



FORUM NEWS

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The year 2000 is already promising to be another busy year for the Forum. Preparations are in full swing for the Environmental Conference, *Calpe 2000: Linking the Fragments of Paradise*. This will be held from 28th September to 1st October at the Mackintosh Hall, Gibraltar. The conference forms one of a new series sponsored by the government of Gibraltar, under the series title "Calpe", which is the old Roman name for Gibraltar. The subtitle also reflects one of the first publications highlighting the immense biodiversity of the UK Overseas Territories and the need to provide for increased exchange of knowledge between them and other areas.

The Forum's data-base and web site project is progressing. Further consultations with users have been conducted in parallel with development work. The web-site (www.ukotcf.org) has been active for some time and is frequently visited. The first modules of the data-base will become active within this web-site in a few weeks. *Forum News* remains a conventional publication vehicle for the Overseas Territories to express views, share information and alert others to conservation issues. The Forum is totally dependent on outside funding for these projects. Foreign and Commonwealth Office has given a generous initial contribution towards the data base project, the first phase of which is almost completed. Further funding sources are being sought to allow further modules, the need for which has been made clear by our partners in the OTs.

Another major project of the Forum (with, as partners, member organisations Turks & Caicos National Trust and CABI Bioscience) just getting under way is our Darwin Initiative project (see page 5). This is a most exciting project which will form the basis of environmentally sustainable development led by local people in the unspoilt parts of the Caicos Islands. This forms part of a well integrated suite of projects of the TCI National Trust. These include environmental education work with the schools, training for villagers in running small businesses, the Trust's management of nature reserves and heritage sites, and development at the ruins of the

historic plantation, Cheshire Hall, as a headquarters for the Trust. This will incorporate features to support the conservation and education work of the Trust throughout the islands. Much of this work featured in the speech by HRH The Duke of York to TCI Legislative Council during his visit in March, when he was also able to visit Cheshire Hall.

measures instituted for the sole purpose of environmental protection. Many people thought that the fund would be used for such purposes as purchasing pieces of ecologically important Central Mangrove Wetlands. No such purchase has yet been made out of the fund. Full report reproduced by kind permission of Cayman Free Press on Page 6 and 7.



A View of the northern part of the Upper Rock Nature Reserve - Gibraltar

Articles in the *Caymanian Compass* of 26th and 27th January are of particular note. A simple question in the Finance Committee touched a veritable hornet's nest. The question being asked is "what will the money taken out of the environmental protection fund to be spent on?" The fund was set up, and revenue

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CALPE 2000: LINKING THE FRAGMENTS OF PARADISE

An international conference on environmental conservation in small territories

28th September to 1st October 2000, John Mackintosh Hall, Gibraltar

Sponsored by the Government of Gibraltar, organised by the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society, with the support of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

BACKGROUND

This conference forms one of a new series sponsored by the Government of Gibraltar, under the series title "Calpe", which is the old Roman name for Gibraltar. This particular conference addresses the very topical issue of environmental conservation. Its title also reflects one of the first publications highlighting the immense biodiversity value of the UK Overseas Territories, and the need to provide for increased exchange of knowledge between them and other areas.

The conference is intended as a working meeting, to help Territories take forward tasks, particularly in a range of areas that have been identified as priorities by workers in the small territories:

1. Environmental awareness and education
2. Information networking
3. Tourism and funding for the environment
4. Making protected areas effective
5. Biodiversity action planning

Emphasis will be placed on sharing knowledge and experience between workers from the various UK Overseas Territories, but also with other Overseas Territories, such as those of France, Spain and the Netherlands, as well as relevant small independent states.

PROVISIONAL OUTLINE

PROGRAMME – as at March 2000

Wednesday 27 September and Thursday 28 September: Arrival

Thursday 28 September

Optional tour of Gibraltar and/or nearby parts of Spain, and principal wildlife sites

Evening (18.00): first chance to view display stands from the Territories

[plus opportunity for closed business AGM of Forum for member organisations]

20.00 Dinner

Friday 29 September

OPENING SESSION 09.00

GONHS welcome and introduction to Minister – plenary

09.15

Minister opening – plenary

09.30

Conservation as viewed from a Gibraltar perspective – GONHS – Outlining purpose of conference and ways of working - plenary

10.00

ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND EDUCATION – plenary session of mainly 10-minute talks on a range of projects and experience in various Territories

13.00 Lunch

14.00 INFORMATION NETWORKING – short presentations in plenary on the Forum's database/web project, introductions to aspects of information handling, and guidance on advice available during the conference and afterwards

15.20 Parallel workshops and help desks on several aspects of ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS AND EDUCATION and INFORMATION NETWORKING

17.30 Plenary for presentation by local schoolchildren, resulting from one of the workshops

18.00 Break

18.30 Annual open meeting of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, with short presentations on its work including its regional Working Groups, followed by reception, with display boards.

20.00 Dinner

Saturday 30 September

09.00 MAKING PROTECTED AREAS EFFECTIVE – short plenary presentations, not on selecting protected areas, but on making those areas meet their objectives ("using, not choosing")

12.15 Introduction to field workshops

12.30 Lunch

13.30 Parallel workshops on managing a range of protected areas. It is hoped to offer a choice including options ranging between

natural and cultural, terrestrial and marine. The workshops will incorporate work in the field.

18.00 Social event – loose plenary, centred on Territories' display and publication stands

[Also exploratory meeting on a Forum European Working Group.]

