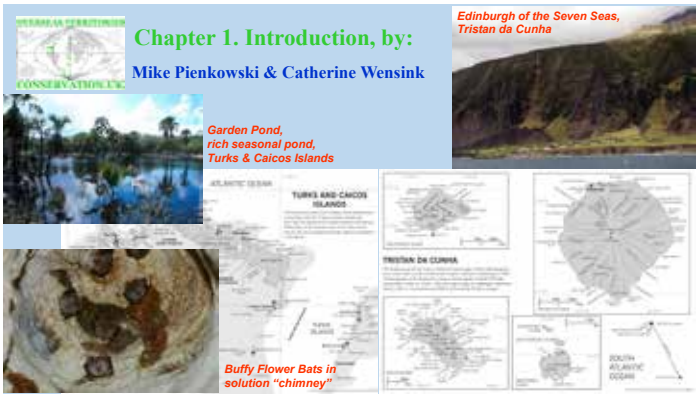
In closing the session, Leigh gave the following recommendations:

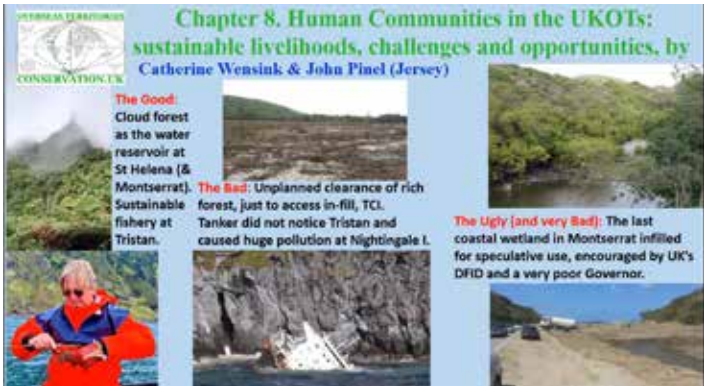
- Scope out potential corporate partnerships carefully.
- Use (and feedback on) the EcoMatch platform and ensure your organisation and projects are showcased there.
- Consider signing up for an online course with Remarkable Partnerships.

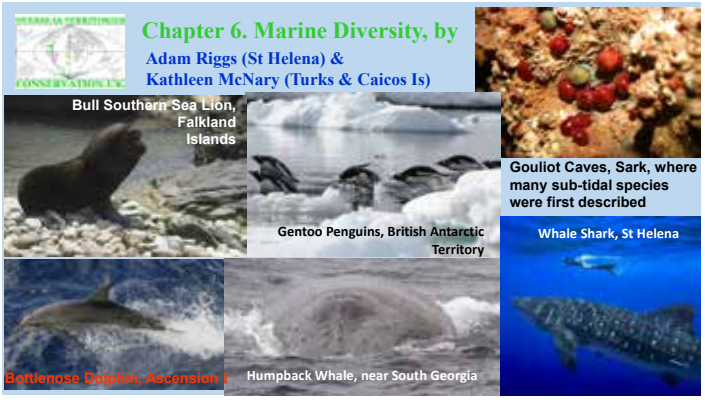
Forthcoming attraction

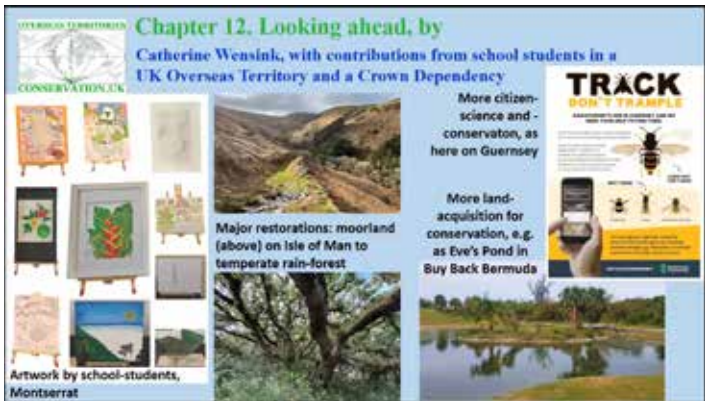
In the closing session, Dr Mike Pienkowski outlined UKOTCF's forthcoming book, *The Nature of Britain's Fragments of Paradise: wildlife and its conservation in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies* (see pages 22-23 of this issue of *Forum News*).

Some of the slides on individual chapters - with a tiny proportions of the many illustrations are shown below.









Thanks

In closing the conference, Dr Mike Pienkowski said:

A conference is a team effort; I guess that I am echoing a key message of our Ground Lecturer here! I would like to credit some of this team – and apologies to any whom inadvertently omit.

I would like to start by acknowledging the financial support from JNCC, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the University of Gibraltar, UKOTCF itself and its member and associate bodies Amphibian & Reptile Conservation, Bermuda National Trust, Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society, Manx Wildlife Trust, the National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, and St Helena National Trust.

I would like to thank Myles Darrell for his inspirational Sir Richard and Lady Dace Ground Lecture. This was partnered by a great number of great talks and posters – and we thank all speakers and poster-presenters, and their colleagues who helped in preparation of these. Apologies to poster-presenters for a technical fault which I am told has now been overcome.

Many of the talks restored my hope that the knowledge of how to make slides is not yet dead. At the last couple of conferences of other organisations (which will remain nameless) that I attended, I wished that I had taken binoculars in with me, as the speakers seemed to have forgotten that slides are intended to convey information, rather than be so stuffed with material in micro-sized fonts that nothing can be read. I was so pleased that most of the speakers at this conference did not fall into that fault. So, the knowledge is merely widely Endangered, rather than Extinct.

Of course, I should remind those few speakers or poster-presenters who have not yet supplied the texts and illustrations of their presentations for the proceedings to do so this week. Any speaker or poster-presenter who wants to amend proceedings material already supplied should get the amended version to me by Monday.

The Session officers (chair-person, question-master & rapporteur) have thankless tasks, serving as the much-battered buffers between participants, speakers and organisers. It takes a lot of preparation time and, for rapporteur and some question-masters, follow-up. We thank them deeply. Those chairing and the rapporteurs are mentioned above. The question-masters were: B Naqqi Manco (Topic1), Catherine Wensink (Ministerial segment), Nancy Pascoe (Topic 3), Myles Darrell (Topic 4), Dr Jodey Peyton (Topics 6 - and, with Lord (John) Randall, Topic 5), and Keith Bensusan (Topic 7).

We are very grateful also to the cross-territory panel who worked for months before the conference to draft the initial version of the recommendations and work on the revisions –and, of course, to all who commented during the consultations.

We thank all those who asked questions or made comments on the talks and, indeed, also in the lively poster session.

We thank in advance those who will help in disseminating the results, including the preparation of the proceedings.

Our lives have been enriched and our hearts lifted by the musicians and their organisations supplying their work and allowing it to be played in the breaks.

Making this happen takes a lot of preparation and frantic activity during and after. I am grateful to my colleagues on the organising team for dividing up these tasks. They are Catherine Wensink, Jodey Peyton, Keith Bensusan and Ann Pienkowski – and, for the Funding session today, Leigh Morris and Jonathan Andrews. The core team also usefully proved that I am not needed by keeping the show on the road for two hours on Monday when Vodafone knocked out my internet and all my communications.

And finally, and most importantly, all you participants (at least 167 registered, including some involved in all UKOTs and CDs – there can be no conference without you.

Thank you all.

Dr Keith Bensusan added:

Almost everyone has been thanked, but I would like to say that the name Mike Pienkowski is indivisible from the subject of conservation on the Overseas Territories; so thank you so much, not just for your organisational skills, but for all the support you have given and continue to give to all the territories.

Mike Pienkowski:

Thank you: you have a nice turn of phrase, Keith!

So, I think we are all conferenced-out – for a day or two at least. And now, we are going to close with some natural night-time sounds from Montserrat.

Conference Recommendations

Introduction

Throughout our series of conservation conferences for UKOT and CD practitioners, the UKOTCF network members have been keen to reach conclusions and recommendations to progress conservation, rather than just learn from an interesting series of talks, posters and discussions. At each UKOTCF conference (from 1999) participants have been encouraged to contribute towards conclusions and recommendations. Some of the uses of these include, but are not limited to:

- Advising on UK reports to CoPs of international conventions etc
- UK Parliamentary inquiries and spending reviews relating to the UKOTs and CDs
- UK calls for evidence on matters relating to UKOTs & CDs
- Provision of briefings on UKOT/CD matters including to UK MPs, Ministers, officials etc
- Funding bids requiring background and scene-setting
- Encouraging funding from other sources
- Communications material based on conference (e.g. newsletters, blogs, websites etc)
- Informing UKOTCF's own actions and those of other organisations/institutions

Starting from a blank page at the conference would not make the best use of time. Instead, the conference is used as an opportunity to share work, discuss ideas and provide a critical mass of persons coming together to highlight progress and opportunities while at the same time providing a clear summary of achievements, future needs etc. Over the past 20 years, our conferences have evolved to meet these and other needs.

Through its own work, including working groups, meetings, projects, preparing publications etc, UKOTCF maintains contact with those working on environmental matters in the UKOTs and CDs between conferences.

For our last couple of conferences, UKOTCF recruited voluntary teams, one for each topic, to draft conclusions for that topic. Copies of an evolving series of these drafts were widely circulated in the months before the conference and the comments used to refine the drafts. As a consequence, the final draft could be approved rapidly at the conference.

This year's topics were developed via consultations within the UKOTCF network over the last couple of years. The recommendations are grouped under the topics, in the order that we expect the topics to be addressed in the conference.

This year, we have streamlined further this process of developing recommendations, by having one team to develop recommendations across all topics. The drafting team includes UKOTCF Council members and other senior officers, together with others invited to bring in a full range of territories and wider expertise.

This year, we aimed to limit the total number of recommendations to about 20, and rather fewer addressed to any one category of organisations.

In June 2025, we circulated this draft to everyone registered for the conference since registrations had opened in April 2025, for comment. A second draft, taking account of all comments, was circulated for comment in early August to all by-then registered. A third draft, taking account of the few further comments affecting only small points in two draft recommendations, was circulated for comment in early September to all by then registered, and again in late September to all who had registerd since the first circulation of this draft. The fourth draft, dealing with these comments, was circulated to all by-then registered in the conference booklet, in early October, over a week before the conference. No comments were received on this.

Confirmation of the acceptance of the recommendations was confirmed in the relevant sessions of the conference.

We thank the drafting team and all those who commented in any of the rounds of consulations.

The recommendations sought to draw consensus from the conference participants involved in conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, but it should be noted that not all points apply to all Territories, such is the diversity among the Territories and the unique challenges they face, in addition to those shared. In all cases, the recommendations are just that, from a gathering of experienced, informed and concerned persons and organisations. We try to indicate to whom each recommendation is directed, whether this be UK Government, territory governments, NGOs, funding bodies or others. Clearly, they are not binding on any of these bodies, even where the body concerned has personnel participating in the conference.

In this document, 'UKOTs' means UK Overseas Territories, 'CDs' means Crown Dependencies, and 'territories' means UKOTs & CDs. The main target-type of each recommendation is in bold italics.

Recommendations
Main topic 1: Sharing Experiences across territories

A. Territories are advised to learn lessons from each other in techniques for conservation, and to develop closer conservation-based relationships with neighbouring countries – to encourage shared learning and technical exchanges. ***[Conservation workers and authorities in Territories]***

B. NGOs and their networks are important to UK

Government because they help deliver its international commitments, through expert help with some issues that UK Government may lack the capacity to address alone. FCDO is advised to re-strengthen its relationship with NGOs and partners working with the UKOTs, including UKOTCF which, for example, it used to invite, alongside other territory and umbrella bodies, to brief Governors-designate and FCDO's own personnel, and to networking events such as linked to the annual Joint Ministerial Council. ***[UK Government]***

Topic 3: Achieving Biodiversity & Sustainability targets

C. Conference asks UK Government: to ensure that it consults official and NGO bodies in the UKOTs and CDs at the start in planning conservation policies, rather than at the end when positions are already firm and time short; and to invite and support UKOT and CD representation as part of UK delegations to COPs. ***[UK Government]***

D. Policy mechanisms that recognise formally, and incorporate, local expertise and community-generated data into environmental governance frameworks, ensuring that conservation actions are contextually appropriate and socially inclusive, should be supported. Biodiversity and sustainability targets should be clear, concise, meaningful, tailored to the situation, but be mindful of broader, international targets. When governments develop new policy, whether Multilateral Environmental Agreements or Local Biodiversity Action Plans, accurate targets can help to ensure that the policy delivers what it is intended to do, and fit-for-purpose monitoring protocols are needed also. Policy development should consider also the reporting requirements as most territories have little capacity for lengthy and time-consuming reporting. [***UK & Territory Governments]***

E. Any project should have a range of targets, including those which are specific to project outcomes, but which also prompt the organisation to ensure that delivery is being achieved, funding is sufficient, that policies are appropriate and that senior management has a stake in the outcome. Targets should be ambitious, but achievable without overly relying on factors outside of the control of the practitioner. Where partnerships exist, targets should assign clear responsibility to the person(s) or organisation(s) who are responsible for delivery. Appropriate budgets (where applicable) should be set, over a multi-year time-scale (when long-term targets are set) to ensure delivery over an extended period of time. Funding for staff must be sufficient to ensure longevity and continuity of staff through the duration of the targets. This ensures that projects do not fail due to poor planning and resource-provision. [Project-managers and their senior colleagues]

F. Territories should ensure that they know which of their species and habitats need protecting and recovery/restoration and, ideally, all endemic species should be IUCN Red-listed. All at-risk species and habitats should at least be integrated fully into National Biodiversity Strategies or, ideally, have focused individual Action Plans/Strategies that are adequately resourced. To achieve this, Territories should have sufficient baseline-data, covering species of animals and plants, habitats and land-ownership. ***[Territory Governments]***

G. UK and Territory governments should provide the financial resources and other support necessary to acquire good data and maintain good records of species, habitats, threats and applied conservation work in the Territories. ***[UK and Territory governments]***

H. For Territory residents to be able to invest in alternative energy, green-energy equipment needs to be affordable; so Territory Governments need to incentivise this and reduce tax on these imported products. ***[Territory Governments]***

I. Our Territories are so small that blue-carbon has been seen to be a better option than some others, but quantifying suitable areas through mapping projects is required first and then there is the need for ongoing monitoring to assure that these sites are still performing as suitable blue-carbon sites – so resources must be allocated to this. ***[UK & Territory Governments]***

J. Island and ecosystem restoration programmes should be highlighted as currently one of the most important conservation measures. It should also be highlighted that effective restoration can be extremely complex and requires a long-term commitment of funding, staff-capacity, resources and monitoring. ***[Conservation-managers, NGOs and governments]***

Topic 5: Using technology and data to guide conservation

K. Conference notes some Territories' success in using technology to overcome some challenges in conservation, including: remote sensing, satellite-imagery and drones, particularly with the addition of multispectral image-processing to help management of protected areas, including identification of land-clearance monitoring and ecosystem-health (e.g. spread of invasive species or plant-disease); and DNA to identify unknown plant-species. Environmental DNA (eDNA) and bioacoustic surveys have the potential to be useful in conducting more routine biodiversity-monitoring or biosecurity-surveillance. ***[Territory governments and NGO land-managers]***

L. Conference notes successes in the deployment of conservation detection dogs across the UKOTs, expanding on work started in South Georgia. Uses include avoiding arrival of invasive species, and finding nest-sites of critically endangered species, such as rock iguana and sea turtles (in Cayman) so that hatchlings can be placed in protected facilities until mature enough to resist predation. Thermal drones are also a new technology that can assist with tracking animals, particularly those that form colonies – but in hot countries there are challenges with the heat-signals and the ground temperature, so more work in this area is needed. ***[Conservation-managers]***

M. Use of combined approaches gets the most out of available data, showing the value of sharing data and

technical expertise to add value to analyses and give long-term benefits. Technological advancements make more accessible novel approaches, such as genomic tools and spatial modelling. Care should be taken when introducing novel techniques as they may be complementary to traditional monitoring rather than a replacement methodology. Side-by-side validation can help determine whether new technology provides consistent results in long-term monitoring. ***[Conservation-managers]***

Topic 6: Identifying and preparing for future challenges and opportunities

N. Horizon-scanning for potential known and novel threats has been undertaken and may continue to be useful for governments and NGOs ***[Territory governments and NGOs]***

O. Knowledge-sharing of current problems, future risks and support opportunities between governments and with NGOs and neighbouring countries is essential to learn from experience and best practice. ***[Territory governments and NGOs]***

P. Emergency funding for active responses to critical threats, whether from invasive non-native species, natural disasters and or human or animal pathogens should be identified and provided ahead of any real-time issues or in the immediate aftermath. Known challenges, e.g. resilience to sea-level rise, and adaptation to extreme heat-events, such as the impacts of climate-change, must be addressed before they reach problematic levels. ***[UK & territory governments]***

Q. Governments, including with corporate funds, should be forward-planning for opportunities to restore nature, including opportunities such as strategic land-purchases for nature reserves, to linking existing sites through the development of habitat-corridors; they should ensure that new development does not compromise existing good practice, including by purchase of private land in Protected Areas to return this to public ownership, or preferably, to the inalienable ownership afforded in National Trust Ordinances where these apply. This idea can be expanded to incorporate networks of protected areas for terrestrial conservation as well as for linking Marine Protected Areas. ***[Territory governments]***

R. Good climate-models are powerful tools when designing, managing and communicating the importance of protected areas. Their use can help maintain the biodiversity of the islands for the future. Sharing data and information across projects can increase greatly the robustness of the models. Modelling climate-change can be very helpful by looking at historical data and predictions within a very local scale – so real change can be seen across small islands and then identifying what ecosystem-services areas are providing, then using this as a justification for protection as national parks or for development restrictions. This can be cross-referenced with local weather-data and ground-truthed satellite-imagery. ***[Territory governments]***

Topic 7: Resourcing Conservation

S. As agreed in the Environment Charters, the UK Government must support the UKOTs in: joining UK's ratification of international environmental agreements protecting species and ecosystems; reaching international targets for biodiversity including the Global Biodiversity Framework Targets (GBF) and the Sustainable Development Goals in UKOTs and CDs; the designation and management of Ramsar Convention Wetlands of International Importance and World Heritage Sites; and in shared high ambitions in combating and adapting to climate-change. Attention is drawn to the inability of CDs to benefit from UK-sourced funding. ***[UK Government]***

T. Conference asks that both the Darwin Plus and Blue Belt funding programmes be maintained (the latter with increased open access by non-government organisations that provide so much technical and practical support) as, without these, nature conservation in the UKOTs would be extremely restricted. Even with the maintenance of these schemes, sources of conservation funding for the UKOTs remain limited compared to the UK. Therefore, Conference also strongly recommends: the establishment of an equivalent "Green-Dot" funding scheme for the conservation of terrestrial wildlife (which includes most UKOT endemics); open access to Lottery funding for UKOT conservation projects; and exploring opportunities to support research through UK Research Institute (UKRI) funding. ***[UK Government]***

U. UK Government is asked to reduce bureaucracy in the environmental project application process and make some criteria less rigid to take account of the very different situations of the UKOTs. UK Government is also asked to extend support for building on projects that are proving successful, rather than requiring funded projects to be totally innovative. Also, territories have pointed out that the time-limit of one year, or less, of Darwin Local grants does not allow for the time-scales needed for decisions in UKOTs (many of which follow UK slow practices of former decades). A restoration is needed of support for umbrella and networking bodies of which UKOT and CD bodies are members/associates, e.g. by funding conferences organised by umbrella bodies as well as crucial networking (on par with EU COST actions and to which UKOTs now have limited access). ***[UK Government]***

V. Corporate businesses and conservation NGOs are encouraged to use tools for example, EcoMatch, so that environmental, social, and governance (ESG) commitments can be met by effective conservation actions in support of the most internationally important biodiversity for which UK and its Territories are responsible. ***[Corporate businesses and conservation NGOs]***

W. Generating revenue from services has potential - park rentals for events, filming and photography, and a range of products and merchandise, including clothing, water-bags, stuffed toys etc. Branding items also market the organisation's image and unique species and habitats. ***[Territory NGOs]***

X. Conference advises all to remain alert to the pressures on ministers and officials in those several territories whose main source of government income is from taxes accruing from the built development of land; and that this can be a perverse incentive against implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and environmental conservation, despite the natural environment being a key asset supporting the economies. ***[UK and Territory Governments and NGOs]***

EcoMatch: a new initiative to support conservation funding in the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies

There are few dedicated funds for biodiversity conservation and restoration funding in the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies. At the time of writing, a new funding call for Darwin Plus proposals for the current financial year, has not been announced, well after the normal time for this. Secure and flexible financing is vital to meeting international targets for reducing biodiversity loss, including the COP15 Global Biodiversity Framework. UKOTCF and The Wildlife Trusts are looking for ways to support the diversification of funding for UKOTs and Crown Dependencies. UKOTCF Council Member and Director of International at The Wildlife Trusts, Leigh Morris, Catherine Wensink, Jodey Peyton and Mike Pienkowski from UKOTCF have developed the concept of EcoMatch; a platform to link conservation organisations/ projects with potential funders, specifically the private sector.

Montserrat EcoPlay

EcoPlay Montserrat

A vision to provide a safe space for children to experience nature and to provide engaging, inspiring activities to foster an appreciation for the island's nature and to learn about how to protect it

About

The Montserrat National Trust needs your help to complete the final stages of their vision to undertake the building of a bespoke environmental education centre to help their young people learn about the island and protect biodiversity.

The Montserrat National Trust runs the Monty's Messengers programme that is reconnecting children with nature and, by linking with local schools, is providing educational and environmental resources to help inspire the next generation of environmental guardians.

To help deliver this environmental education vision, Montserrat National Trust bought a plot of land next to the Trust's botanical garden to build EcoPlay. Pro bono support from Dennis Sharp Architects was secured via UKOTCF to design the building. This building will provide educational facilities for young children under the age of 6 years as well as older children, adults, families and visitors to the island as well as a research station for visiting scientists. EcoPlay features a large garden that will include a horticultural area where young people can learn about the importance of growing food and a wild plant area for insects and other wildlife, allowing their study on-site.

Leigh Morris, CEO of the Manx Wildlife Trust, with MNT colleagues Chris Sealys and Delmaude Ryan and Monty's Messengers

UKOTCF member and associate organisations are invited to submit their conservation projects for EcoMatch, which (after a check from UKOTCF) will be featured on the EcoMatch website. Alongside this, funders are also able to load a profile onto the website to outline the type(s) of projects they would like to partner with and support. Links to both functions are at https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/ecomatch/, where summaries of those projects already include can be seen. Two examples are shown on the previous page and below.

This initiative was dual-launched at the Inter Island Environment Meeting (IIEM) in September 2025 and the UKOTCF Conference in October 2025 as part of the Finances and Resourcing session. It is hoped EcoMatch will provide a 'dating site' to bring conservationists and potential partners together and add to the support pipeline for projects in the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies.

As noted, the project is new, and we welcome also any suggestions, especially from potential funders, as to how to improve the web-pages.

BEEP!

Bailiwick Eelgrass Exploration Project

BEEP

Background

Eelgrass, *Zostera marina*, is a type of underwater flowering plant found in shallow coastal waters, forming dense seagrass meadows. It plays a vital role in marine ecosystems by stabilising sediments, reducing coastal erosion, and providing habitat and nursery grounds for fish, shellfish, and other wildlife. Eelgrass also improves water quality by absorbing nutrients and carbon dioxide, making it a powerful natural tool for carbon storage and climate change mitigation. However, eelgrass meadows are under threat from pollution, boat damage, and climate change, highlighting the need for conservation and restoration efforts.

About

The Bailiwick Eelgrass Exploration Project (BEEP) was founded by several NGO's within the Bailiwick of Guernsey in 2019, with the aim to record and create awareness of the Bailiwick's eelgrass meadows through citizen science. The project has three objectives:

1. To record (and collate information on) the presence, distribution, extent and composition of eelgrass around the Bailiwick of Guernsey.
2. To promote awareness of this important habitat forming species within the Bailiwick to relevant stakeholders, appropriate bodies and the public.
3. To assess environmental impacts from human activities (such as traditional boat moorings) upon eelgrass beds within the Bailiwick of Guernsey.

Forthcoming UKOTCF book on UKOT & CD wildife & conservation

In 1987, Sara Oldfield's review of wildlife in the UKOTs and its conservation needs, *Fragments of Paradise* was published; this resulted in the formation of what became UKOTCF. 30 years on: the review in *Forum News* 46 (2017) (ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/) showed a lot of progress – but also lots left to do.

For more than 4 years, a team has been working on a new book. This consists of a well-referenced text (nearly complete) and very many high-quality photos (which will take up about half of the space); collation of these is over half complete. Publication is expected in 2026.

The expected title is: *The Nature of Britain's Fragments of Paradise: wildlife and its conservation in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies*, edited by Mike Pienkowski & Sara Oldfield, assisted by Catherine Wensink, Ann Pienkowski, Keith

Bensusan, Adam Riggs & Jodey Peyton. The chapters and lead-authors are:

Foreword by Hon. Professor John Cortés, Gibraltar Minister for Education, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change, Heritage, Technical Services and Transport; and Chair of the Council of Environment Ministers (or equivalents) of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies

Chapter 1. **Introduction**, by Mike Pienkowski & Catherine Wensink

Chapter 2. **Flora – diversity, endemism, rarity and threats**, by Sara Oldfield

Chapter 3. **Terrestrial invertebrate diversity and endemism**, by Vicky Wilkins (Species Recovery Trust and IUCN Atlantic Islands Invertebrate Specialist Group) and Liza Fowler (St Helena National Trust), with 12 case-studies by territory authors

Chapter 4. **Reptiles and Amphibians**, by Paul Edgar, with sections by Frederic J Burton (Cayman) and Cerys Joshua (St Helena)

Chapter 5. **Birds – flagships for global conservation**, by Mike Pienkowski

Chapter 6. **Marine Diversity**, by Adam Riggs (St Helena) & Kathleen McNary (Turks & Caicos Islands)

Chapter 7. **Conservation arrangements and mechanisms**, by Mike Pienkowski & Catherine Wensink

Chapter 8. **Human Communities in the UKOTs: sustainable livelihoods, challenges and opportunities**, by Catherine Wensink & John Pinel (Jersey)

Chapter 9. **Tackling invasive non-native species & restoring ecosystems**, by Rebecca Cairns-Wicks (St Helena), Jodey Peyton & Alan Gray, with 8 territory case-studies, including by Alison Neil (South Georgia Heritage Trust), Bryan Naqqi Manco (Turks & Caicos Islands), Grant Munroe, Ben Taylor & Darnell Christie (Falklands) & Bermuda

Chapter 10. **Managing Marine Resources**, by Adam Riggs (St Helena) & Alizée Zimmermann (Turks & Caicos Reef Fund)

Chapter 11. **Global Connectivity & Global Climate Change**, by Sara Oldfield & Keith Bensusan (Gibraltar)

Chapter 12. **Looking ahead**, by Catherine Wensink, with contributions from school students in a UK Overseas Territory and a Crown Dependency

References (sorted and formatted by Keith Bensusan)

Glossary

Conservation bodies in UKOTs and CDs

Visiting the territories

Here are just four of the several hundred photos which will illustrate the book.

More spider papers published on St Helena & Ascension

Two more papers from the research group led by Danni Sherwood have been published on spiders of Saint Helena and Ascension Island.