20.00 Conference Dinner

Sunday 1 October

09.00 TOURISM AND FUNDING FOR THE ENVIRONMENT - plenary presentations on positive and negative experiences in securing funding from the tourism industry for environmental conservation

12.20 Plenary discussion on future prospects in this area

13.15 Lunch

14.15 BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLANNING – short plenary talks on: why we need plans; whose plans are they; what do they look like; how do we prevent them becoming an industry; and how to make them effective?

15.30 Plenary discussions on this topic

16.30 TAKING THINGS FORWARD

17.30 CLOSING OF CONFERENCE

18.00 Informal discussions

20.00: Dinner

Monday 2 October

Disperse

FURTHER PARTICULARS

Further information will be made available on the Forum's web-site. Those wishing to register a preliminary interest in the conference, or to make a booking, should contact:

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Migratory Species Convention meeting in South Africa comes up with good news for South Atlantic seabirds at risk from longlining

By John Cooper

In November 1999 the Sixth Conference of the Parties (6th COP) of the Bonn Convention for the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals was held in Somerset West, South Africa. BirdLife International attended as an International NGO Observer, with representatives from several national partners, including the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and BirdLife South Africa

At the previous Conference of the Parties Southern Ocean albatrosses at risk from longline fishing had been added to Appendix II of the Convention, creating the opportunity for the development of a Regional Agreement between range states for their enhanced protection. During the course of 1998, a review commissioned by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (Brothers et al. 1999) had shown quite clearly that, in addition to the albatrosses, the larger petrels of the genera *Macronectes* and *Procellaria*, totalling seven species, were also under serious threat from longliners in the Southern Ocean and adjoining seas. In the first half of 1999 the BirdLife International Seabird Conservation Programme wrote the necessary texts (Huyser et al. 1999) so that South Africa could nominate these seven species for inclusion in Appendix II of the Convention at its 6th COP.

Bonn Convention COPs by tradition include a scientific symposium on migration. I gave an invited lecture that emphasized how the migration patterns of southern albatrosses included the territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones of a number of countries, thus making them an excellent group of birds for international conservation efforts via a Bonn Convention Agreement. I was able to alert national delegates to the very serious conservation problems facing southern albatrosses and petrels, in time for the crucial discussions that followed.

Once the Conference of Parties started, all went relatively smoothly. First the Scientific Council and then the full COP unanimously approved the nominations, thus successfully adding the seven petrel species to Appendix II. BirdLife also offered strong support to an adopted resolution led by Australia (and importantly supported by France, South Africa, the United Kingdom and Uruguay, all range states for Southern Ocean albatrosses) that encouraged speedy action towards finalizing a Southern Ocean Albatross Agreement. Three breeding range states were not present: Argentina and Chile were not represented, and as yet New Zealand is not a party to the Convention.

Albatrosses and petrels now listed in Appendix II



Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus* at nest South Georgia

breed at several United Kingdom Overseas Territories (UKOTs) in the South Atlantic. At the Tristan da Cunha and Gough Islands three albatross species, including the endemic Tristan Albatross *Diomedea dabbenena* and endemic Atlantic Yellow-nosed Albatross *Thalassarche chlororhynchus*, the Southern Giant Petrel *Macronectes giganteus*, the endemic Spectacled Petrel *Procellaria conspicillata* and the Grey Petrel *P. cinerea* all breed, the Falkland Islands supports a huge population of Black-browed Albatross *T. melanophrys* as well as some Southern Giant Petrels, and South Georgia has four albatross species, two giant petrels and the White-chinned Petrel *P. aequinoctialis* as breeding species. Most of these species have been accorded a IUCN (World Conservation Union) category of threat by BirdLife International.

It is hoped that the seven petrel species will be included within a Regional Agreement along with the albatrosses. In this way all the Southern Ocean seabird species most affected by longlining will be included in an Agreement. South Atlantic UKOTs, and NGOs such as Falklands Conservation, will need to be involved in the deliberations and meetings which will now take place, so that their albatrosses and petrels may receive the maximum protection needed for their continued well-being.

References

Brothers, N.P., Cooper, J. & Lokkeborg, S. 1999. The incidental catch of seabirds by longline fisheries: worldwide review and technical guidelines for mitigation. FAO Fisheries Circular No. 937. 100 pp.
Huyser, O.A.W., Nel, D.C. & Cooper, J. 1999. Proposals from the Republic of South Africa for amendments to Appendix II of the Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals (the Bonn Convention). ADU Research Report No. 34. 41 pp.

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ALBATROSS IN TROUBLE

The world's albatross population is facing dramatic declines. New research in the last month by Falklands Conservation has shown a 30% fall in population over the last 20 years. Numbers on Beauchene Island have dropped from 160,000 pairs in 1981-82 to just 101,000 this breeding season.

An appeal is now being launched to fund in-depth research to identify the reasons for the decline and an Island-wide strategy to reverse it.

It coincides with an international campaign to save global albatross populations entitled *Keeping the World Seabirds off the Hook*, launched by BirdLife International, the leading global conservation body working in over 100 countries, of which Falklands Conservation is an International Representative.

"This is the most staggering decline" says Becky Ingham, Conservation Officer for Falklands Conservation. "We are deeply concerned and are urgently seeking funding to study our albatross populations more fully. We need to understand what is going on in the South Atlantic where the albatross are concentrated and why this decline is happening".