In the first paper, the INNS (invasive non-native species) spiders of Saint Helena are catalogued, with identifying characteristics, like genitalia, illustrated (see example overpage), in a collaboration with St Helena Government Agricultural and Natural Resources Division and St Helena National Trust. This paper was funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) *St Helena Cloud Forest Project*, supported by the Species Recovery Trust and RSPB.

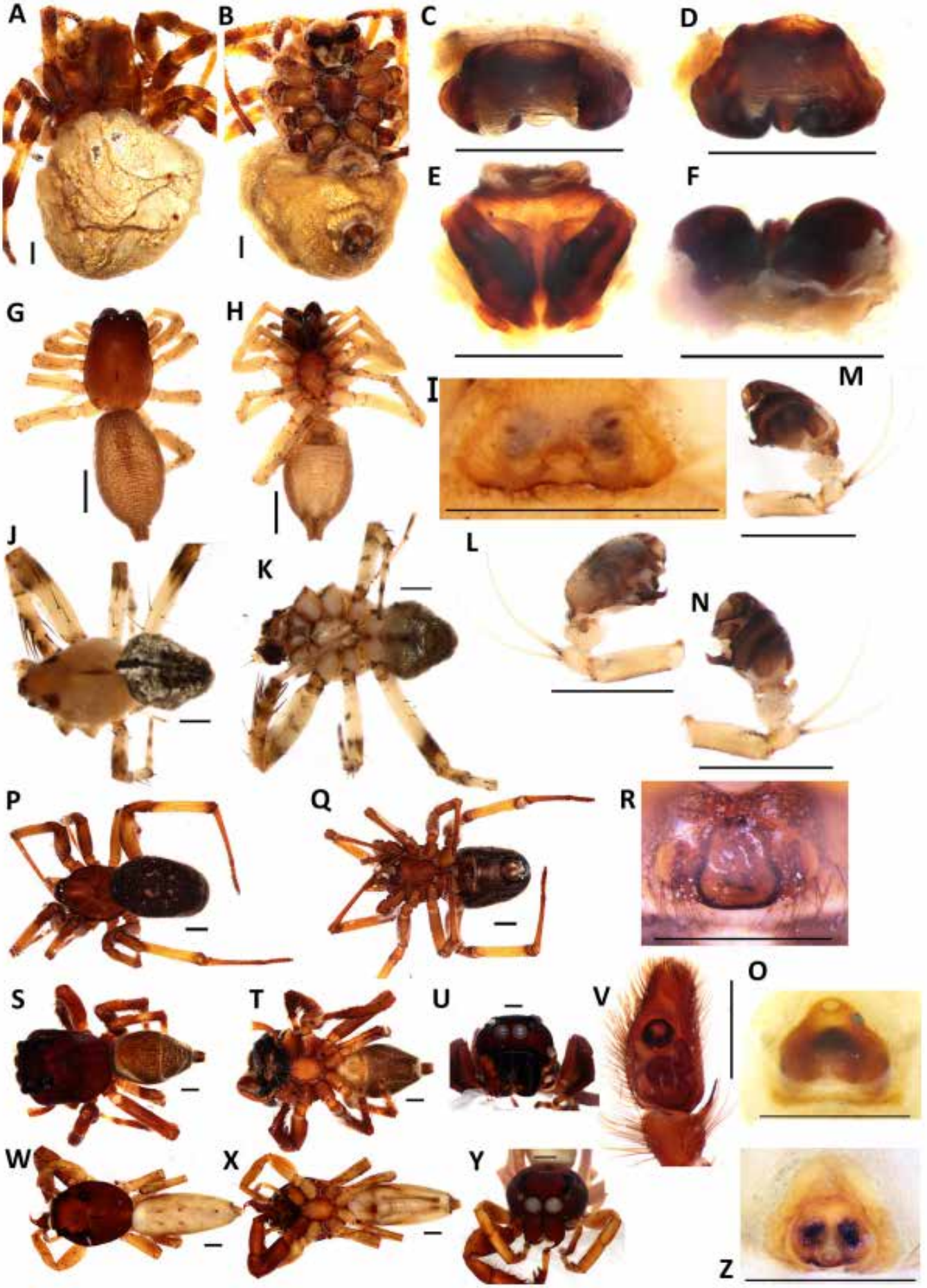
Sherwood, D., Stevens, N., Peters, R., Fowler, L., Joshua, D. & Balchin, J. (2025). Arachnological biosecurity on one of the world's most remote inhabited islands: a checklist of stowaway spiders found on Saint Helena, South Atlantic Ocean. *Natura Somogyiensis* 45: 57-68.

(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/391895187_Arachnological_biosecurity_on_one_of_the_world's_most_remote_inhabited_islands_a_checklist_of_stowaway_spiders_found_on_Saint_Helena_South_Atlantic_Ocean)

In the second paper, the modern annotated checklist of spiders of Ascension Island is finally published after no such list having been updated in over 60 years. Sherwood *et al*. provide the first analysis of genus and species endemicity within a modern taxonomic context, showing only one genus and handful of species are possible endemics. The researchers found also three new INNS species established on the island, further reinforcing the threat to endemics. This paper was funded by the UK Government through Darwin Plus grants DPLUS135 and DPLUS 216.

Sherwood, D., Sharp, A., Wilkins, V. & Ashmole, P. (2025). Annotated checklist of the spiders of Ascension Island with new faunistic records, including three newly recorded non-native species (Araneae: Araneomorphae). *Acta Zoológica Lilloana* 69(1): 449-474.

(https://www.researchgate.net/publication/392468991_Annotated_checklist_of_the_spiders_of_Ascension_Island_with_new_faunistic_records_including_three_newly_recorded_non-native_species_Araneae_Araneomorphae)



A–F Araneus quadratus *Clerck, 1757 female (NHMUK), G–I* Clubiona *sp. female (ANRD 563), J–N* Neoscona rapta *(Thorell, 1899) male (ANRD 924), O* Physocyclus globosus *(Taczanowski, 1874) female (ANRD 667), P–R* Steatoda capensis *Hahn, 1990 female (ANRD 416), S–V* Zenodorus *sp. male (NHMUK), W–Z* Zenodorus *sp. female (NHMUK). A habitus, dorsal view; B Idem, ventral view; C epigyne (dissected, scape missing), ventral view; D Idem, dorso-ventral view; E Idem, posterior view; F vulva, dorsal view; G habitus, dorsal view; H Idem, ventral view; I epigyne (undissected), ventral view; J habitus, dorsal view; K Idem, ventral view; L palp, prolateral view, M Idem, retrolateral view; N Idem, retro-ventral view; O epigyne (undissected), P habitus, dorsal view; Q Idem, ventral view; R epigyne (undissected, completely filled by epigynal plug), ventral view; S habitus, dorsal view; T Idem, ventral view; U cephalothorax, frontal view; V palp, ventral view; W habitus, dorsal view; X Idem, ventral view; Y cephalothorax, frontal view; Z epigyne (undissected), ventral view. Scale bars = 1mm.*

Lady Dace McCoy Ground: Pioneering conservationist and long-time generous supporter of UKOTCF and other good causes

As this issue completed proof-checking, we received the very sad news of the loss of Lady Dace Ground.

Margerita Candace (Dace) McCoy Ground, a Harvard-trained American lawyer, worked for City governments in Los Angeles and Seattle. After a further degree in marine studies, she was hired in 1985 by the Cayman Islands Government as Marine Parks Coordinator, responsible for establishing a marine parks system for those islands, a pioneer for the region. She worked closely with Gina Ebanks-Petrie, the Director of Environment for Cayman. Dace then became founding Executive Director of the National Trust for the Cayman Islands.

In 1986 Dace McCoy married Richad Ground, whom she had met in the Cayman Islands. After working mainly in media law, Richard Ground had left London in 1983 for the Cayman Islands where he served as Crown Counsel, and from 1987 as Attorney General. Richard and Dace continued to live in Wider Caribbean UK Overseas Territories until 2012.

As part of a productive partnership, Dace undertook the layout and publication in Cayman in 1989 of Richard's first book of photographs, *Creator's Glory.* Outside his legal and judicial work, Sir Richard was a keen and talented wildlife photographer and became passionate about the natural world. Such combined and complementary efforts continued throughout. In Bermuda, Dace worked for the Bermuda National Trust as Director of Development, having moved there, Sir Richard being Judge of the Supreme Court of Bermuda, from 1992 to 1998.

In 1998, Sir Richard was appointed Chief Justice of the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI). At the time of the Grounds' arrival, UKOTCF had recently started a major programme of work over several years to help the Turks & Caicos National Trust recover from an almost impossible position that it had been left in by a previous mentoring organisation. Dace's history brought them into contact with UKOTCF around this project, and much subsequent conservation progress has flowed from this coming together. The Richard and Dace publishing team leapt into action again, with the production in 2001 of the superb photographic *Birds of the Turks and Caicos Islands* – a book which still sells today, with proceeds donated to conservation.

Dace worked with Dr Mike Pienkowski of UKOTCF and Michelle Fulford-Gardiner, TCI's Acting Director of Environment and Coastal Resources, to facilitate cross-sectoral workshops and related consultations and analyses to help local players produce TCI's strategy to implement the 2001 Environment Charter between UK and TCI. This served as the pilot for similar exercises in other UKOTs, until UK Government ended funding, only having to restart it in another guise some years later. Dace joined UKOTCF Council and, working with UKOTCF, also undertook the design and layout for FCO and DFID for their then new Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP), the then funding mechanism for the Environment Charters. Following their departure from TCI, Dace (with Richard making his excellent photographs available) continued support for TCI. This included layout of the pioneering trail guides and environmental information centre display-boards, developed and implemented by UKOTCF for TCI.

While still maintaining her voluntary work for UKOTCF, back in Bermuda 2004-2012, while Richard was Chief Justice there, Dace again became very active volunteering for Bermuda National Trust and other conservation bodies on the island. In 2011, the Bermuda National Trust awarded her its Silver Palmetto Award, the Trust's highest honour, to acknowledge her many years of exemplary service. Richard and Dace moved to live in Derbyshire, UK, an area they had come to know and love during many vacations spent trout fishing in the Derbyshire Wye, and not so far from Richard's original family home in Lincolnshire. Their support for UKOTCF continued, including participation at several high-level events. Richard was made a Knight Bachelor in the Birthday Honours list 2012 for his services to justice in Bermuda. Tragically, Richard died in February 2014 after an illness. By 2015, Dace felt able to take on the Chair of UKOTCF's Wider Caribbean Working Group, from which she had just retired after 10 years of service. By 2015 too. Dace resumed her Council duties

UKOTCF is honoured to be hosting a series of occasional high-level lectures on nature conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies named after the long-term supporters of such conservation and of UKOTCF, Sir Richard and Lady Dace Ground. These will continue.

Dace will be greatly missed, and we extend our condolences to her family and all her many friends.

Sir Richard and Lady (Dace) Ground at the Haulover Field-Road (nature trail), set up by UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum and Turks & Caicos National Trust. They are holding copies of the trail guides designed by Dace for UKOTCF and featuring Richard's bird photographs. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Myrtle Jane Ashmole
Artist, biologist, lover of nature and starter of things

Myrtle passed away peacefully on 27th April 2025, aged 90, surrounded by nature and her family. She is survived by her husband, Philip Ashmole, their three children, and grandchildren.

Myrtle and Philip Ashmole are synonymous with the study and conservation of island biology and their seminal work on St Helena and Ascension will be invaluable for generations to come. A pioneering, inseparable partnership and inspirational couple, they brought global attention to the St Helena's unique biodiversity – particularly its rich and often overlooked invertebrate fauna – and that of Ascension too, and made a lasting mark on local and international conservation efforts.

Myrtle was more than a scientist; she was a talented artist, who wove her passion for ecology and art into beautiful lino-cut prints.

Philip and Myrtle first visited St Helena in 1994–1995, spending six months undertaking extensive research into the island's flora and fauna, with a special focus on invertebrates. This work culminated in the publication of *St Helena and Ascension Island: A Natural History* (published by Anthony Nelson, 2000) – a landmark volume that, even 25 years on, remains the cornerstone reference for understanding the biodiversity of St Helena and Ascension Island. It is a treasure-trove of knowledge and ecological insight and a true labour of love.

In their book, they described Prosperous Bay Plain as a unique habitat, and a major centre for endemicity and, in 2003, Philip and Myrtle were invited to investigate the ecology of endemic invertebrates in the eastern arid areas of St Helena, including Prosperous Bay Plain (PBP) as part of the project *Surveying the Invertebrates of Prosperous Bay Plain* funded by the FCO Environment Fund for Overseas Territories. Their work involved extensive surveys in the field, searching for and capturing invertebrates – followed by many long hours sorting and identifying the material collected. Their findings confirmed PBP as a hotspot of endemic diversity, particularly for dryland fauna that fed into the Environmental Impact Assessment for the airport project. One of their most evocative findings was the discovery of nocturnal wolf-spiders whose eyes reflected torchlight like scattered jewels across the desert floor. Their samples contributed to the later identification and description of several new species and genera, including *Molearachne sanctaehelenae* (gen. et sp. nov.) and *Dolocosa joshuai* (sp. nov.) – the latter named in recognition of Daryl Joshua, a young Saint with a passion for invertebrate conservation.

Philip and Myrtle returned in 2005, together with Howard Mendel, to study the invertebrates of the Central Peaks and Peak Dale, under the Overseas Territories Environment Programme funded project *Protected Area Planning for the Central Peaks*, ably supported in the field by Ed Thorpe. They stayed on island for 3 months enabling them to extend their studies of the fauna of the island.

Among other important rediscoveries made by the Ashmoles were the Ammonite Snail *Helenoconcha relicta*, a Critically Endangered species thought to have been lost, and Turton's Whorl Snail *Nesopupa turtoni*, previously known only from fossils.

A number of endemic St Helenian species have been named in their honour, recognition of their dedication and legacy:

In 1995, the world's only known eyeless psocid *Sphaeropsocopsis myrtleae* was found in Ruperts Battery Cave. In the species' description, under etymology, "The species is dedicated to Myrtle Ashmole, who in 1984 suggested studying the fauna of barren volcanic terrain in the Canaries and who participated in all field work on St Helena. Also in 1995, the land-hopper *Platorchestia ashmoleorum* was named after them both: -orum is the genitive plural – meaning the Ashmoles.

Philip and Myrtle's work extended far beyond St Helena, with important contributions to the understanding of biodiversity on other remote islands, including the Azores, Galapagos, and Hawaii. They published widely, including a natural history of Tenerife, and, in 1997, a seminal paper on Ascension Island's terrestrial fauna, revealing a far greater number of endemic invertebrates than previously recognised.

Myrtle's deep affection for St Helena, its wildlife, and its people will long be remembered. Her pioneering efforts inspired an interest in, and understanding of, the importance of these tiny and often overlooked invertebrates, helping to lay the foundation for the island's thriving invertebrate conservation community. Today, St Helena is home to a new generation of passionate, skilled conservationists who in some way will all have been touched by Myrtle's earlier work.

In latter years, Philip and Myrtle did much to increase the biodiversity of their part of Scotland, being instrumental in setting up the Carrifran Wildwood project, which was essentially Myrtle's brain-child, and which has gone on to 'rewild' successfully 655 ha of Scottish valley and restored a rich wildlife heritage. This visionary project is not only ground-breaking and a beautiful legacy, but a wonderful gift to the people of Southern Scotland where the vast majority of native forest has been devastated. It is a remarkable example of what can be achieved when vision, dedication and determination come together to achieve conservation goals.

The *Terrestrial and Freshwater Invertebrates of St Helena* guidebook, authored by Roger Key, Liza Fowler, and David Pryce, is dedicated "to the future generations of young Saints who take an interest in St Helena's unique invertebrates. Also to Philip and Myrtle Ashmole who first brought the importance of St Helena's invertebrates to the attention of the wider world—for their welcome advice, for allowing us the use of their data and photographs, and for sharing their love and concerns for St Helena, its people, and its wildlife."

Myrtle leaves behind a profound legacy—of science, of inspiration, and of love for the natural world.

Submitted by friends on St Helena, Ascension, in the UK and much farther afield.

Myrtle Ashmole, with husband Philip

The Humpback Whales of the Pitcairn Islands

The Pitcairn Islands, having an exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of some 840,000 km^2, were designated one of the world's largest Marine Protected Areas in 2016. The islands are regularly visited by a small number of humpback whales *Megaptera novaeangliae*, first observed in the area in the 1990s. The Pitcairn humpback whales are of scientific and conservation interest as they appeared to be a part of the International Whaling Commission breeding sub-stock F2, which is listed as Endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List, due to intense illegal Soviet whaling in the Southern Ocean feeding grounds in the latter half of the 20th century.

Since 2012, mother-calf pairs have been observed at all four of the islands, confirming the Pitcairn Islands as a calving ground. The science team from the *Humpback Whales of the Pitcairn Islands* project, funded under the DEFRA Darwin+ programme (2022-2025), visited Pitcairn Island on 4 September 2024 to continue their investigation of these enigmatic whales that are present around the islands during the austral winter to spring period (normally June to November).

PhD student Katy McCoy and Professor Terry Dawson (both from King's College London) with Dr Tilen Genov (Morigenos - Slovenian Marine Mammal Society) were collecting data to add to those from an earlier expedition in 2023. Fieldwork involved using drones and land- and boat-based observations of surface behaviours, collecting photo-identifications of individual whale tail-flukes, collecting biopsy samples, and recording their songs using underwater microphones (hydrophones).

A total of 50 humpback whale sightings were recorded over 59 hours of sighting effort. Of these, a total of 16 different individuals have been identified so far, including 4 mother-calf pairs, from a combination of tail fluke and dorsal fin photographs. A photo-catalogue has now been established, with additional photos added by tourists and visitors to the island to build up a profile of the Pitcairn whales and their connection to other humpback whale populations in French Polynesia and wider regions.

Fluke, Pitcairn, July 2023

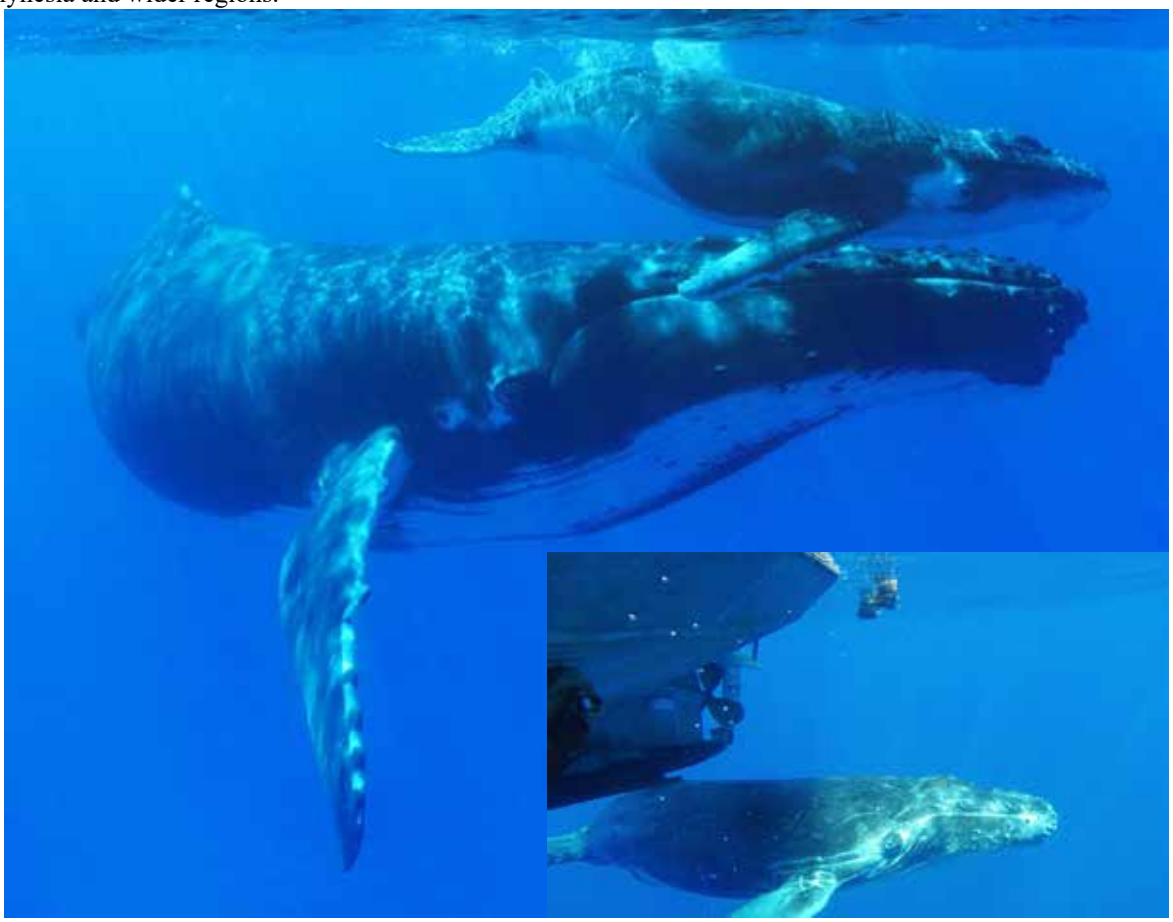
Several individuals have been matched successfully to the wider South Pacific region using automated fluke recognition through Happywhale.com, using these photographs and others uploaded to the catalogue through a citizen-science programme. The resighted individuals had been sighted previously in Papeete and Rurutu, French Polynesia, and Niue, an island east of Tonga.

Biopsies are small skin and blubber samples collected by specially adapted bolts fired from a crossbow, which causes no harm to the whales. Mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) sequencing from one biopsy collected by the authors so far revealed a haplotype that has been recorded in whales located over all regions of the south Pacific. Whilst inconclusive without further analysis of biopsy samples at this stage, our preliminary studies suggest that the humpback whales observed in the Pitcairn Islands have interchange with other regions of the South Pacific.

Six hydrophones, deployed at sites around Bounty Bay and offshore off Tautama, recorded over 640 hours of acoustic recordings to build up the whale vocalisations database. Subsequent analysis of the audio data will be undertaken over the next few months to provide further evidence of the provenance of these iconic and charismatic flagship species of the Pitcairn Islands marine reserve.

Prof. T. P. Dawson, Chair of the Scientific Advisory Committee, Government of the Pitcairn Islands; Member, IUCN Commission on Ecosystem Management; King's College London

Mother and calf, 2015 (inset: baby under boat)



Fourth Expedition to the Pitcairn Islands fosters effective conservation through collaboration

In September 2025, the Blue Belt Programme's anticipated expedition arrived in the Pitcairn Islands. Involving international researchers and the local community, it embarked on a journey to the remote outer islands of Henderson and Oeno. The expedition is enhancing scientific understanding of the marine habitats and seabirds around the Pitcairn Islands. Collected data will answer key questions that support the implementation of The Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area Management Plan 2021 to 2026.

This year marks the fourth expedition of its kind to Pitcairn. It is a continuation of the ongoing effort to improve understanding of Pitcairn's uniquely pristine marine environment, which serves as a crucial baseline for understanding our changing oceans.

The 2025 expedition was led jointly by the Government of the Pitcairn Islands and UK government agency Cefas, and represents a collaborative effort from the Pitcairn community and researchers from Heriot-Watt University, Glasgow University, the Natural History Museum, and the University of São Paulo. Their diverse expertise is advancing our understanding of both Pitcairn's pelagic and benthic ecosystems.

The Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area safeguards 842,000 km^2 of near-pristine coral reefs. These untouched ecosystems are a living laboratory for climate-science. They provide scientists with a rare opportunity to study marine environments largely unaffected by human pressures, offering essential baseline data to assess the impacts of climate-change and human activities on coral reefs worldwide. However, they have remained widely understudied. Therefore, the Pitcairn Islands' Marine Protected Area Management Plan places furthering scientific understanding as a central priority.

The recent research expedition is supporting the development of an evidence-based Marine Protected Area Management Plan for the Pitcairn Islands. Its primary purpose is to gather new data that will create new baselines and inform the Marine Protected Area management plan into the future. Baselines provide a benchmark against which ecological changes can be assessed, allowing managers to evaluate the effectiveness of conservation efforts.

The scientific investigations are informing several critical objectives outlined in the Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area Management Plan 2021-2026. Detailed benthic habitat-maps of Henderson Island's inner reef shelf and Oeno Island's lagoon have been created. These maps provide insights into spatial patterns that will guide Pitcairn's commitment to reducing anchor-damage on its coral reefs.

Although Pitcairn's remoteness and Marine Protected Area protect it from more human pressures, climate-change poses an ever-increasing threat. Therefore, the Government of the Pitcairn Islands is prioritising research on the impacts of climate-change. Water-samples taken during the expedition will reveal how local biogeochemical processes affect carbon-dioxide transfer between the ocean and atmosphere, contributing vital data to climate-change research. Additionally, scientists are assessing the health and climate adaptability of key coral species using the recently collected coral samples. This work is furthering understanding of the impacts of climate-change on Pitcairn's marine environments.

MV Silver Supporter. *Photo: Luke Hosty*

Pitcairn work

Establishing a long-term monitoring programme for key habitats and species within the MPA has been a key priority for the Government of the Pitcairn Islands. During the recent expedition, the local population of Masked Boobies was monitored as an indicator of ocean-health and local toxicology.

Hannah Wolstenholme, lead scientist of the expedition, said, "The 2025 expedition – named Operation Ganet by the Pitcairn community – has been an exciting opportunity to further our understanding of Pitcairn's marine environment and explore new areas of research using innovative technologies. The team has worked extremely hard and is making new discoveries that will be important for assessing future changes within Pitcairn's MPA. This research may also highlight areas on which to focus conservation efforts for marine environments worldwide."

Additionally, the expedition is helping to strengthen the Pitcairn Islands' scientific capabilities. With the establishment of Pitcairn's Marine Science Base, the island has a greater capacity to support more frequent and innovative research of its waters and coast. Pitcairn's community of ~40 people has the duty of protecting Pitcairn's waters and mitigating the growing threats of climate-change and pollution. By fostering collaboration between local communities and international researchers, the expedition creates lasting partnerships that will benefit ongoing marine conservation efforts.

Conclusion

The Blue Belt Programme is committed to supporting the Government of the Pitcairn Islands in understanding their marine environment and ensuring it is protected for future generations, specifically through the establishment of a long-term ecosystem monitoring programme and undertaking research on climate-change impacts. These efforts ensure that scientific discoveries translate into practical and sustainable conservation and management outcomes that benefit both local communities and global marine conservation efforts.

Hannah Wolstenholme & Danielle Anthony, Centre forEnvironment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science

Rescuing Blaiklock Refuge: Conserving a Remote Antarctic Hut

On a small island to the north of Marguerite Bay sits Blaiklock Refuge – a tiny wooden hut built in 1957. From the outside, it doesn't look like much. Yet this simple shelter played a vital role in Antarctic exploration, providing a safe haven for scientific dog-sledging parties operating far from their main stations. This year, it was the focus of the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust's (UKAHT) conservation work.

Above: Blaiklock Refuge prior to conservation works
Below: Removing historic fuel

Blaiklock was designated a Historic Site and Monument alongside Base Y at Horseshoe Island in 1995, and UKAHT took on its management in 2014. Although Blaiklock's history is fascinating, its location makes it one of the hardest historic sites for UKAHT to reach. The surrounding sea-ice lingers late into the summer, the channels are narrow and poorly charted, and conditions can change in an instant. Prior to 2022, two separate attempts to reach the island had failed due to poor weather and the lack of up-to-date charts. I was lucky, then, to be part of a team of two aboard *HMS Protector* when we managed to reach the site. At first we couldn't find it at all – the coordinates were inaccurate – and it was only by scanning the coastline with binoculars that we spotted the faint outline of a roof-line. Inside, we discovered a remarkable time capsule: bunks, tools and everyday objects left behind by those who once relied on the hut for survival. But we also found a building at risk.