The Black-browed Albatross, with a wingspan of over two metres is the Falklands largest and most beautiful seabird, attracting tourists from all over the world to the Islands. It is also one of the most important species breeding in the Islands which hold three-quarters of its entire global breeding population.

For more information contact Ann Brown, UK Secretary, Falklands Conservation 020 8343 0831
www.falklands-nature.demon.co.uk

BERMUDA BLUEBIRDS

The Eastern Bluebird *Sialia sialia* is a native species to Bermuda - the only location outside North America where this species breeds. Before man first settled in 1609, forest growth dominated the landscape. Bluebirds fed on coastal grasslands, nesting in old cedars and cliff cavities. There was an absence of non-avian predators. In the last 50 years, the pressures put on the bluebirds to find suitable nest-sites have been immense:

- House sparrow *Passer domesticus* introduced in 1870-74 increased rapidly and began to displace bluebirds from natural cliffs and tree cavities.
- In the late 1940s and 1950s, a scale insect caused the elimination of over 90% of the cedar trees in Bermuda.
- European Starling *Sternus vulgaris* colonised in the 1950s and increased competition for nesting cavity species.
- House Sparrows use bluebird nestboxes and are responsible for the slaughter of numerous bluebird chicks.
- The Great Kiskadee *Pitangus sulphuratus* was introduced in 1956 (to control the anolis lizard population) but proved to have a wide-ranging food preferences including taking young bluebirds from their nests.
- Pesticides such as DDT were widely used in Bermuda in the 1950s and 60s especially on golf courses and gardens. Being an insectivorous species, one can only assume the bluebird must have suffered a decline.
- There has been a dramatic increase in the number of feral cats, especially since the introduction of cat feeding stations in the 1990s.
- The tropical fowl mite *Ornithonyssus bursa* has caused a significant number of deaths in bluebird nestlings.
- Bermuda's human population has increased three-fold since 1900 to about 60,000. The resulting urbanisation means there are far fewer open spaces.
- Vandalism by mindless individuals has resulted in broken nestboxes and dead bluebirds.

However, great efforts have been made to halt the decline in bluebird numbers:

- A nest box scheme has been in place for many years. The campaign was initiated by the Bermuda Audubon Society in the 1950s
- Workshops and publicity campaigns are regularly mounted.
- Efforts have been made to educate the public to the plight of the bluebird and the part that individuals can play.
- Hundreds of bluebird nestboxes have been erected around Bermuda. The boxes keep out starlings but must be monitored constantly to keep out sparrows.
- Bluebird boxes have been erected in 'trails' on most of the golf courses.
- A small number of sparrow traps have been used to remove sparrows from bluebird nest-sites.

The current population of bluebirds in Bermuda is estimated to be about 500 individuals. The bluebird is now totally dependent on artificial nestboxes for breeding success and its survival in Bermuda can only be guaranteed with human help.

References:

Bermuda Audubon Society Newsletters. Vol.9 No.2 (Summer 98), Vol.10 No.1 (Spring 99), Vol.10 No.3 (Fall 99)
DeSilva, S. (1992) Bermuda Dept. of Agriculture and Fisheries – Monthly Bulletin

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Swann, W (1982) Bermuda Dept. of Agriculture and Fisheries – Monthly Bulletin Vol.53 No.7

Wingate, D.B. (1968) Bermuda Dept. of Agriculture and Fisheries – Monthly Bulletin Vol.38 No.3

Andrew Dobson
Vice-President
Bermuda Audubon Society

CITES and the Overseas Territories

A useful meeting was held in November, between FCO, several NGO's and the CITES Secretariat. The meeting was intended to address problems identified by the CITES Secretariat draft report on the OTs, and the "Conched Out" report produced by WWF-UK. Several promising solutions were suggested. For example, a legal consultant could work with OT governments to extend or upgrade CITES legislation. Implementation issues could also be addressed and TRAFFIC International is producing a proposal on how implementation in the Caribbean OTs could be improved in the short term. An Action Plan is also being prepared as is a proposal from DETR for a "simplified licensing" scheme. Further details will be released when they become available.



H.R.H. Prince Edward visiting a bluebird nestbox workshop. School students from Warwick Academy made boxes as part of their programme with the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

ENDEMIC IGUANAS RELEASED ON GRAND CAYMAN

The Chairman of the Forum's Wider Caribbean Working Group and former Governor of the Cayman Islands, Michael Gore, released the first young captive-bred Grand Cayman blue iguana in a ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park when he visited the Island in December. A total of ten two-year old iguanas were released bringing the total wild population to about 150. The ten were bred by the Cayman Islands National Trust and cared for and fed daily by a team of Trust volunteers.



A young captive bred blue iguana sees her first taste of freedom, watched by sponsors and National Trust supporters

The release of the young iguanas was a historic moment for the Trust as it was the first release of captive-bred iguanas and was the culmination of ten years work to save this highly-endangered species from extinction. The ten will join several wild iguanas already in the Park, which is not close-fenced so that they are free to move into the surrounding savannah. All those released have been implanted with electronic chips so that they can be identified in future.

Future releases are planned in future years to build up the population.

Conserving Biodiversity in the Turks and Caicos Islands

The last Forum News reported four Darwin Initiative awards for work in the Overseas Territories. One focuses on the Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI), which contain a substantial Ramsar site (North, Middle and East Caicos), and support a fascinating but poorly documented biodiversity. The Darwin project will develop a biodiversity management plan and facilitate sustainable, low-impact tourist activities on Middle Caicos. Visiting scientists will collect baseline data for plants, birds, mammals, herpetiles and insects, whilst training a local team in identification and monitoring techniques. Project outputs will feed into the local planning process and environmental education programmes.