The roof-covering had been torn away by the wind; ceiling panels were warped with water-damage, and old fuel-drums were corroding dangerously close to leaking. Left unchecked, the hut and its collection of artefacts would have been lost, and the environment around it at risk. We knew Blaiklock needed urgent conservation.

To make that happen, we had to overcome a major logistical challenge. Unlike some of our other sites, there are no nearby tourist vessels to call on for help. Instead, we turned to *Ocean Tramp*, a small ice-strengthened sailing boat capable of operating in these tricky waters. With transport secured, we pulled together a skilled team: two experienced conservation carpenters, an expert project-leader and artefact-conservator with years of fieldwork experience in Antarctica, and for the first time, a filmmaker to record the story.

Despite delays due to heavy snow and ice, our field-team accomplished a huge amount. We re-covered the hut and made it weather-tight again, repaired the damaged ceiling and wall-panels, and carried out a full hazard-survey to understand the risks. Every single artefact was catalogued and assessed for condition, while corroding fuel-drums were safely emptied and removed to protect the surrounding environment. We also installed new interpretation inside the hut, helping future visitors understand its history and importance.

Thanks to this season's work, and the hard work of our Antarctic team, the refuge will continue to stand as a small but powerful reminder of the resilience, science, and survival that shaped Antarctic history.

Right: Assessing the condition of artefacts. Below: Blaiklock Refuge after conservation works

What is UKAHT?

The UK Antarctic Heritage Trust (UKAHT) is a charity that cares for historic buildings and artefacts in Antarctica. Our work preserves the huts, equipment, and stories left behind by early pioneers and scientists, ensuring they are protected for the future. We also share these remarkable histories with people around the world through education and outreach.

Why conserve Antarctic huts?

Antarctic heritage sites are unique time capsules. They show us how early scientists lived and worked in one of the harshest environments on Earth. However, the buildings are fragile, battered by extreme weather and a changing climate, and often full of historic objects that need specialist care. By conserving them, we protect both history and the pristine Antarctic environment.

Ruth Mullett, Head of Buildings and Conservation, UK Antarctic Heritage Trust, High Cross, Madingley Road, Cambridge, CB3 0ET, UK

Turtle Conservation in the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas

As this year's turtle nesting season drew to a close, a total of 224 nests had been recorded on the beaches of the Western and Eastern Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) in Cyprus. This figure is among the highest ever recorded, confirming a steady upward trend in recent years.

The SBA Administration (SBAA) remains strongly committed to the protection of Green *Chelonia mydas* and Loggerhead *Caretta caretta* Turtles – both Endangered and listed as priority species under the Protection and Management of Nature and Wildlife Ordinance. The Ordinance mirrors the provisions of the equivalent Republic of Cyprus legislation implementing the EU Habitats Directive.

Since the enactment of the Nature Ordinance, the SBA Environment Department has implemented a minimum-intervention conservation protocol, aligned with international best practices and the turtle conservation programme implemented elsewhere in Cyprus.

Turtle conservation is a long-term effort, and it takes about twenty years before the effectiveness of protection measures can truly be assessed. This is the time it takes for hatchlings to reach adulthood and return to their natal beaches to nest.

The recent surge in nesting – compared with an average of just thirty nests per year between 1994 and 2011 – is a testament to the success of a consistent, systematic "hands-off" approach, combined with enforcement measures aimed at reducing harmful human activities on nesting beaches. The fact that most beaches within the SBAs remain undeveloped and free from artificial lighting has also played a crucial role in supporting turtle populations.

Beaches are patrolled daily, and nests are protected with aluminium cages to guard them against predators such as foxes and dogs. Beyond this, no further intervention takes place: hatchlings are left to emerge naturally and make their first journey from nest to sea. This crawl is vital – it helps them orient themselves and imprint on the beach, increasing the likelihood that they will return as adults to nest in the same location.

In addition to nest-protection, the SBA Administration works actively to safeguard nesting habitats. This includes physical measures, such as installing barriers or boulders to manage access, and strict enforcement against illegal activities. These include driving on beaches, overnight camping, beach-parties with bright lights or barbecues, and dogs on beaches, all of which can harm nesting sites. The Protection and Management of Nature and Wildlife Ordinance imposes severe penalties for damaging and disturbing turtle nests, turtles, and hatchlings, including fines of up to €17,000 and imprisonment for up to three years.

The success of turtle conservation in the SBAs would not have been possible without the invaluable support of volunteers, who patrol beaches daily to identify and report turtle tracks. Volunteers – British residents living and working in the SBAs as well as citizens from across Cyprus – also play a crucial role in reporting illegal and harmful activities. Their contribution is both vital and inspiring. No matter how many resources and how much effort authorities dedicate to the conservation of important species and habitats, these measures can succeed only when they are embraced and supported by the people who live in and enjoy these precious natural areas.

Alexia Perdiou, Senior Policy and Enforcement Officer, SBAA Environment Department

Above: Green turtle Akrotiri sheltering; below: green turtles mating. (All photos © SBAA Environment Department)

Hatchlings emerge from the nest (above) and scurry to the sea (below).

How invaded is Bermuda?: a PhD update

By Alison Copeland

In the autumn of 2022, I moved from Bermuda to the UK to begin a PhD at Durham University studying Bermuda's invasive plants. A good place to start such a study is with a checklist so the first output of the project was to create an updated inventory of Bermuda's plants. To do this, my co-workers and I compiled species-names, introduction-dates, native or introduced status, reason for its introduction, native range, lifeform (i.e is it a tree, vine, fern etc.) and any other information available from a variety of sources. Bermuda is fortunate to have a rich source of plant records in the historic writings of Governor Sir John Henry Lefroy (Lefroy 1884), the Botany of the Challenger Expedition (Hemsley 1884) and books by Oswald Reade (1883). By far the best resource is Nathaniel Britton's *Flora of Bermuda* published in 1918. To these historic records we added more recent information from publications such as the Garden Club of Bermuda's books (Whitney 1955; Wardman 1971 & Ogden 2002). The published information was supplemented by observations collected 'on the ground' by visiting local garden-centres to see what was for sale to the public. We compiled also records from the herbarium of the Natural History Museum at the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo.

Such a large dataset with recent and historic records requires standardisation to align records with today's accepted taxonomy. We achieved this in R through the rWCVP package (Brown *et al*. 2023) which matches user-provided names to the World Checklist of Vascular Plants (Govaerts *et al*. 2021). The resulting dataset contains 1587 plants from 162 families (Copeland & Dawson 2025).

We developed a decision-tree to classify plants into an invasion-stage based on answers to 10 questions about their survival, reproduction and dispersal in Bermuda (Copeland & Dawson 2025: ESM1). I classified each species based on the literature, and my experience working as the Bermuda Government's Biodiversity Officer for 14 years. We used 7 invasion-stage classes. Plants that arrived in Bermuda on their own were classed as 'native' and if the literature suggested they were island-endemics we classed them as 'endemic'. All plants that were brought to Bermuda by human activities were put into the class 'introduced'. The majority of species (69.5%) remained in this introduced class (Fig.1). Some of them had successful offspring who hopped over the garden-wall and escaped from cultivation – we called these 'casual'. This is a class of waifs and strays, with populations mostly being topped up by further escapes from gardens. If these escaped species are able to reproduce in the wild, and recruit surviving offspring, then they form self-sustaining wild populations and we classed them as 'naturalised' species. The final class was the invasive species. These are species that once introduced, formed self-sustaining populations in the wild, and found a means of dispersal to spread actively around Bermuda. For 12 species, we found some records calling them native while others said they had been introduced. We used the class 'cryptogenic' when we could not be sure of a species place of origin. The most well-known example of a cryptogenic species would be the Morning Glory I*pomea indica*, which is widespread in many habitats. The number and proportions of Bermuda's plants that fell into each of these classes is shown in Figure 1.

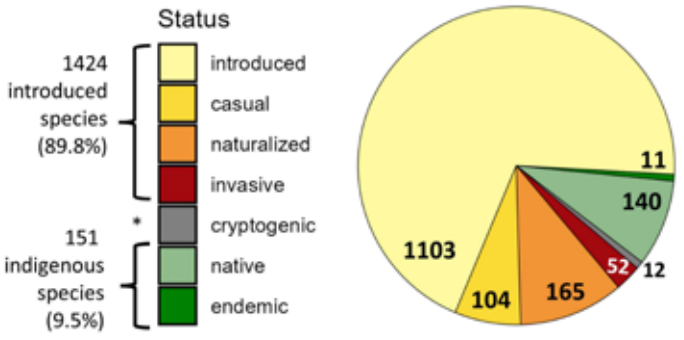


Figure 1: Proportions of Bermuda's vascular plant flora in 7 invasion stage classes, including cryptogenic species of uncertain native origin

Our inventory was published by *Biological Invasions* in March (Copeland & Dawson 2025). The supplements to the paper, including the questions for classifying invasion-stage, and the tables showing the 1587 plants in the inventory, can be read here: https://rdcu.be/edCZ7.

Analysis of the inventory showed that 321 species, that is 22.5% of the plants introduced to Bermuda, had escaped cultivation and been classed as casual, naturalised or invasive. Bermuda has 52 species which were self-sustaining in the wild and dispersed widely enough to be considered invasive. This is only 3.3% of Bermuda's total flora and only 3.7% of introduced plants. These figures might seem like Bermuda does not have a significant problem with invasive plants, but the landscape tells a different story (Fig.2). Therefore, the next part of the work was to survey the vegetation in unmanaged areas of 16 national parks and nature reserves to quantify how invaded the habitats really are. We were also keen to identify novel communities of plants which had been formed by combining Bermuda's native and endemic species with introduced plants from all around the world (Fig. 2).

Figure 2: The woodland at Ferry Point Park, showing a typical mix of invasive trees, marked with their continent of origin. The lone native tree is the Bermuda Palmetto circled.

The vegetation surveys were done from January to April 2024 and December to March 2025. In ArcMap, a 50m grid was created to identify systematic survey-targets in protected areas that had large enough patches of vegetation for us to carry out a survey. Given the small size and fragmented nature of many of Bermuda's parks, this was a bit of a challenge! Target-points were selected where grid-lines crossed, and reaching some of them was also rather challenging. I visited 300 targets in 16 parks to do quadrat surveys. The protocol involved counting all the trees over 1.5 m tall (conveniently the height of the end of my nose) inside a 20x20m canopy quadrat, and then doing cover-estimates for herbaceous species in two 4x4m understory quadrats which were nested in the SE and NW quarters of the big plot. We counted also seedlings in the understory plots, and counted the number of trees with vine species on them. At 246 of the targets we collected successfully canopy and understory data, and at the other 54 we sampled only the understory – either because there were no trees, or because we could not fit the 20x20m quadrat into the space.

In total. we surveyed 9.84 ha of habitat and counted 30,873 trees, palms and shrubs from 65 species. We found 37 species of

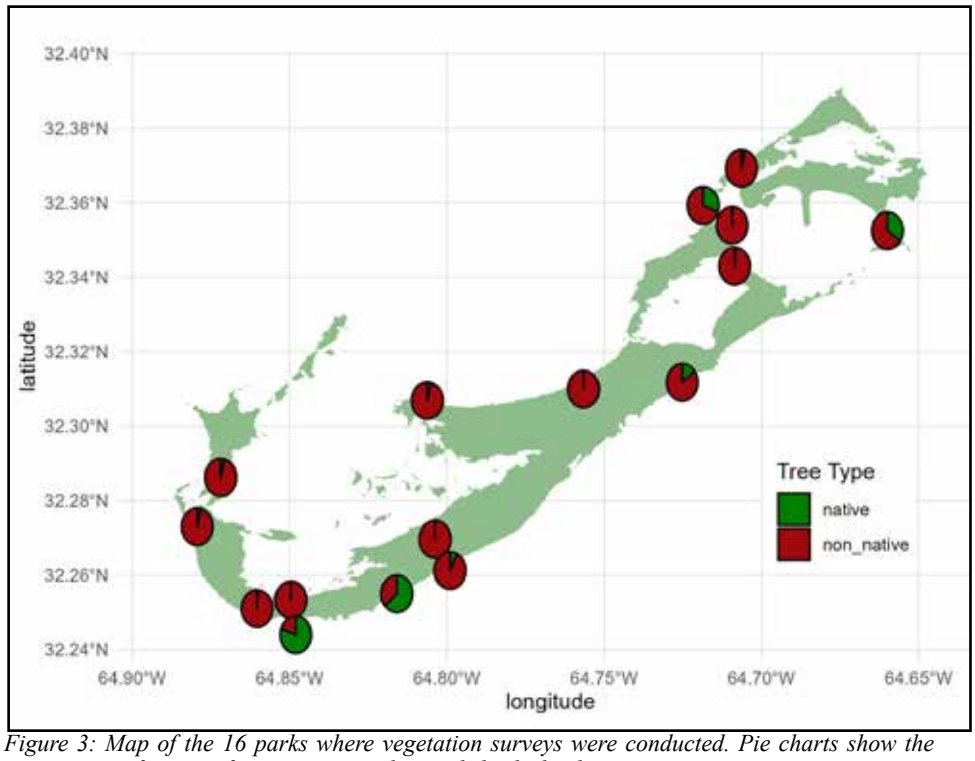


Figure 3: Map of the 16 parks where vegetation surveys were conducted. Pie charts show the counts of canopy-forming trees, palms and shrubs by their native or non-native origin.

seedlings and 37 species of saplings in the understory of the plots, along with 133 species of herbaceous plants, grasses, ferns and succulents, and 19 species of vines on trees.

From my years with the Deptartment of Environment and Natural Resources, and a lifetime of exploring these parks and nature reserves, I thought I had a good idea of what and who I would find in this survey, and I am thrilled to say in many ways I was wrong!

The general trends are as we expected. The tree canopies of our parks are dominated by non-native species, just how dominated was a bit of a shock (Fig. 3). Of the 16 sites surveyed, 10 of them had over 95% non-native trees, and 4 had over 99%. The four plots at Warwick Pond did not contain a single native tree, and the two plots at Seymour's Pond had one Bermuda Cedar out of the 436 trees counted.

Slightly surprising was the finding that, at some of the coastal sites along the South Shore, the canopies are native-dominated. At Church Bay Park the wooded sections are 80% native trees, and South Shore Park (Bermuda's largest protected area, including the famous Horseshoe Bay) contained 63% native trees. These native tree canopies are, however, not species-diverse, they are very much dominated by Bay Grape or Sea Grape *Coccoloba uvifera*. At Church Bay, for example, 77% of the trees we counted were Bay Grapes.

The more extreme environmental conditions at the coast (like salt-spray, drying oceanic winds, hot rocks etc.) are possibly saving them from becoming dominated by invasive trees, but upland sites further inland have not been so lucky. Upland sites have also been more disturbed by human activities like agriculture and housing development. Doing a rough division of our sites into 'coastal' and 'upland' habitats showed that 98% of trees in upland sites are naturalised or invasive species, versus 51% at the coast. Only 2% of upland trees were native, compared to 48% on the coast.

We found a few surprises during the surveys. One was the prevalence of seedlings of the Australian native Solitaire Palm *Ptychosperma elegans*, the Mock Orange *Murraya paniculata*, Song of India *Dracaena reflexa*, Japanese Yew *Podocarpus macrophyllus* and an *Araucaria* spp. which I suspect is Cook Pine *A. columnaris* (Fig. 4). A rather pleasing surprise was finding specimens of nine endemic plants in the surveys, including seedlings of Bermuda Bean *Phaseolus lignosus* at the Walsingham Trust (Fig. 4F). When we Red-Listed this endemic vine in 2014, we counted 29 mature plants remaining, so the likelihood of it turning up in a random survey was incredibly low.

Obviously the fieldwork to collect a dataset like this was quite an undertaking, and I would like to thank UKOTCF's Jodey Peyton for coming out to Bermuda for a few weeks to help me (Fig. 5). The Bermuda Government, Bermuda National Trust, Bermuda Audubon Society and the trustees of the Walsingham Trust allowed me unrestricted access to their sites to do this work. In particular Buy Back Bermuda gave permission to survey the new High Point Nature Reserve before it was opened to the public, and before restoration work began earlier this year. Therefore, I hope our data will provide a valuable baseline to see future changes in the species composition in this space.

I will be continuing to analyse the vegetation-survey data this autumn and writing it up into a thesis chapter. I am working also on analysing seedling and bird data from five parks and observations of birds feeding on the fruits of some of our invasive trees, with the aim of identifying the dispersers of invasive seeds.

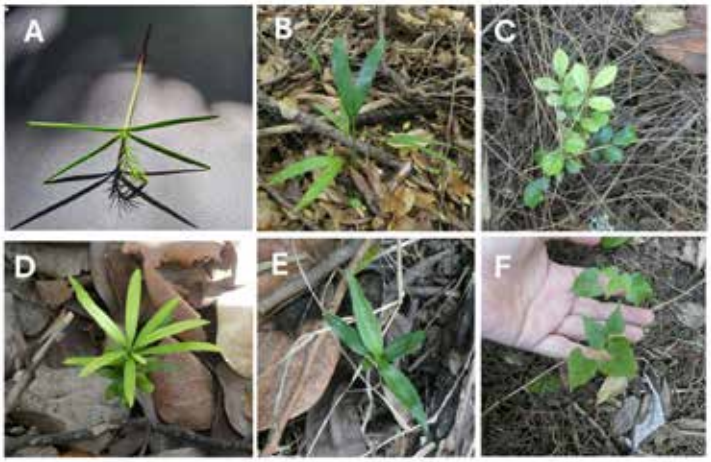


Figure 4: Seedlings of: A) suspected Araucaria columnaris; *B)* Ptychosperma elegans; *C)* Murraya paniculata; *D)* Podocarpus macrophyllus; *E)* Dracaena reflexa; *F)* Phaseolus lignosus

Figure 5. Surprisingly, our only fieldwork selfie! The author (left) and Jodey Peyton at Cooper's Island

Our analysis shows that 75% of Bermuda's invasive plants arrived on the island for ornamental purposes (Copeland & Dawson 2025). So there is obviously some awareness-work that can be done on the need to consider: what we import in the future; how we manage our present invasive problems; and how we can improve the status of our native plants. I have had incredible support, including financial contributions, from both the Garden Club of Bermuda (https://gardenclubbermuda.org/) and the Bermuda Botanical Society (https://bermudabotanicalsociety.org). I am hoping through these avenues, and others, to share more results

as I get them. I am keen to connect with others from the UKOTs or working in the UKOTs at UK universities. I can be contacted through Durham University Biosciences, and can presently be found as a visitor at the University of Liverpool.

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Alison Copeland, PhD Student, Department of Biosciences, Durham University

Gibraltar Botanic Garden – horticulture upskilling at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

The Director of Gibraltar Botanic Garden (GBG), Keith Bensusan, has been liaising with fellow UKOTCF Council member and Director of International, The Wildlife Trusts, Leigh Morris, on their nursery development. Following a visit by Leigh to GBG in December 2023, a role-descriptor for a propagator was produced, a role created, and Alejandro Iglesias (known as Alex) was appointed as GBG Propagator. "Alex was initially an arborist at the GBG but, as soon as he expressed an interest in propagation, we knew he was our man. He did so well during his two weeks at RBGE, which are just the first steps in what we hope will be a long journey for him", said Dr Keith Bensusan.

Alex did not have a propagation background, and there was a desire for him to receive upskilling at another botanic garden. Leigh contacted the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE), where he had worked between 2004-14, to ask if they could facilitate this, and his good friend Sarah Cathcart, RBGE's Director of Learning & Engagement, agreed to help. "The RBGE team fully supports working with others to share knowledge and to provide professional development skills for horticulturists. Hosting Alex was a great opportunity to do this and learn from the GBG", said Sarah Cathcart.

Alex spent two weeks at RBGE in July 2025, during which he gained experience working with their horticulture team, and completed the RBGE Certificate in Practical Horticulture (CPH) course (www.rbge.org.uk/learn/certificate-courses/rbge-certificate-in-practical-horticulture/) which was created by Leigh while at RBGE. Alex feels "that the whole experience was life-changing. I got the chance to meet new people from different backgrounds: very interesting and I learnt much from them. The CPH course allowed me to gain more experience and confidence in propagation, and discover new techniques, which I have now adapted at GBG."

Leigh Morris said: "I am delighted to have been able to facilitate this upskilling visit by Alex by RBGE, one of the world's best botanical gardens. It is also wonderful for me to see RBGE still delivering the CPH and Alex gaining the qualification during his internship, as the vison 20 years ago was that the course would be a core tool to build horticultural capacity. This has been a great example of how UKOTCF can facilitate upskilling in the UK for member and assciate organisations."

Above: Alex (left) and Leigh

Below: On the course at RBGE

Sustainable Cayman Delegates Return from Global Sustainable Islands Summit 2025

Sustainable Cayman is proud to announce the successful return of its first official delegation to the Global Sustainable Islands Summit (GSIS) 2025, held in St. Kitts and Nevis on 23-31 May. This landmark summit convened leaders from island nations across the globe – governments, NGOs and private sector partners – to address urgent challenges around climate-resilience, sustainable development, and inclusive governance.

As an official summit partner, Sustainable Cayman was represented by Executive Officer Melanie Carmichael and two of our Youth Sustainability Ambassadors, Leanni Tibbetts and Dani Seales. Together, they engaged in key sessions, bilateral meetings, and a two-day Youth Forum dedicated to empowering young islanders.

Summit Themes & Relevance to Cayman: The summit's focus on water-security, energy-transition, food-resilience, circular economies, nature-based solutions and social protection offered critical insights for the Cayman Islands. While Cayman's economic position may set it apart from typical SIDS (Small Island Developing States) profiles, our national response to climate-change often lags behind our more resource-challenged neighbours. GSIS 2025 offered both a reality check and a pathway forward.

Youth Forum Highlights:

- ***Policy Access:*** Cayman's delegates echoed regional calls for youth to be part of the planning process – not just late-stage consultation. They urged clearer communication, earlier inclusion, and institutional support for youth-led initiatives.
- ***Green Innovation:*** Delegates explored initiatives like St. Kitts' recycling programme with Taiwan, sparking ideas for circular-economy approaches and entrepreneurship in Cayman.
- ***Climate and Equity:*** Sessions focused on the disproportionate impact of climate-change on women, youth, and persons with disabilities, highlighting the need for inclusive planning tools such as sign-language integration and targeted support frameworks.

Cayman's Takeaways & Forward Agenda: Sustainable Cayman welcomes the opportunity to discuss and collaborate with policymakers on youth-informed proposals shaped by the summit:

1. Quick-Win Initiatives for the Cayman Islands Civil Service
2. A Climate-Aligned Tourism Strategy that balances sustainability, waste-reduction, and cultural resilience
3. Composting Education in schools and community-gardens, in partnership with the Department of Agriculture
4. A youth-led Green Business Spotlight Series to promote local sustainability champions.

Why This Matters: GSIS 2025 was a transformational moment for Cayman's youth. Our Ambassadors returned with fresh insights, new networks and a deeper understanding of how small island states can lead in climate-innovation. Youth-participation in these forums is not symbolic – it is strategic. They are ready to implement, collaborate, and scale ideas that directly strengthen Cayman's national resilience.

"We can't afford to sit back and assume our economy will shield us from the climate-crisis. What we saw at GSIS 2025 were small nations doing big things: integrating circular economies, protecting and restoring ecosystems, and empowering youth. Cayman can and should be leading that charge," said Melanie Carmichael.

L-R Catherine Childs, Melanie Carmichael, Leanni Tibbetts, Joanna Hossack, Arianna Abdul-Nour

Support & Acknowledgements: This impactful delegation was made possible through the generous support of our sponsors: Island Innovation, Ministry of Wellness, Island Waste Carriers, Mike's Ice, Island Recycling, Cayman Islands Football Association and Grant Thornton Cayman. We extend our sincere gratitude for their commitment to youth empowerment and sustainable development.

This builds on the work of Ambassador Isabela Watler, who led Honouring Coasts, a youth-produced storytelling project spotlighting the cultural heritage of Cayman's beaches and a policy discussion paper by Matthew Feitelberg *Between Sand & Sea*,examining solutions for Seven Mile Beach, including the importance of sediment systems, managed retreat, and nature-based restoration.

Sustainable Cayman, founded in 2014 and officially recognised as a charitable organisation in April 2022, remains committed to providing sensible solutions to sustainability challenges. With the continued support of the Cayman Islands' community, international organisations and the dedication of a diverse team of youth volunteers and professionals, the grassroots-organisation looks forward to making a lasting impact in the Cayman Islands of today and for future generations. Visit sustainablecayman.org to learn more.

Supporting Atlantic Territories Invertebrate Conservation DPLUS216 - Achievements in Year 1

Danniella Sherwood (Senior Conservation Officer, Buglife)

Introduction

Supporting Atlantic Territories Invertebrate Conservation aims to improve our understanding of endemic and native invertebrates in Anguilla, Ascension Island, Bermuda and the Falkland Islands. By identifying which species are present and where they are found, the project seeks to highlight Important Invertebrate Areas (IIA) and identify targeted and prioritised conservation actions to protect them. This project is funded by the UK Government through the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Darwin Plus (DPLUS216) and is a collaboration between Anguilla National Trust, Government of Anguilla, Ascension Island Government Conservation & Fisheries Directorate, The Bermuda National Trust, The Government of Bermuda, Falklands Conservation, Falkland Islands Government, the Species Recovery Trust, and Buglife: The Invertebrate Conservation Trust (lead partner).

During the first year of the project, we were focused mainly on data-collation and fieldwork to improve knowledge about invertebrates on Anguilla, Bermuda and the Falklands. This allows for crucial taxonomy work and to help identify and map IIAs. These maps can then be used to identify priority areas and species for conservation and for advocacy to influence local policy and management-plans. Below, I give a summary under four areas and note our current aspirations for the second year.

Fieldwork

Fieldwork by our partners, Myles Darrell (Bermuda National Trust) and Mark Outerbridge (Bermuda Government), supplemented with help from talented local high-school students, has resulted in a good collection of invertebrates being amassed for Bermuda, which are in transit to the UK at the time of writing. Similarly, our partners, Andy Stanworth (Falkland Conservation) and colleagues, and Sean Prokopiw (Falkland Islands Government) collected some Falklands samples, whilst the majority of the standardised surveys were undertaken by a freelance entomologist, Christy Jo Scipio-O'Dean, who was contracted by Buglife. As a result, an excellent collection of invertebrates from the Falklands has been made. The moths are already in the UK and being analysed, while the rest of the samples should arrive by boat soon. On both islands, there has been promotion in local media, and in Bermuda we ran also a news story about the first photographs of an endemic spider which were collected by a citizen-scientist and sent into the project.

This year, I visited Anguilla for 28 days in January-February to conduct fieldwork and to provide training in invertebrate collection, curation, and identification to two incredible local organisations. Crucial to the success of my fieldwork was working with local collaborators Farah Mukhida (Executive Director, Anguilla National Trust) and Rhon Connor (Environment Officer, Department of Natural Resources, Government of Anguilla), two internationally renowned experts on the flora and fauna of Anguilla. Both Farah and Rhon have spent many years at the forefront of protecting the island's natural heritage, and it was a great privilege to work with them. Anguilla colleagues helped with collecting samples, from remote islets to the island's cave system, from leaf-litter, rocks, pond-edges and deep in the scrub. Also integral to the success of the visit was the kindness of my accommodation hosts, Merlyne Gumbs and Joshua Francis, a wonderful couple whose property gave me the ideal base for my work, including pristine land teeming with endemic invertebrates where I could conduct night surveys. This has led to the discovery of several possible new species.