In November 1999, Mike Pienkowski and Sara Cross (UKOTCF), Oliver Cheesman (CABI), Ethlyn Gibbs-Williams (Turks & Caicos National Trust), and Fred Burton (National Trust for the Cayman Islands) visited local

stakeholders to nurture the strong support which already exists for the project in TCI. Constructive meetings were held with the Governor, Chief Minister, and other senior Government representatives, and a lively workshop was

held with Middle Caicos residents. At the time of writing (February) recruitment is in progress for a Darwin Project Officer, to enhance the capacity of TC National Trust and to co-ordinate the project locally.



Middle Caicos residents participate fully in a workshop on the Darwin Project, facilitated by Ethlyn Gibbs Williams, Executive Director of the TCI National Trust (right).

FLARE-UP OVER CAYMAN ISLANDS

FUNDS FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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A simple, innocent question in Monday's Finance Committee meeting touched a veritable hornet's nest. It was a question that had to be asked: the North Side MLA wanted to know what the money taken out of the Environmental Protection Fund was to be spent on. There should have been a simple answer to the question but there was not.

Actually, the question should not have been necessary - the information should have been contained in the estimates but it was not.

That the information was not readily available, and that the MLA's simple question did not find an immediate answer is unfortunate. In this way, government members laid themselves open to the accusation that the \$4 million was to be moved from the fund to general revenue merely to balance the budget, rather than being used to protect the environment.

The fund was set up, and revenue measures instituted, for the sole purpose of environmental protection. The monies in the fund are collected and set aside to ensure that they would not be used for any other purpose.

Many people thought the fund would be used for purposes such as purchasing pieces of ecologically important Central Mangrove Wetlands but no such purchase has yet been made out of the fund.

There may be other legitimate projects for which the fund may provide but they must be within the purview of the fund's specific purpose.

It is a vital purpose in the face of continued rapid development with the ensuing destruction of natural habitats. Cayman's livelihood and our native way of life depends on the continued health of the environment.

The Environmental Protection Fund was established to guarantee that some efforts would be made to preserve the environment.

It is the duty of the members of Finance Committee to make sure that no misappropriation takes place.

MONEY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

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The 1997 motion setting up the environment Protection Fund does not define environmental protection, but there are many who will see it as an abuse if the money in the fund is used for such things as garbage collection.

Tempers rose in finance Committee yesterday when members did not receive a list of environmental projects to be financed from the budgeted figure to be taken out of the fund. Instead the committee heard a government proposal that \$5.9 million from the fund was to be transferred to general revenue to be used mostly to cover recurrent expenditure of the



Dredged "borrow pit" in North Sound Grand Cayman. Dredging marl from the shallow water marine environment in North Sound, to provide fill to destroy mangrove wetland for real estate development, has generated huge fine sediment loads which are also stressing coral reefs

Environmental Health Department and of the Department of Environment. These departments have hitherto been financed out of general revenue.

Two studies are to be paid for out of the fund, one relating to marl mining and one to liquid petroleum gas. These could perhaps fall legitimately within the ambit of the fund, but the recurrent expenditures of the two departments should rightly be covered by recurrent expenditure.

The studies are expected to consume a fraction of the funds transferred, the bulk of the funds, \$5.3 million, is to be used for the running of the two departments.

Since the text of the motion to set up the fund does not define environment government deems it appropriate to use the monies for the departments that have environment in their name.

This looks like a clumsy attempt at a sleight of hand performance.

The Environment Protection fund consists of

the proceeds of a special levy on airline tickets which the general public accepted quietly because, one ventures to assume, of its perceived purpose.

Government may find that many members of the public will think the way the backbenchers apparently do, that the fund was to provide additional funds earmarked to be utilised for protection of the natural environment, perhaps for the purchase of Central Mangrove Wetlands or similar purposes. It is apparent that government is under sever strain in their effort to balance the budget. Instead of attempting to achieve that balance by subterfuge, they could have stated the problem clearly and drawn on the combined good will of the Finance Committee, the civil service and the population at large, in a search for a solution. This might have garnered wide support. An attempt to minimise the difficulties and to quietly divert funds from their true purpose will tend to reap the public's ire when a joint effort is needed to bring government finances



Cruise liners and the pressure for built development for the leisure and offshore banking industries place heavy pressures on Cayman's natural resources. George Town

LANDS ENVIRONMENT FUND

FLARE-UP OVER ENVIRONMENT FUND

*Reproduced from the Caymanian Compass
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In what some Members termed as a precedent setting move, Government sought approval to transfer money from a fund to recurrent and statutory expenditure.

As a consequence in Finance Committee yesterday morning, approval was granted for \$5,904,772 to be transferred from the Environmental Protection Fund to General Revenue. In the budget document, of the \$6.16 million in the Environmental Protection Fund, \$5.9 million was to be transferred to General Revenue (in the sum of \$1.9 million for the DOE and \$4 million to the Capital Development Fund). The motion has changed the \$4 million as a transfer to recurrent expenditure now.

The motion states that the transfer of the \$5.9 million is "to cover expenditure relating to the operating costs of the departments of Environment and Environmental Health and the carrying out of the Environmental Studies to be undertaken by the Ministry of Agriculture, Communications, Environment and Natural Resources."