Light trap in the Falklands. Photo by Christy Jo Scipio-O'Dean (Stanley, Falkland Islands)

Danni Sherwood (Buglife) and James Gumbs (Anguilla Government Department of Natural Resources) during in-field training at Cove Pond, Anguilla, February 2025. Photo by Zavier Morrishaw (Anguilla Government Department of Natural Resources).

Almost nothing is known currently about Anguilla's invertebrates. Despite being in a biodiversity hotspot, prior to this project, only around 120 invertebrate species had ever been recorded on the island. We now know that a huge number of unrecorded invertebrates were collected during the visit, which we are in

Malaise trap at Spittal Pond, Bermuda. Photo by Myles Darrell (Bermuda National Trust)

A previously undiscovered wolf spider (Lycosidae) found by Danni during fieldwork in Anguilla, February 2025. Photo by Danni Sherwood (Buglife)

the process of describing with local collaborators and other scientific colleagues here in the UK. Although we are studying all invertebrates, having been an academic arachnologist for 15 years, my strongest interest is in revising the spiders of the island, a project that is now ongoing, with several new species suspected to need description. We are also preparing descriptions of a new species of solifugid which I discovered on Anguilla, the first camel-spider to be discovered on the mainland!

Our work has generated crucial data-collection of local species, which will eventually contribute to global conservation efforts and enhance our understanding of the ecological dynamics of invertebrates within the Northern Caribbean. Providing training to local collaborators has fostered capacity-building, empowering them with skills and knowledge that can be utilised in ongoing conservation initiatives. This knowledge-exchange not only enhances the capabilities of local researchers but also allowed me to learn about the local habitats and invasive plants from experts. Engaging with local stakeholders ensures that the conservation strategies developed for invertebrates moving forwards are locally led. Additionally, fostering these collaborations will hopefully lead to long-term partnerships with the Anguilla National Trust and Department of Environment, creating a sustainable framework for ongoing research and conservation of Anguillan invertebrates. This holistic strategy is essential for effective and lasting invertebrate conservation stewardship in the region.

Taxonomy and other research

Taxonomic revision of the invertebrates from island fieldwork is currently underway, I have almost completed the spiders and already finished analysis of the other arachnid groups and many of the insect groups from Anguilla. Papers are being written and two have already been published. We are working with experts to finish the remaining speciose groups (Coleoptera, Hemiptera, Diptera) later in the year.

I have produced new checklists for all three islands, and am also building upon the Ascension list, which was produced by a prior Darwin project (*From pseudoscorpions to crickets: Securing Ascension Island's unique invertebrates* DPLUS135). As taxonomic work continues, these checklists will be updated continually and shared with stakeholders.

Outreach, Training and Engagement

All project partners received bespoke training on sampling methods and general invertebrate identification by myself and Vicky Wilkins (Species Recovery Trust). As detailed above, my fieldwork on Anguilla also allowed for me to extend in-person training to all staff-members in our local partner organisations. For all three islands, we sent equipment (e.g. nets, aspirators, forceps, moth=traps, malaise-traps) out for the fieldwork and showed how to use it.

While in Anguilla, Farah and I did several outreach activities, which included leading a 'night walk' for the local conservation club, showing local nature-lovers the massive diversity of bugs that live amongst them. The walk was so successful we ran over the original end-time by 45 minutes!

The project is aiming to collect as many records from iNaturalist as possible and encourage more local people to use it. So far, we have amassed over 1,000 new records during the lifetime of the project, which we hope will continue to grow. This, combined with the 5,000 or so historical records made before the project, make a very valuable resource that will be invaluable to the taxonomic and mapping outputs later in the project.

A preview of the Supporting Atlantic Territories Invertebrate Conservation iNaturalist project. Photo by Danni Sherwood (Buglife)

Christy Jo and I delivered a lecture for Falklands residents. Christy Jo, living locally, did the bulk of the work, explaining how she did her fieldwork. I joined virtually and answered technical questions on invertebrate ecology and conservation.

Important Invertebrate Areas on Ascension

Last, but not least, I worked with Buglife colleagues Jamie Robins and Tom Thomson to adapt the IIA methodology used in Great Britain, ensuring the species-selection criteria and scale were appropriate for use in smaller areas and with high endemicity. Since Ascension has such a good dataset from DPLUS135 (with which regular readers will be familiar), it served as the perfect pilot island for this work. We have now finalised the methodology and produced preliminary maps. Meetings with other stakeholders were held recently and we are adapting the boundaries slightly based on their expertise. By late July, we hope the IIAs will be completed and we can start to roll out this exciting new method on other territories. A scientific paper is being produced about the new methodology also, which will be a significant output for the project.

Year 2 aspirations

With identification work, IIA mapping, and other outputs going very smoothly, we are positive for the second year of the project, which will feature more in-depth training offered to partners and more advocacy as we start to look at rolling out IIAs and embedding invertebrates into local policy in each Territory. I look forward to updating readers as the project develops.

Project funding and partners

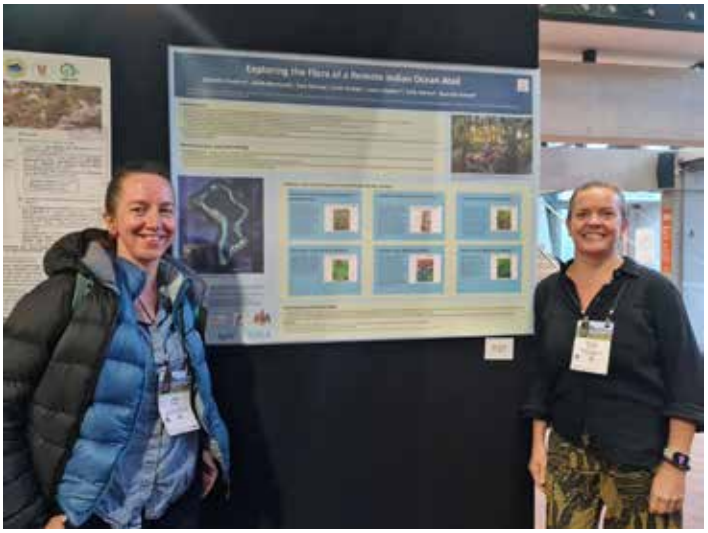
Supporting Atlantic Territories Invertebrate Conservation aims to improve our understanding of endemic and native invertebrates in Anguilla, Bermuda, Ascension Island and the Falkland Islands. By identifying which species are present and where they are found, the project seeks to highlight Important Invertebrate Areas and implement targeted conservation actions to protect them. This project is funded by the UK Government through the Biodiversity Challenge Funds Darwin Plus (DPLUS216) and is a collaboration between: Anguilla National Trust, Government of Anguilla, Ascension Island Government Conservation & Fisheries Directorate, the Bermuda National Trust, the Government of Bermuda, Falklands Conservation, Falkland Islands Government, the Species Recovery Trust, and Buglife: The Invertebrate Conservation Trust.

UKOTs at the Ecology and Management of Alien Plant Invasions Conference 2025

Alison Copeland, PhD Student, Department of Biosciences, Durham University

The 17th International Conference on the Ecology and Management of Alien Plant Invasions (EMAPi) was held on the South Island of New Zealand, at Lincoln University, from 2nd to 5th September. This biennial meeting brings together academics and students studying plant invasions with practitioners and land-managers battling invasions. This year the conference was attended by 170 people from 30 countries. New Zealand is a world-leader in biosecurity,invasive-species control and containment programmes for both plants and animals – so it was particularly interesting to learn about their projects and experiences.

The UKOTs were well represented at EMAPi this year. Amongst the oral presentations, Michael Lavery from Kaitiaki o te Ngahere in New Zealand gave a talk on surveying the vegetation of South Georgia to help plan plant-eradication and control efforts under various projects. He highlighted how sharing experience from New Zealand of herbicide applications to plant-invasions helped control plants successfully on South Georgia. Michael's talk highlighted also the use of technologies such as an offline app for tracking site-visits, herbicide-applications and native flora-recording, and a drone delivering herbicides to inaccessible slopes. After telling us how Kaitiaki o te Ngahere is implementing South Georgia's Non-Native Plant Management Strategy, Michael made the audience jealous with photos of the wildlife and scenery of South Georgia.



Dr Jodey Peyton (UKOTCF and International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis) and Danielle Frolich (SWCA Environmental Consultants) with their poster on the flora of Deigo Garcia. Photo by Alison Copeland.

Some UKOT presenters at EMAPi, from L-R: Alison Copeland (Durham University), Erica Berntsen (Falkland Islands Government), Michael Lavery (Kaitiaki o te Ngahere) and Bradley Myer (Kaitiaki o te Ngahere and Indigena Biosecurity International). Photo by Jodey Petyon.

Also among the plenary speakers was Bradley Myer, from Indigena Biosecurity International, who has previously worked across several territories. He gave a talk on a 15-year project to manage plant-invasions within the water-catchments of the City of Nelson, New Zealand.

Alison Copeland, a PhD student at Durham University in the UK presented a 5-minute flash-talk and poster summarising a survey of canopy-forming trees, palms and shrubs in 16 of Bermuda's parks and nature reserves. The key finding of the work was that, in ten parks, the canopy was composed of over 95% non-native trees, while four of those parks were over 99% non-native. Invasive species made up the majority of trees found – accounting for 85% of the 30,873 trees counted in the survey, and 20 of the 65 species recorded. Alison is supervised by Prof Wayne Dawson, who some of you will know from his work in the Caribbean UKOTs and South Georgia.

Erica Berntsen, representing the Falkland Islands Government's Department of Agriculture, presented a poster describing the threats posed by Calafate *Berberis microphylla* and the

collaborative project to manage it. Her poster highlighted the early engagement of farmers and landowners, visible political support for the project, and clear communication to avoid conflict as key drivers of success. Targeted spraying of Calafate by New Zealand contractor Indigena Biosecurity International, in collaboration with community members and the Falkland Islands Government, has allowed this economically harmful weed to be tackled over a large area. This project gives a good case-study of how to engage with private land-owners and the community through various methods to gain support for control of a widespread weed.

Dr Jodey Peyton, from UKOTCF and International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis, and Danielle Frohlich, from SWCA Environmental Consultants in Hawai'i USA, also attended the conference, where they presented a poster on behalf of numerous collaborators on the flora of Diego Garcia. The project collaborators, including SWCA Environmental Consultants, RBG Kew, Gibraltar Botanic Gardens, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, UKOTCF and Meise Botanic Garden (Belgium), created an updated checklist of 367 plant species for the atoll. The invasive species recorded during vegetation surveys were highlighted for conference participants, including *Leucaena leucocephala*, the almost universally problematic Lead Tree *Mimosa pudica*, *Chromolaena odorata* and *Mikania micrantha*. The Chagos Archipelago is home to fifty-one native plants; the poster highlights the risk of invasive non-native plant species and suggests actions for the future conservation and restoration of native species and habitats.

On the final day of the conference, some of us were fortunate to visit the Hinewai Reserve to learn about the restoration of the property from degraded farmland into a native forest. We were fortunate to meet Hugh Wilson who began restoring Hinewai in 1987. Hugh and the project to restore Hinewai can be seen in the Netflix documentary *Fools & Dreamers: Regenerating a Native Forest* which can be watched online here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3VZSJKbzyMc .

Invasive yellow-flowered Gorse and regenerating native forest at Hinewai Reserve, New Zealand. Photo: Alison Copeland.

The 18th EMAPi meeting will be held in 2027 and will be hosted by the University of Toronto. Given this proximity to the Caribbean and Europe, it would be wonderful if the UKOTs could be represented again.

Spiky Yellow Woodlouse Green-listed: major achievement for Saint Helena's invertebrates

In a significant achievement for the IUCN Species Survival Group Atlantic Island Invertebrate Specialist Group (AIISG), invertebrate experts Danni Sherwood, Liza Fowler and Vicky Wilkins have authored the first green-status assessment of a UKOT invertebrate, focusing on the flagship Critically Engendered Spiky Yellow Woodlouse, endemic to the cloud-forest in St Helena. The assessment shows that this species is extremely threatened, but that it has a high chance of recovery if restoration efforts continue. It now opens the door for further green list assessments of UKOT invertebrates in the future. This work was made possible through funding from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) *St Helena Cloud Forest Project*, supported by Species Recovery Trust and RSPB.

(https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/67368866/67368879)

Sherwood, D., Fowler, L. & Wilkins, V. L. (2025) *Pseudolaureola atlantica* (Green Status assessment). *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2025: e.T67368866A67368866620251*. Accessed on 20 June 2025.

New UKOTCF Botanical Nurseries Working Group

Several of the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies (and UKOTCF members or associates) have plant nurseries and/or botanic gardens delivering *ex situ* plant conservation. There are some wonderful examples across our members and associates of *ex situ* conservation work, which we believe would be interesting and useful to other territories. There is enthusiasm from some of our members for UKOTCF to facilitate knowledge sharing between these gardens and nurseries and to that aim we are hosting an on-line meeting on 11 December 2025 at 1900 GMT which is open to any of our members who are interested to have a cross-territory discussion about *ex situ* plant conservation. This initial meeting will be chaired by UKOTCF Council member, Leigh Morris, supported by UKOTCF Senior Conservation & Project Officer, Dr Jodey Peyton. If this meeting deems that it would be useful, UKOTCF Council would consider favourably setting up and facilitating a UKOTCF Botanical Nurseries Working Group for any members, associates or others in the UKOTCF network.