The specifics, as presented by Tourism Minister Thomas Jefferson on behalf of Government are: \$1,344,772 to cover the total cost of recurrent and statutory expenditure of the Department of Environment;

\$560,000 to cover the recurrent cost of the Environmental Studies (Marl Mining Study and Liquid Petroleum Gas Study) under the Ministry of Agriculture; and

\$4,000,000 to cover a part of the recurrent and statutory expenditure of the Environmental Health Department.

After the entire morning was spent debating the issue, especially the manner in which it was presented, Government's motion was carried on a split vote of 7-6. Voting with Ministers for the motion were MLAs Heather Bodden and Capt. Mabry Kirkconnell while voting against were MLAs Kurt Tibbetts, McKeeva Bush, Edna Moyle, Roy Bodden and Dr. Frank McField, who all spoke against it, and MLA Linford Pierson. MLAs John Jefferson and Dalmain Ebanks were absent from the proceedings.

Backbench MLAs sought the list of items on which the vote would be spent but did not get it as Government was of the view that it was not required to present such a list as per the motion that set up the fund in 1997.

The concern was the move was simply a ploy to get the budget balanced.

At the start of proceedings yesterday, Financial Secretary and Committee Chairman George McCarthy noted that when the budget was presented on 26 November, it was pointed out that many persons including Ministers had worked late on the night of 25 November and that morning to finalise the budget document. The constraints to finalise the document were so demanding that the House had begun proceedings not at 10 am as planned but at around 11.30 am, he said.

It was against this background on 25 November

that a decision was taken by the budget review committee to put in a block figure of \$4 million to be transferred from the Environmental Protection Fund to the Capital Development Fund, Mr. McCarthy detailed. It was further intended that at a given point in the budgetary process, a schedule of projects to be financed by this \$4 million would be developed in accordance with Motion 14/97 which set up the Environmental Protection Fund.

Government at no point in time had intended to mislead the Committee in this matter, he said.

Subsequent to the budget address on 26 November, the Auditor General had raised the query with regards to the schedule of projects for funding the transfer made in 1998 from the Environmental Protection Fund, Mr. McCarthy said.

It was then felt that the query had to be addressed "having regard to the need to determine the exact definition of an environmental project before the schedule in support of the \$4 million for the year 2000 could be agreed upon," he said.

When ExCo met on Tuesday 25 January to commence preparation of the list of projects that could be regarded as being of an environmental nature, the view was taken that there could still be a difference in thinking between the Government and the Auditor General as to what projects should be classified as environmentally related, he said.

Government took the view that given the circumstances, rather than attempting to prepare a schedule of projects to support the transfer of the \$4 million as originally planned, the sum should be applied against the recurrent budget for the Environmental Health Department, Mr. McCarthy added. He then called on Tourism Minister Thomas Jefferson to provide more specific details.

MLA Roy Bodden sprang in to remonstrate against the move. He submitted that Mr. McCarthy as Chairman should have brought the matter to the Committee's attention far earlier. The present move smacked of sheer contempt on

the part of Government for the backbench, he commented.

Mr. McCarthy said he had not shown or attempted to show disrespect to Members.

Minister Jefferson noted budget gaps in what was sought by departments and what was available occurred annually; this was not new. The exercise always was to cut the cloth to fit the coat.

Reading from Motion 14/97 that set up the Environmental Protection Fund, Mr. Jefferson stressed that the motion had no limiting definition of the word "environment". Did the word relate to the natural environment? Did it relate to public health of the island? Could waste management be a part of its definition? In his opinion, it should, he said. There was intent in the motion to protect and preserve the wellness of the land as opposed to the wellness of the people which was a health issue.

After careful re-examination of the motion and discussion, ExCo was of the view it was better to use the funds to fund the department of Environment. The Environmental Fund should be used for that purpose. Mr. Jefferson read out the mission statement of the DOE.

ExCo equally felt, upon examining the mission statement of Environmental Health, that department also qualified for such funding since it worked to protect the health of the natural environment.

Serious environmental disasters could emanate from a badly managed landfill. The leaching of chemicals could result in serious damage to the marine life, perhaps deforming it.

There was no deceit in the exercise. The budget was not deformed. All that government had attempted to do was to allocate as best as it could funds in General Reserve.

Members could air their views. But because Government did not respond to everything that was said did not mean it agreed with the views and that the person was right. It only meant that the person had a view on the subject.



Red mangroves *Rhizophora mangle* at Booby Cay, North Sound, Grand Cayman

The Anguillian, Feb 18th: Heartically Yours

Ijahnya Christian's article in *The Anguillian* of February 18, around the time of the Anguillian general election

The Sombrero issue is yet to be satisfactorily addressed in this election campaign. I believe that one of the reasons that Anguillians have not expressed strong positions either way regarding Sombrero is that the relevant information has neither been readily available, nor accessible in terms of the language used in documents made available for public scrutiny. This lack of transparency has not been unique to the processing of the Beal proposal but it has demonstrated how a lack of transparency can either undo the entire process or result in significantly higher costs than originally anticipated. I have never met Mr. Andy Beal so references to Beal in this article are not about the man but about his public representation. I do however, question the quality of advice he is receiving from his team and some of the reasons will become clear as you read on.

Just last week, the Anguilla National Trust completed a case study of the Beal proposal based on the information available to the organisation up to that time. Right on the heels of that and once again through e-mail and Internet sources, it has been disclosed that Beal has asked the UK Planning Inspectorate to postpone the review of the Environmental Impact Assessment while they try to work out the level of risk to third parties and the cost of third party liability insurance. This may all be in order but there was one surprise. Apparently, the Government of Anguilla has been funding the cost of this review and will be reimbursed by Beal. This raises several questions the first one being, how much is this review costing us and then whether this reimbursement is subject to the proposal being approved.

I believe that a fundamental flaw in the entire process stems from a seeming inability to appreciate value in terms other than economic value and an understanding of development that is synonymous with revenue generating potential. In fact the Sombrero case reminds me of the argument raised some years ago that the 6th Form at the Albena Lake-Hodge Comprehensive School should be abolished because someone thought it was not economically viable.

Apart from Sir Emile Gumbs and Mr. David Carty, I have not heard one politician say anything to indicate that he or she has an appreciation of the value of Sombrero's unique eco-system and biodiversity. If Sombrero has no value, then the sum being offered for the lease of the island is not bad at all though there seems to be consensus that it is a paltry sum compared to anticipated profits. But what if we thought that Sombrero did have some value?

According to an article written by Fred Pearce, recently published in the *New Scientist* magazine, and extracted from the magazines website on February 12th, there are serious differences in the findings of the scientists hired by Beal and those commissioned by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The article highlights the work of Mike Ivie, the entomologist on the team that conducted the Rapid Conservation Assessment of Sombrero in November 1999. In contrast to Beal's website claim that there are no endangered or endemic species on the island, Ivie discovered two more species of reptile and sixty-five more species of invertebrates. He believes that some of these species may, like the black lizard, be found nowhere but on Sombrero. The article goes further to share the views of Beal's spokesman David Spoede, who tried to defend their scientific claims by referring to the work done on Sombrero by Dr Ellen Censky. Dr Censky's angry retort included an apology for her language but she strongly contradicted the claim that the endemic lizard survived Hurricane Luis by climbing into the Sombrero lighthouse. Beal's point has been to try to establish that the companys presence on Sombrero would be good not just for the Anguillian economy but also for the lizards. The *New Scientist* cites Censky thus, Lizards did not climb into the lighthouse to survive the hurricane. The natural activity of the lizards in inclement weather is to go down into holes. I told them this was not a healthy population. Any intrusion on the island might be detrimental.

The view that Sombrero's ecosystem can be severely threatened by human activity is shared by Jim Stevenson of the RSPB who is quoted by *New Scientist* as follows; We are not opposed to rocket launch sites, but it is now clear that Sombrero is a very special place of global importance.

Beal has not yet produced the cost-benefit analysis but we are told that it will be an objective one. We have not yet been told if Anguillians or Anguillian agencies will be consulted in the process. The Anguilla National Trust has not yet been able to secure the UK expertise it has been seeking since June 1999, to conduct a feasibility study for alternative low-impact development on Sombrero if we think that we must make money from Sombrero. I do not know how long Beal will need to complete this part of the process but I know that eventually a Government of Anguilla signature will be needed to complete the process. Some of the deeds already done cannot be undone and some time ago, I was reassured by the then Minister of Finance that the Government of Anguilla had signed nothing that it could be sued for if the Beal proposal was not approved. I can only hope he was right since I am aware of at least two instances where the company has threatened to sue for purportedly libellous statements. You may notice that I have tried to be extremely careful in my language here as I would not like to be writing Heartically Yours from Her Majesties Prison.

We do not yet know the day, the hour, the cost or the nature of the decision to be made but two words of advice for the new Government of Anguilla. It is neither wise nor prudent to begin the development application process with the signing of agreements and in future we may need to require more than a prospective investor's dollars or the scientific credentials of his/her experts, we may also need character references. Of course, the would-be investor may require the same of us.

16 February 2000.

ANGUILLA

The Forum has been increasingly involved in Anguilla since a proposal to launch rockets from Sombrero Island was tabled by Texas millionaire, Andy Beal in 1998. We were first concerned over the lack of transparency in the planning process itself. Further alarm bells rang as biologists reacted to the less than adequate Environmental Assessment presented by ICF consultants. The biodiversity value of the island was badly understated.

We have acted in three ways:

- Drawing public attention to the issue in the UK and in the Caribbean Region.
- Presenting the conservation case to government in the UK and Anguilla
- Mounting an expedition composed of competent specialists to Sombrero to re-inforce the conservation case.

RSPB initially led on the issue on behalf of the Forum, but a host of other organisations have contributed to the cause, particularly FFI, WWF (UK) and of course, the Anguilla National Trust. A lot of support for the conservation case has come from the USA, particularly the American Bird Conservancy and the Ornithological Council.

The public consultation phase, organised by planners at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, was to be concluded this Spring, but Beal Aerospace have called a halt to the proceedings, possibly to give them time to assemble a better case. Meanwhile, two other potential launch sites have been identified in Guyana and Florida. So what next? Nail-biting times indeed!

How do we stop this sort of thing happening again?

The root cause that allows so many damaging planning proposals in the Caribbean to become realised is public apathy. This may be due to a lack of knowledge or awareness, or a feeling of impotence due to the fact that planning matters are often decided in private.

The result of this apathy is that environmental issues are seldom aired, even at election time. Protected areas, where they exist, are often designated for



Caribbean buckeye butterfly - *Junonia evarete*

reasons of tourist potential, rather than biodiversity interest. The best sites do not get designated.

In the case of Anguilla, environment is definitely on the political agenda now. The Sombrero issue has sparked a lot of interest in Anguilla's biodiversity. Last year's hurricane season ended with massive flood damage caused by Hurricane Lenny, and exasperated by bad coastal zone management practices.

Forum members are active in working with the Anguilla National Trust to try and attack the root causes of run-away development:

- WWF (UK) has appointed a specialist to work in Anguilla on protected areas, with the aim of getting better protection for the most important sites. This is funded by the UK Darwin Initiative.
- FFI has carried out awareness and training programmes on the endemic iguana and snake, and carried out surveys of reptiles.
- RSPB is carrying out an Important Bird Areas Survey in order to re-inforce the protected areas programme. A public awareness programme, based on birds, hopes to increase support for nature for its own sake. This will include a series of publications such as identification cards, an annotated check-list of birds, and,

finally, a little pocket guide to the birds.

The "joined-up" approach being applied in Anguilla will hopefully provide a good model for the Forum's operations elsewhere.

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FALKLANDS CONSERVATION

Tourism Impact Project

There has been a dramatic increase in cruise ship passengers visiting the Falklands in recent years - 4,738 in 95/96 and 30,000 forecast for 1999/2000. Some of the larger vessels are not members of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators and do not have codes of practice or behaviour guidelines to adhere to. The Falkland Islands Development Corporation is funding Falklands Conservation to run a project to investigate management of visitors. It is hoped that the project may be extended for a further two years to enable the development of site specific guidelines and a booklet to ensure environmentally sensitive tourism in the islands.

Examples of sensitive tourism management and good practice would be welcome.

Darwin Initiative Marine Turtle Research Project on Ascension Island

Between December and June, Ascension Island plays host to one of the largest breeding populations of green turtle *Chelonia mydas* in the Atlantic Ocean. Male and female turtles migrate many hundreds of kilometres across the Atlantic from the coast of South America to mate around Ascension. Following this, female turtles crawl ashore, dig nests in the sand and lay clutches of a hundred eggs or more before covering them over to be left in the heat of the sand to incubate.



Ascension Island green turtle *Chelonia mydas* returns to sea

December 1998 saw the start of the most comprehensive marine turtle monitoring and research endeavour undertaken on the Ascension Island population for over 20 years. Spanning the nesting seasons of both 1998/9 and 1999/2000, this project is the result of a partnership between the Ascension Island Administrator's Office and British scientists from the University of Wales, Swansea; a project funded by Darwin Initiative for the Survival of the Species.

The Darwin Initiative, launched at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, is a

scheme run by the UK Department of Environment, Transport and Regions. It is designed to help safeguard the world's biodiversity by enabling British expertise to assist countries around the world with conservation related issues. It is currently assisting a number of projects in the British Overseas Territories.

The major aims of the project include:

- Assessing the current size of the Ascension Island green turtle population,
- Analysing the reproductive output of individual turtles,
- Assessing the sex ratio of hatchlings
- Identification of the feeding grounds of the turtles through the use of satellite transmitters.

Great steps have been taken towards all of these scientific aims, resulting in a number of scientific publications to date (see footnote*) as well as others in preparation and under review. Work being carried out by the Swansea-based researchers and specially trained turtle wardens paid by the Darwin Initiative. Additionally, the level of community involvement attained (both by individuals and organisations) has greatly surpassed expectations. There is a tremendous will on the Island to undertake any steps necessary better to understand and protect the turtles.

Educational activities have included school visits, field trips for youth groups, production of press articles including *The Ascension Islander*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Independent* and *New Scientist* and posters. Foreign and Commonwealth Office sponsored leaflets and a project web site: <http://www.seaturtle.org/mtrg/projects/ascension/> Also a set of stamps and first day cover dedicated to the project will soon be issued.

Readers can find out more about the project by contacting the Project Officer Darwin Initiative Turtle Project or assessing the project's the web site.



Cubs and Scouts learn about marine turtle biology in situ.

*Scientific Publications to date:

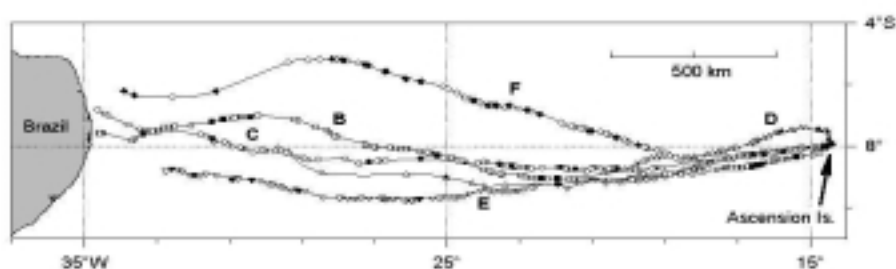
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Satellite tracking of turtles to their foraging grounds in Brazil

St Helena: Environmental Awareness Year: Involvement by the Schools

The Agricultural and Natural Resources Department (ANRD) holds an annual farmers competition each year which requires entrants to show excellence over the year, not just on the day. In an effort to get school children to take part we introduced the schools environmental competition. All the schools were invited to submit an environmental project backed by a simple questionnaire: name of the project; who has been involved and how; how was the project decided; how is it to be sustained; what has been learnt from it; what are the benefits; who benefits; and what will you do with the prize if you win it.

Prizes were £100 first and £50 second . Mrs Patsy Flagg and Ms Rita Nicholls were judges.

The winner was Longwood First School for the enhancement of Longwood Avenue.



Longwood Avenue

We intend to hold the competition again this year.

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St. Helena's School Activities

Summary by Dorothy Evans

As expected, the St Helena Environmental Awareness Year has reached out to, and involved, people in all parts of the Island, including the schools. All the schools have been keen to help their students become interested and involved in securing the future in terms of preserving their unique environment.

Heather George, Head Teacher of Harford Middle School, reported that her school is cleaning up the surrounding area of the school and planting additional shrubs and flowers. Plans to set up a wild life pond and an amenities area enhanced by grass, trees and benches and to make their

the First School block. They are hoping to be able to afford to enclose the area, to preserve the endemics already planted there. They, too, have involved the whole school in an Environmental Walk through Arno's Vale.

Meanwhile, Muriel Leo, Head of the Jamestown First School, reported that all the children had been given a tree to take home to plant to help beautify their home environment. Parents have co-operated fully and the trees are progressing well.

Joyce Harris, Head of Half Tree Hollow School, described their activities. All the Nursery, Reception and Year 1 pupils had been involved in a sponsored walk to the Clifford Arboretum. The parents have undertaken to clean up and landscape the area in front of the main building. Years 2 and 3 pupils are involved in a Sponsored Clean-up of the area.

The pupils of St Paul's First School are also very active. Their Head, Mrs Marilyn Roberts reported that Year 1 went to the Nature Trail, Year 2 went on an educational visit to Diana's Peak and Year 3 is involved in gardening sessions at the school. All year groups did an observational exercise on a chosen environment in different districts, followed by a litter clean-up. They also hope to be able to create a terraced area, with a stone wall enclosing a flower-bed with endemic plants, to be looked after by pupils in their gardening sessions.

Longwood First School, in connection with its hosting of the Commonwealth Day, has been involved in the enhancement of Longwood Avenue planting flowering perennials along the avenue. They had three objectives in mind - to mark the School's fiftieth anniversary, to contribute to the Island's Environmental Awareness Year, and to add some beauty and colour to Longwood Avenue.

The involvement of so many of the children of the Island in the ways described will, without doubt, have long-term benefits in terms of their interest in and appreciation of their environment and their willingness to become involved in caring for it. This augurs well for the future and the teachers are to be congratulated on their encouragement and good efforts.

entrance more attractive are in progress.

They also invited a member of the Island Conservation Group to organise a walk with students and staff.

Alice Greentree, Head Teacher of St Paul's Middle School, described their plans to create the "Gosse Arboretum", in the area behind

THE BIOTA OF BIOT: WHAT'S GOING ON?

One of the challenges facing those interested in the ecology of the Chagos Archipelago stems from the rarity of visits by people qualified to report changes as they occur. Arguably, that is a price worth paying for the conservation resulting from the simple fact of restricted access. And yet, if no-one knows what is really happening, it becomes that much more difficult to take timely and sensible decisions.

A case in point was their severe coral mortality, suspected from satellite measurements of oceanic temperature changes as they occurred in 1998, but only confirmed by direct observations in 1999. Now the gloom occasioned by Dr Charles Sheppard's report has lifted somewhat. He could examine only what was visible from the surface - the first 10 metres of so, however a team of experienced divers recently looked at the reefs within and outside the island of Diego Garcia. There at least, it now seems that, as the depth of water increases, so does the health of the stony corals. Below 27 metres - a habitat with less diversity and abundance, of course - very little damage was observed. This situation is much better than in the Maldives. However, hardly anything is known about the state of the corals below 10 metres in the northerly parts of the Chagos, much closer to the Maldives. Someone needs to assess the damage there too and set a benchmark for the measurement of coral recovery and of the consequences of coral mortality for the wider community of reef fauna, especially the fish populations. The first hints of what may be another ocean warming event makes an assessment all the more urgent.

As regards the commercial fisheries, the BIOT Government has helpfully provided the data to make possible a more informed dialogue about the scope and sustainability of current operations. It is a bit early to draw long-term conclusions from figures which probably need to be examined in a regional

context. Meanwhile, there remains a strong case for the introduction of Marine Protected Areas applicable to commercial as well as recreational fishing. At the same time, it is a pleasure to report the introduction of a ban on steel traces for in-shore fishing. This should lead to a reduction in shark mortality, one of the matters on which the Friends of the Chagos earlier expressed special concern.

The Friends' AGM, held at the headquarters of the Linnean Society in October, was well attended and provided the opportunity for a number of conservation issues to be aired, as well as for an historically interesting slide show. The scene was set for continued dialogue over ways to secure the practical benefits potentially resulting from the BIOT Government's increasingly comprehensive environmental legislation. One example, cited at the meeting, was the banning of coral exports, even when the samples were dead on collection. The details of this and other measures are regularly reported in the Friend's newsletter *Chagos News*.

Nigel Wenban-Smith
Chairman, Friends of the Chagos
British Indian Ocean Territory
Working Group

STRING OF PEARLS

An invitation to view Britain's treasured buildings along the River Thames. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) will open on twelve days this summer to reveal the work of the modern FCO and offer privileged access to its fine interiors. The FCO grade I listed building was designed by George Gilbert Scott and completed in 1875 to house the Foreign Office, India Office, Colonial Office and Home Office. Special displays featuring the work of the Overseas Territories will take place on 6 June and 11 July. Open to the public from 10 am to 5 pm. The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum and the FCO will meet on 11 July in the Locarno Suite, where it is envisaged that the general public may view the meeting in progress.



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