If you would like to participate in the first meeting, please email Jodey Peyton at: jpeyton@ukotcf.org

Colossal squid finally filmed

A colossal squid has been filmed alive in the wild for the first time, 100 years after the species was discovered. The footage was captured on 9 March by Schmidt Ocean Institute's remotely operated vehicle *SuBastian*, at a depth of 600 metres off the South Sandwich Islands. The juvenile squid, with luminous rear body parts, is the first confirmed sighting of a living *Mesonychoteuthis hamiltoni* in its natural habitat. Colossal squid are thought to grow up to seven metres in length and weigh as much as 500kg, making them the world's heaviest invertebrate. Until now they have been seen only dead – washed up or in the stomachs of predators such as whales.

The discovery came during a 35-day ocean census expedition – part of a global project to find and record new marine life, and research teams from the UK and Germany. The glacial glass squid *Galiteuthis glacialis* was also filmed alive for the first time on a previous Schmidt Ocean Institute expedition in January, in the Bellingshausen Sea off British Antarctic Territory.

25th Inter Island Environment Meeting in the Isle of Man

The Inter Island Environment Meeting (IIEM) 2025 is a wonderful annual gathering of individuals and organisations (governments, NGOs and businesses) who are involved in conservation, sustainability and the environment in the Crown Dependencies and other British islands.

This year's IIEM was held for the first time in the Isle of Man (September 17-19), hosted by Manx Wildlife Trust (MWT) (www.mwt.im/IIEM25). The #IIEM25 event was led excellently by Graham Makepeace-Warne, MWT CEO, supported by his team who delivered a fantastic three days at the Villa Marina in Douglas. In addition to a great turnout from the Isle of Man, all were delighted to welcome delegates from Guernsey, Jersey, Alderney, Lundy Island, Isle of Wight and Isles of Scilly and Great Britain (referred to by some as the big isand north of Alderney).

The IIEM is primarily focused on the Crown Dependencies. However, it was excellent that the UKOTs were in the conversation, with several organisations attending who work across islands. The team from UKOTCF (Catherine Wensink, Jodey Peyton, Mike Pienkowski, Ann Pienkowski and Leigh Morris), were joined by Amdeep Sangera (UKOTs Conservation Manager, Marine Conservation Society), and Natalie Hall (Head of Global Policy, RSPB), alongside representatives from Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust and The Wildlife Trusts.

#IIEM25 was opened by the Lieutenant Governor for the Isle of Man, His Excellency Sir John Lorimer and Lady Lorimer, who then hosted an evening reception on Day 1 to celebrate 25 years of IIEM. The Manx Bard, Jordanne Kennaugh, wrote and recited a poem to celebrate 25 years of IIEM, and Alf Cannon MHK, the island's Chief Minister (aka Prime Minister) closed the IIEM on Friday afternoon.

The talks over the first day and a half were an excellent eclectic mix of island conservation stories and all who were not at IIEM are encouraged to watch the recordings, which are available on the MWT YouTube page (www.youtube.com/@manxwildlifetrust6289/streams).

On the afternoon of day two, the delegates each chose one of a series of visit options to see environmental projects in the Island. The trips included: Up the mountain – to learn about the Island's peat restoration programme; Farming for Nature – visit to Ballacosnahan Farm to see agri-environment in action; Tour of the Ballaugh Curragh; a Fungal Foray; Derbyhaven & Langness Nature Walk; and a Guided Visit to the Manx Birdlife Point of Ayre Nature Reserve.

This year, IIEM had an additional third day, focused on green finance and building corporate partnerships, the aim being to help increase the capacity of the environmental organisations to build meaningful relationships with businesses. The excellent talks on the third day included Jonathan Andrews (Remarkable Partnerships), Claudine Blamey (Aviva), Hannah Simons (Lloyds

Bank International), Dominic Wall (Deloitte) and Samir Whitaker (Orsted). To coincide with IIEM, a team from Aviva, led by Claudine Blamey, their Chief Sustainability Officer, were in the Isle of Man to visit the three rainforest restoration sites and tree nursery that they are funding for Manx Wildlife Trust through their partnership with The Wildlife Trusts (www.aviva.com/newsroom/news-releases/2023/02/aviva-helps-restore-rare-native-british-rainforests/).

Sarah Mercer and the IOM UNESCO Biosphere Youth Organization facilitated an interactive visioning exercise on the last afternoon, which was followed by seven eNGOs each having 5 mins to pitch for funding to a panel of dragon's denesque judges, who subsequently awarded seed-funding to four of them. The main output of this session, however, was the collective learning in the room on how to pitch an idea for funding.

Jodey Peyton and Leigh Morris ended Day 3 by presenting for UKOTCF on EcoMatch (www.ukotcf.org.uk/ecomatch/), a new UKOTCF web-platform aiming to link environmental organisations/projects with potential partners/funders (see also pages 21-22 in this issue of *Forum News*). UKOTCF's ambition is that EcoMatch develops and expands (ideas welcomed on how to improve it, please), and it becomes a key place environmental projects across the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies seek support.

#IIEM25 hosted by Manx Wildlife Trust was a great success. Next year IIEM reverts back to the Channel Islands, where it will be hosted by Guernsey (TBC 30th September to 2nd October). We encourage people and organisations to attend.

The UKOTs Biosecurity Initiative

The GB Non-native Species Secretariat (GBNNSS) has a long-running programme of support for the UK Overseas Territories to improve biosecurity and prevent Invasive Non Native Species. The UKOTs are mostly small islands with important biodiversity and accordingly are vulnerable to the impact of INNS.

Invasive Non Native Species (INNS) are an increasing threat to biodiversity, agriculture, human health and economies. According to the IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services) assessment on Invasive Alien Species and their Control, the annual global cost of INNS is now over $423 billion, and these costs have quadrupled every decade since 1970. This increase is due primarily to increased frequency of species introductions, either deliberate or accidental.

The programme is centred on the premise that it is better to reduce the risk of introducing INNS by strengthening biosecurity than to address matters after introduction. The costs of managing or preventing the impacts of INNS is much greater after they are established. Hence it is more effective and cost effective to intervene early in the invasion pathway.

The programme supports the UKOTs Governments and civil society groups to improve biosecurity, working across the whole invasion pathway, this includes

- support to improve biosecurity legislation;
- helping with biosecurity facilities, equipment, training and procedures for more effective border measures;
- training in key aspects of biosecurity and INNS management;
- sharing information in INNS threats, including horizon-scanning to identify emerging INNS;
- help with rapid responses against INNS that have arrived, before they are established.

The development of better biosecurity legislation is a keystone to a good biosecurity regime and, with support from the programme, several UKOTs, including Pitcairn Island and Tristan da Cunha, have already enacted new biosecurity laws. Other territories, including Montserrat and Anguilla, have recently started the process to develop modern biosecurity legislation.

The programme has helped also with rapid responses against INNS that have already arrived in the UKOTs. These include action against reptiles, including the Peters Rock Agama *Agama picticauda* in the Caribbean. These invasive lizards are established in Florida but have already arrived on Tortola and Grand Cayman where establishment has been prevented. However, this illustrates the issue of bridge-head populations of INNS. Where invasive species establish outside their natural range and the new populations become the primary source of biosecurity risks to other areas.

Far from abating, biosecurity risks are increasing with increased global trade, the establishment of bridge-head populations and increasing trends such as keeping exotic pets. It is important that the UKOTs are prepared to manage these threats. Biodiversity, sustainable agriculture, human health and economies are all at risk.

Biosecurity is not, and cannot be, the responsibility of one organisation or body; it relies on a wide range of actors including environment, agriculture, maritime authorities, customs and immigration and legislature. Several sectors contributing to a common purpose result in a stronger biosecurity regime, which is suited to the modern challenges.

The Biosecurity Initiative is implemented by the GB Non Native Species Secretariat (under the Animal and Plant Health Agency) and is funded by Defra. The programme works closely with other organisations to deliver support to the UKOTs, including CABI, Fera, RSPB, MMO and a wide range of technical specialists. You can find out more about the work of the GB Non Native Species Secretariat here:

Above: an agama lizard on Tortola (BVI) near the port was captured during a rapid response.
Below: training in invasive ants led by Fera Science Ltd.

https://www.nonnativespecies.org/overseas-territories

James Millett, UK Overseas Territories Biosecurity Project Officer, GB Non Native Species Secretariat

A Busman's Holiday in Cyprus

UKOTCF Council Member, Leigh Morris, went on vacation to Cyprus at the end of June, and took the opportunity to enjoy something of a busman's holiday, see conservation in action in UK Sovereign Base Areas (SBA) in Cyprus, and meet some of the people involved. Here is is report.

Akrotiri is an internationally important biodiversity hotspot, a Ramsar Site, and one of the jewels of the UK's biodiversity estate. Leigh met Margarita Stravrinide (Senior Conservation and Projects Officer) and Vakis Michael (Conservation Warden) for the SBA Administration (SBAA) Environment Department, at the excellent Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre, which provides information for visitors and education to an impressive ~9,000 children per year about the species and habitats of Akrotiri.

Margarita then took Leigh to see their Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, which consists of the Salt Lake and marsh area. Margarita and Vakis enthusiastically told him "*The salt marsh has been positively transformed by a Biodiversity Challenge Funds Darwin Project that included the farming of a local cattle-breed in the marsh, to help control the reeds (by eating and trampling).*" It was wonderful to hear, from these two front-line conservationists, just how tremendously successful they believe this project has been in restoring the marsh-land, which has already resulted in key bird-species once again breeding in the area. It demonstrates the crucially important role Darwin Projects, and collaboration with the UK, have for biodiversity-conservation in Akrotiri (and all UKOTs). It demonstrates also the huge value of conservation grazing when used appropriately.

Jakovos Demetriou is an entomologist, former Darwin Fellow, and member of the UKOTCF Ant Working Group, who is studying for a PhD on the ants of Cyprus. Jakovos is creating a monograph/checklist of the ants present, gathering data on non-native species, and the impact of human activity on native species. Leigh met with Jakovos over coffee, and their conversation touched on Cypriot culture, the unique conservation-challenges across different parts of the island, and the potential for increased collaboration among UK Overseas Territories.

Leigh engaged also with the marine environment, with a few days' scuba-diving. After one dive, he met Evagoras Isaias, biologist and oceanographer, running a one-day National Geographic programme to engage tourists of the company Tui with marine conservation in Paphos, in partnership with local dive-centre Cydive.

Above: views at the Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre

While in Cyprus, Leigh connected also with BirdLife Cyprus and Terra Cypria, the two largest conservation NGOs in the island, and he hopes to connect with them again through the UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group meetings.

Marsh Interpretaton Panel

Thanks...

for help with this issue to those writing articles or contributing images and their colleagues, as well as the core editing and production team of Dr Jodey Peyton, Catherine Wensink, Ann Pienkowski and Dr Mike Pienkowski.

UKOTCF needs your help

UKOTCF's only focus is on helping achieve effective conservation, environmental education and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. This has a great advantage in that we always follow the priorities of the territories for conservation, rather than having to decide whether their priorities or those from other places, such as domestic Britain, need our attention.

It also has disadvantages, too. Organisations with wider involvement have income streams relating to those activities, potentially giving some buffering at times when funding for UKOT conservation is limited. As well as focussing on particular projects requested by territories, much of UKOTCF's work is coordinating across territories and pushing for their interests with UK Government. Indeed, the UK Government funds for UKOT conservation (Environment Fund for Overseas Territories, Overseas Territories Environment Programme, and the Darwin Initiative's earmarking some funding for UKOTs) all resulted in part from UKOTCF working with UK Government and Parliament. The same applies in relation to European Union institutions in the setting up of BEST, following years of lobbying by UKOTCF and its equivalent French and Netherlands umbrella bodies for their territories (but now lost to UKOTs because of Brexit). All this coordinating work is not amenable to fund-raising, as most funders like to focus on local issues and particular projects.

We know our work is valued. For example, two comments we received from UKOTs were: "Thanks so very much for keeping us all informed about what's happening across the territories" and "Great meeting... it shows the value of UKOTCF and its WCWG to bring folk together to tackle issues."

This increased current difficulty in raising funds for non-profit organisations providing wide support for others was brought home to us a few years ago. We were shocked when *Arkive* closed down due to lack of funding. This had made available still and moving images of wildlife provided by photographers, and was much used by many organisations, including IUCN's Red-List (which now lacks images). This loss of funding was despite the high profile of *Arkive* and its support by names such as Sir David Attenborough.

UKOTCF tries to keep its costs very low. Personnel work from home, absorbing office costs (thanks to understanding spouses!). Council members and advisors are unpaid. The Chairman works full-time for UKOTCF but is unpaid for this core work, and his wife donates almost as much. Currently, four others routinely donate large amounts of time to UKOTCF core roles, and many others donate time to projects. In addition, our few paid personnel donate extra unpaid time.

However, some things still need paying for. This was well recognised by UK Government officials in the early part of this millennium, when they recognised that UKOTCF provided support for UKOT conservation that UK Government might be expected to provide (and is done by some other states with overseas territories) but which it could not and still cannot, despite some increase by its agencies in work in the UKOTs.

However, at the time of the financial crisis, in 2009, UK Government's average annual funding support for UKOT conservation paid via UKOTCF fell by 76%, and never recovered. Although it is said that that financial crisis ended (well before the next started), this funding was not restored – and, in fact fell further, so that the decline in UK Government support via UKOTCF for UKOT conservation declined for several years by 100%. We appreciate some project grants awarded in the last few years which restore part of this.

Of course, UKOTCF has looked, and continues to look, for other sources of funding – but there are limited opportunities in respect of funding for conservation in UKOTs and CDs. We are grateful for some very generous donations from certain Council members and others which helped hugely in recent years.

How you can help

Clearly, if you have links with funding institutions, an introduction would be welcome! Please contact Catherine Wensink (cwensink@ukotcf.org). However, even if you do not, there are several ways in which you could help: see https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/donate/.

Some of the species that UKOTCF's joint projects with partners in Montserrat have assisted: left: 3 island endemics (Montserrat oriole with large caught insect, Montserrat galliwasp lizard, pribby bush); right: 3 regional endemics (purple-throated Carib and Antillean crested hummingbirds and Critically Endangered mountain chicken frog. Photos (galliwasp) Beano; (others) Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF.