



## UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM

### Annual Report 1998 - 1999

- [Chairman's Report on behalf of the Executive Committee 1998/99](#)
- [Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group](#)
- [Report of the UKOTCF Pitcairn Working Group](#)
- [Report of the UKOTCF British Indian Ocean Territories Working Group](#)
- [Report of the UKOTCF South Atlantic Working Group](#)
- [Officers and Contact Points](#)
- [Acknowledgements & Credits](#)

## Chairman's Report on behalf of the Executive Committee 1998/99

1998/99 saw major progress, particularly joint developments with UK Government. From a position a year ago when we had to deplore the lack of attention to the environment in the Government's major policy statement, we have moved to a situation in which the environment forms a major — and widely commended — chapter of the Government's White Paper on the UK Overseas Territories *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity*, published in March 1999. The consultative approach adopted by the strengthened Environment, Science and Energy Department, as well as the new Overseas Territories Department, meant that many ideas from the Forum's "checklist" (see last year's Annual Report) have found their way into the White Paper. The Forum is working closely with UK Government on follow-up procedures. The purpose of these and other activities is to facilitate the work of our partners in conservation in the Overseas Territories. Below, we outline these, following the structure of the Forum's Business Plan. Within each section, we report progress and highlight priorities for the coming year.



Nick Ross, Geoff Hoon MP (Foreign Office Minister responsible for Environmental Issues) & Mark O'Connor listen to Mike Pienkowski at the "Breath of Fresh Air" conference

### Organisational development



Sara Cross & Bernard Lettsome giving final presentation

The Forum completed procedures for its name now to refer to Overseas Territories. Work started on a Corporate Supporters scheme, as well as continuing with identifying other potential sources of funding. The Executive Committee reviewed the excessive load placed on the Co-ordinator, and started a restructuring to match better the demands placed on the Forum by its successful progress in recent years. The work has commenced with Forum partners in the Overseas Territories and elsewhere to refine the relationship between the Forum and its Associate Members. The Forum has replaced its financial accounting procedures with ones better suited to its nature.

In 1999/2000, the Forum needs to consolidate several of these tasks, especially those concerned with fund-raising and resourcing/organising the work. In addition, it needs to examine how to develop its relationships with individuals and others who have indicated that they would like to support the Forum's work.

### Relationships and links with Overseas Territories and OTNGOs

The Forum has maintained close working relationships between those based in UK and partners in the Overseas Territories, by telecommunications, *Forum News*, and, as far as possible by a programme of regular visits in both directions. Visitors to the Forum network during the year have come from Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands, Anguilla, Montserrat and the Turks & Caicos Islands. Forum officers and members have been involved with development programmes and projects with Ascension, Anguilla National Trust, British Virgin Islands National Parks Trust, National Trust for the Cayman Islands, National Trust for the Turks & Caicos Islands, and Falklands Conservation.

Discussions have been held with people from a range of OTs in preparation for, during, and around the major conference in London on 29-30 June, "A Breath of Fresh Air" organised by the UK FCO with support from the Forum, as one of the first stages of follow-up to the White Paper.

The Forum was pleased to be able to facilitate the participation of colleagues from the British Virgin Islands in both the governmental and NGO UK delegations at the Conference of the Parties to the "Ramsar" Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, and from OT Governments in the Conference of the International Whaling Commission. We look forward to encouraging the inclusion of the remaining UKOTS in UK's ratification of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species), as well as of the Convention on Biological Diversity.



At the "Breath of Fresh Air" Conference

It has also been made clear to the Forum by partner NGOs (and some OT government officials) that, in addition to the project facilitation, several partner NGOs value highly — and would like more of — the strategic advice provided by Forum officers. We need to explore ways to resource this.

Forum officers had constructive meetings with ministers, senior governmental officials and NGOs in the Turks & Caicos Islands. The Forum continues its programme of development work with the TCI National Trust. This is already moving into a new phase, with the awarding of the Darwin Initiative award to the

Forum, CAB International and TCI National Trust to work towards a sustainable management plan for the wetland of international importance ("Ramsar Convention site") of North, Middle and East Caicos and the surrounding areas. This will have major implications. The Forum is also advising the Montserrat National Trust on its re-establishment, and both bodies are exploring ways to resource more of this work. The Forum is also helping NGOs in St Helena identify ways of developing their operation. Forum member organisations are helping with the development of Falklands Conservation, and Anguilla National Trust.

The Forum and its partner, the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society, are working with the Gibraltar Government on a major conference on the environment in territories and small island states to be hosted by that government in 2000.

### Working Groups

These have proven effective in mobilising joint efforts in support of various issues, such as the response to the Montserrat emergency, the examination of the proposal for rocket launching from Sombrero (Anguilla) and advising on approaches to environmental impact assessment for Pitcairn's proposed airport. A voluntary link officer has been appointed to liaise with the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas.

The Forum needs to give further attention to the ways of making the best use of the largely volunteer effort which operates its Working Groups, as well as finding ways of meeting their limited costs.

### Relationship with UK Government and government agencies

The half-yearly meetings with UK Government and government agencies, jointly organised with FCO, have provided an increasingly valuable point of contact. These have been complemented when appropriate with direct contact with desk officers of territorial departments, often through Working Groups. With the enhanced staffing in ESED, frequent informal contacts between Forum officers and government officials have blossomed, with meetings on average monthly and often daily contacts by telephone. Good relationships are being established too with the new Overseas Territories Department. The Forum Chairman, together with the Co-ordinator or a Working Group Chairman have briefed incoming Governors for the Cayman Islands and St Helena, and also had discussions with the Governors of TCI and BVI. Meetings with the new Governor of the Falkland Islands and any other new appointees need to be arranged.



Central mangrove wetland, Grand Cayman

Late last year, the Forum edited a special edition of *Ecoss*, the journal of the British Association of Nature Conservationists (BANC) this was published in July 1998. This included a range of articles about the UK Overseas Territories as well as a set of recommendations for UK Government to address in respect of its responsibilities to the environment in UK Overseas Territories. It is pleasing to be able to commend UK Government for so rapidly and positively responding to our suggestions. A major area of work throughout the year has been the contribution of ideas and discussions to the development of the White Paper and its concept of an environmental charter. Forum officers have taken several opportunities to outline to both NGO partners and OT Government officials and ministers the potential advantages which the environmental sections offer if all can work together.

The Forum is especially grateful to RSPB, WWF-UK, and BOU for extra financial support to help it utilise the opportunity presented by the White Paper process.

In addition to the increasingly strong working links with FCO, the Forum has worked closely in recent months with colleagues in the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the Government's statutory advisors on nature conservation, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, particularly in regard to the Conference to the Parties to the Ramsar Convention. In the coming months, the Forum looks forward to working with JNCC and DETR to find ways of providing advice on Ramsar-related matters in the UKOTs. The Forum would like also to develop strong collaboration with other departments, particularly the Department for International Development. It is pleasing to note that the White Paper addresses a point relevant to this Department made by the Forum in a letter to that Secretary of State in 1997. This concerns the gap in funding between UK domestic spend and UK's international contribution to funding through the Global Environment Facility (which is the support mechanism to developing countries under the Convention on Biological Diversity). The UK Overseas

Territories are eligible for neither. The Forum would be happy to work with DFID to facilitate ways of implementing the new policy aimed at filling this gap.

### Conservation priorities

The Forum is pleased to have been able to facilitate the designation by the British Government (in association with the Governments of the Territories concerned), under the "Ramsar" Convention, as Wetlands of International Importance, part of Anegada (BVI), seven sites in Bermuda, and almost the whole of the British Indian Ocean Territory. The Forum looks forward to working with governments and OT NGOs to maintain the momentum and to progress the designations of other sites, as well as reviewing the list of qualifying sites.

The Forum has supported — and will continue to support — OT NGOs in their efforts to prevent damaging or destructive development activities affecting important sites. This includes proposed devastation at East Caicos, TCI, by a cruise liner port; destruction of wildlife and habitats on Sombrero island, Anguilla, by a rocket launch site; destructive development at Grand Cayman's Central Mangrove Wetland; and risk to Ships Hill Caves, Bermuda, by hotel development.

The Forum looks forward to assisting the putting in place, under the White Paper follow-up process, better procedures to take environmental conservation into account in strategic planning. This would be compatible with the Convention on Biological Diversity. This should help avoid, at an early stage, some of the conflicts illustrated in the previous paragraph. The Forum agreed 18 months ago to the Secretary of State's request that it contribute to conservation planning in the OTs by commenting on the environment part of country plans, and awaits UK Government's implementation. The Forum looks forward to working with all parties in TCI to develop a model sustainable management plan, which will feed into TCI's new physical development plan as well as providing an example for elsewhere.

### Public awareness and publicity



Three of the Interpretation Display Boards produced for the Overseas Territories to help raise awareness about the wealth of biodiversity in the UKOTs (each of above links to full web-page version)

The special issue of *Ecos* has been noted already. As a key part of raising the profile of UK's Overseas Territories and their importance to biodiversity, the first display boards relating to individual territories were produced to complement the three general introductory boards produced last year. The Forum is grateful for the support of FCO, RSPB, the British Ornithologists' Union, WWF-UK and several photographers in producing the boards for the Falklands, St Helena, Ascension, the Turks and Caicos Islands and Montserrat. The display board work has been used also in producing a new leaflet for the Forum. Several articles in the national press, as well as the press in some OTs, have been stimulated, together with some television coverage in UK, USA and the OTs. A corporate supporters leaflet has been produced.

The Forum would like to produce display boards for the remaining Overseas Territories. We would like to develop the web-site, with briefing sheets and background material on each OT for general and press enquiries. *Forum News* should be published more frequently and its mailing list increased to include a more target audience. All these developments will depend on further funding and management resources.

#### Information management

Several partner NGOs and OT governments have underlined the need for the Forum's support on information flow and advice, and welcomed the revised proposals for a new data base/web site. The Forum has developed a clear view of information management needs, consulted widely with partners and officials in the Overseas Territories and elsewhere. This will make information routinely available with minimal expensive human intervention. This would also ensure that information gathered for one purpose would be available for others, thereby also reducing demands on hard-pressed personnel both at the Forum and in the OTs. We were delighted with Ministerial confirmation at the end of the year that FCO will fund the first year of work, and work with the Forum to secure other funding in future years.

Work has already started on restructuring and updating the Forum's web-site ([www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org)). This will facilitate access to the database as this develops. One of the first modules to be implemented on the new database will concern projects and their funding, this being a response to the needs identified by the wide consultations.

#### Overview

The Forum has had an extremely successful year. The major progress made jointly with UK Government is outlined at the start of this report. The Forum has played a key role in advising and helping Overseas Territories NGOs and, in several cases, governments. All this work will continue, particularly in the context of taking forward the initiatives of the White Paper, including the Environmental Charter. Our new database/web system will be fundamental to enabling much of this. The Forum has been able to identify and help address some of the most urgent conservation issues in the Overseas Territories. It will continue to do this but, as a more proactive approach develops, these crisis issues ought to be generated less. The Forum plans to contribute to a more planned approach to development in several ways, including the forthcoming Darwin Initiative project.

Last year, our report asked 'What are the most urgent matters?' Apart from direct conservation issues, we identified a need for improved co-ordination with Government, the need for resourcing the Forum's new database/web-site, and resourcing the core advice and facilitation services of the Forum more generally. This report demonstrates the major progress on the first two of these items. We have set some significant initiatives in place on the third, but this remains a major challenge. With very limited paid resourcing, the Forum can deploy a great wealth of voluntary skilled effort. However, without an increase in the Forum's tiny core funding, the Forum will be unable to take full advantage of the opportunities opening at last to facilitate effective conservation in the UK Overseas Territories. The Overseas Territories have told us that they want our help; we must find ways of resourcing it.

## Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

Three meetings of the WCWG were held during the year. In addition there were numerous informal contacts between members of the Group dealing with particular problems in individual Territories.

Three problems required, and will continue to require, special attention by the Group: A proposal to construct a space rocket launch site on the island of Sombrero off Anguilla; the failure of the Cayman Islands Government to take the necessary action to properly protect the Central Mangrove Wetland on Grand Cayman and to make available money raised by a special departure tax and placed into an Environment Fund for land purchase; and the proposed port at East Caicos, TCI.



## Anguilla

So much concern has been expressed in the UK, USA and neighbouring islands about the proposal by a private company to build a rocket launch site on Sombrero and the obvious deficiencies in the Environmental Assessment, that the Group is hopeful the necessary permission will not be granted. (On these grounds alone such a development would not be approved in the UK or, for that matter, the US.) However, a close watch must continue to be taken to ensure, on environmental grounds, that this project does not go ahead. In the meantime, WWF and the Anguilla National Trust were successful in a Darwin grant application to review protected area legislation on Anguilla and advise on new protected areas and management procedures, both terrestrial and marine.



Boobies at Booby Pond, Ramsar site, Little Cayman

## Cayman Islands.

The Cayman Islands Government claims that it remains committed to the preservation of the Central Mangrove Wetland and the designation of part of it as a Ramsar site. However, the Group is concerned that little, if anything, has been done to move this forward and no information has been forthcoming on the state, management or use of the Environmental Tax - which was originally intended to assist this.

The WWF/FCO-funded Biodiversity Mapping work has been continuing. Fieldwork on Cayman Brac and Little Cayman was completed by July 1998, but data collection for Grand Cayman was delayed due to the need for the Cayman National Trust to divert human resources to fight planning approval for a large development proposed for an untouched mangrove wetland in western Grand Cayman. During next year, the vegetation classification and satellite images will be combined to produce vegetation community maps. The RSPB have also contributed towards a survey by the National Trust of the Cayman Brac Parrot.

## Bermuda

A strong economy coupled with limited land resources has resulted in continued pressure for development and loss of open space. At the same time, a declining tourism industry has resulted in the relaxing of standards for many environmental regulations. This decline is also prompting alternative marketing strategies, including a feasibility study on bringing "mega" cruise ships to Bermuda. Other problems include the liberal use of pesticides and inappropriate disposal of excess chemicals, while asbestos stockpiles have accumulated on the docks and former US baselands pending a decision over disposal. Invasive plant species are starting to dominate the landscape in many areas, the two main ones being Indian Laurel and Brazilian Pepper. A woodland management scheme is being developed to support replacing these by native species.

A Green Paper review of fisheries and use of marine resources has been initiated. Some surveys conducted by the Department of Fisheries since the 1990 ban on fish pots, suggest that parrotfish stocks are recovering. Last year saw a fairly large-scale coral bleaching episode in Bermuda (like the rest of the globe) but it would appear that most of the coral that were affected survived.

Environmental awareness education is being provided by the Bermuda Zoological Society in partnership with the Aquarium through teacher training, summer camps, interpretative tours, public lectures and school classes. Ten permanent moorings have been established (with 19 more planned) for dive boat operators where fishing is prohibited. The Government purchased 18 acres of woodland at Abbotts Cliff and the Bermuda National Trust 23 acres of Smith's Island. In the Bermuda Biodiversity Project (a joint initiative by the Bermuda Zoological Society and the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo to develop a comprehensive information management system for the island's natural resources), 1998 saw the launching of various habitat mapping initiatives to provide baseline environmental data, with support from FCO. By the end of 1999, this information will be ready for incorporation into the next Bermuda Development Plan. Another initiative under the Biodiversity Project is the development of a Biodiversity Action Plan, modelled on the UK's Biodiversity Challenge, with initial focus on Bermuda's endemic species.

## Turks and Caicos Islands

The Forum (supported by RSPB, WWF and the World Land Trust) has continued its programme of capacity building with the TCI National Trust. This is particularly important in view of the Trust's key role with the TCI government in the major Coastal Resource Management Plan, funded partly by the UK Government's Department for International Development and partly by the new TCI Conservation Fund raised by an addition to the accommodation tax paid by visitors. Both the challenges and the opportunities for conservation remain high in TCI. Environmentalists and others are concerned at the continued rapid intensive development on both inhabited and hitherto uninhabited islands, the latter including proposals for East Caicos and construction on Big Ambergris Cay, two of the most important areas for biodiversity. The Trust, the Forum, TCI and UK Governments, with other partners, are exploring better ways for the future. The funding (to start in late 1999) by the Darwin Initiative of a project centred on the major Ramsar site of East, Middle and North Caicos should lead to local people being able to develop an alternative model of development, to sustain biodiversity and the quality of village life. The RSPB-funded survey on TCI found important wetland bird species.

## Montserrat

We are glad to report that volcanic activity has subsided and people are now returning to the islands. A Sustainable Development Plan has been drawn up by the UK and Montserrat Governments and the Montserrat National Trust has moved into new accommodation with the Montserrat Tourist Board as a tenant. With a Government of Montserrat subvention, a new Director will be appointed and redevelopment of the Trust is a top priority for all concerned. RSPB assisted Gerard Gray of the Montserrat Department of Forestry and Agriculture with his successful application to the Wellcome Trust for a scholarship to study for a research training fellowship in wildlife conservation at the University of East Anglia.

## British Virgin Islands

The Darwin Initiative project: Integrating National Parks, Education and Community Development for the British Virgin Islands 1998 saw the very successful start of this project with Forum members BVI National Parks Trust, Fauna and Flora International and Royal Botanic Gardens Kew together with the Open University working together on a number of workshops to build capacity for biodiversity identification, inventory and





Pristine Coral Reefs of BVI.

management planning. Staff from National Parks Trust, Department of Town and Country Planning, Conservation and Fisheries and Agriculture received training. Project partners and government staff successfully set up permanent plots and developed a management plan and database for Gorda Peak National Park. NPT bid farewell to Joy Blaine. Raymond Walker, formerly of the Forestry Service, Grenada, has taken up the post of Programme Co-ordinator for the eastern region of the parks system and the Darwin Initiative.

#### General

Sites on Anguilla and Bermuda have been put forward for submission to the World Heritage Committee as potential World Heritage sites. The

Caribbean Overseas Territories were the focus of a WWF funded survey of wildlife trade and CITES implementation which exposed many problems but also made strong recommendations for the way forward. FCO and RSPB are funding the attendance of two representatives from each Overseas Territory in the Caribbean at a meeting of the Society of Caribbean Ornithology in the Dominican Republic for a week from 29 July 1999. This conference will be very useful for bringing together a wide range of organisations. Its theme is environmental education.

## Report of the UKOTCF Pitcairn Working Group

The Group's main activities and concerns continued those described in the 1998 report.

### Rat eradication

At the time of the last report, September 1998, the team from Wildlife Management International (WMI) had left Pitcairn Island and there had not been recent sightings of rats. However, rats were re-sighted about two months later, and continue to be sighted. The Conservation Officer is controlling numbers by judicious distribution of poison bait. However, given the difficult terrain, it is unlikely that one person's efforts will achieve final eradication. Therefore, there is a need to decide whether to build on the lessons learnt during the first two eradication attempts and send a specialist team to the Island for a third attempt. A critical factor in making that decision will be the input from, and thoughts of, the Islanders. Meanwhile the news from Oeno remains good. The atoll is rat-free. There has been no opportunity for a thorough check of Ducie since the eradication programme of November 1997.

### Plant conservation

Jay Warren, Island Magistrate and Conservation Officer, visited England in the summer of 1998 to learn propagation techniques at a Darwin Initiative funded course organised by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. He also met with members of the Working Group during the visit. Now back on Pitcairn, he has established the nursery and begun working with economically useful species and also with some of the species of greater conservation concern. The hope is to enhance populations of the rarest plant species and to replace some of Pitcairn's alien vegetation by native flora. This is manifestly a long-term enterprise. An application to the Darwin Fund to support new aspects of the programme is now in train. Ideally the project needs more manpower than the Conservation Officer, working on his own, can provide.

### Airstrip

The idea of an airstrip on Pitcairn Island, well supported by the Islanders, is now

being vigorously pursued. It is likely to have a major impact on the social, physical and biological environment of Pitcairn. The Group has been active in suggesting, to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, terms of reference for the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) that will consider the nature and extent of these impacts before work on the airstrip proceeds. If the procedure for establishing and then acting on the EIA is given due thought, it could serve as a model when other projects arise on the Overseas Territories in the future. In the shorter term it is important that any quarrying of stone, needed for rebuilding and surfacing leading up the Hill of Difficulty from Bounty Bay to Adamstown, does not damage the last remaining pockets of native vegetation on Pitcairn.

### Henderson Management Plan

When Henderson Island was designated as a World Heritage Site ten years ago, it was on condition that the British Government proceed to develop a Management Plan. Given the lapse of time, it is disappointing that the management plan remains a draft.



Coconut Crab (*Birgus latro*)

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

### Summary

This report covers the period October 1998 to September 1999, with anticipation of some events due to occur before the Forum's AGM. The most important matter to report is the severe coral mortality resulting from a sudden and temporary rise in the region's sea temperature, which occurred in May 1998. Other developments are the significant new conservation measures taken by the Administration of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) and further follow-up to the 1996 Scientific Expedition.

### Coral Mortality

As the World Conservation Monitoring Centre has reported in detail, 1998 proved to be the worst year on record for the phenomenon known as 'coral bleaching'. At the Friends of the Chagos (FOTC) request, the FCO funded a project to assess the damage to the Chagos reefs. Dr Charles Sheppard's report showed that mortality was at least 80%. It is too soon to say how long the reefs may take to recover; and further examination will be needed to establish in detail the effects on reef fauna and on the commercial fishery. Those are issues which the FOTC are currently pursuing.



Crown of Thorns Starfish

### Conservation Measures

At a seminar organised by FOTC in October 1998, the BIOT Administration announced a range of additional initiatives in the field of environmental conservation. Two of the most important have since been implemented. Extensive sites in the Archipelago have been listed under the Ramsar Convention. In addition Special Conservation areas have been declared for the reefs surrounding most of the atolls, so as to provide increased protection against unauthorised fishing. (The FOTC have up-dated and revised the discussion paper prepared for the Seminar to include mention of these initiatives. Copies of this *Situation Report* are available on request.)

### Follow-up to 1996 Expedition

The 1998 Seminar was itself a part of the Expedition follow-up. By the time of the Forum's AGM, a single volume incorporating the scientific papers resulting from the Expedition will have been published by the Linnean Society. This will help to establish a baseline for identification of further research requirements other than those arising from the coral-bleaching incident. One project has already been undertaken by Fauna and Flora International, with FCO funding. This involved more detailed study of the genetics of the local turtle population. The project report is in preparation.

### Other

The FOTC are to publish shortly two further booklets on the natural history of the Chagos. The titles are *Plants of Chagos* and *Birds of Chagos*. Copies of both should be available before September.

## Report of the UKOTCF South Atlantic Working Group

The South Atlantic Working Group met three times at Kew Gardens under the Joint Chairmanship of David Taylor and Mike Maunder. The Secretary is Dorothy Evans.

We have been very successful in maintaining regular contact with the Territories involved, St. Helena, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha, and the Falkland Islands. A short report on each Territory is regularly considered at our meetings; these are sent from the Territories, apart from the Falkland Islands where the London end of Falklands Conservation is represented on the Group by Ann Brown. We have had a visit from Isabel Peters from St. Helena, who is about to complete a degree in ecology and tourism at North London University. Jimmy Glass, the Chief Islander of Tristan da Cunha has visited us for a second time. At the same time Dorothy Evans, Ann Brown, Sukey Cameron and Jim Stevenson have all visited the South Atlantic. In addition therefore, to being well informed, members have up to date personal experience of the problems and developments in the area covered by the Group.

### St Helena

The Environmental Awareness Year has been a great success. There have been a number of environmental awareness activities both in schools and in the wider community. The Sandy Bay Environmental Centre is now well established, providing a focus for all on the island's environmental heritage. The St Helena Nature Conservation Group is active in ensuring that the island government takes account of environmental issues in its decision-making and is hoping to develop into a National Trust. Plans under consideration for the island's Quincentenary Celebrations include the possibility of an international environmental conference. St Helena continues to attract research interest such as Dr McCulloch's Wirebird Project and to stimulate scientific writing; Beau Rowlands has recently published "The Birds of St. Helena" whilst Dr and Mrs Ashmole's comprehensive work on the origins, evolution and natural history of St Helena and Ascension at present awaits publication as does the Cronk and Ninnes book about St Helena flora.

### Ascension

Interest has centred on the production of the Management Plan by Tony Pickup of RSPB. Funded by the FCO, the work has received great support and encouragement from the Administrator, Roger Huxley, and from the Island's users. The Plan was launched at the end of June and forms the basis for discussions over implementation of a series of projects over the next 5-10 years. As well as providing an impressively full picture of Ascension's flora and fauna, it raises numerous challenges for conservationists, particularly the need to eradicate feral cats and control



rats, donkeys, sheep, the Mexican Thorn and the development of land. Researchers from the University of Wales in Swansea are studying the Green Turtle and involving local people in their work. A Conservation Officer, Rebecca Sharp, has been appointed to share her time between Ascension and St. Helena.

### Tristan da Cunha



Gough Island, Tristan da Cunha's World Heritage site



Wind generators on Ascension Island

### Tristan da

Cunha has been able to report a number of activities. Gough Island as a World Heritage Site, has attracted several scientific expeditions, the latest being a Darwin Initiative sponsored visit to study invertebrates. The Gough Island Management Plan requires an annual environmental inspection to ensure that its provisions are adhered to. A research hut is being built on Inaccessible Island, a Nature Reserve, as a base for scientific expeditions there. To encourage conservation-mindedness amongst Tristan Islanders, the Island authorities are arranging for regular Islander participation on an observer/trainee basis in any research programmes carried out in the Tristan Group. Nightingale Island is regularly cleared of waste by Islanders paying their traditional visits. The local Department of Natural Resources monitors conservation aspects of the crayfish industry through the Fisheries Observer who enforces the licensing conditions.

### The Falkland Islands

Once again we have been well served with information through Falklands Conservation with Trustees and staff both in the Falklands and UK. Oil is no longer quite the preoccupation or the worry that it was; oil exploration has so far produced disappointing results for the oil companies. But it has, of course, spawned a great deal of useful research

activity in the conservation field. The Seabirds at Sea Survey will be continuing for a further year funded by the Falklands Government with Oil Consortium support. The draft Wildlife and Nature Bill was published in January with the intention that it should go to the Legislative Council in May but this has been delayed whilst further refinements are discussed. Falklands Conservation has had a considerable input already but has been seeking to strengthen the Bill in a number of areas. Funding has been provided by the FCO for the important Native Plants Survey and the Darwin Initiative has agreed to support a two-year project by Queen's University, Belfast to map the islands' vegetation. The Johnny Rook Survey to assess the distribution and abundance of this near-threatened species was completed in November

Falklands Conservation has developed a Strategic Plan for the years 1999 to 2004 on the basis of an extraordinarily valuable input from RSPB in the shape of Dieter Hoffman and Jim Stevenson. It expects to play an increasingly professional and influential role in addressing conservation issues in the Islands.

### South Georgia

The Environmental Management Plan for South Georgia, a very useful and comprehensive public consultation paper prepared by the British Antarctic Survey at Government request, was issued in February. At the time of writing the consultation process continues.

The Group sent a small team to participate in the week-long Conference of the Association of Science Education at Reading University in January. This gave an opportunity for the team to describe the South Atlantic islands' efforts to introduce environmental education in their schools. This ties in with the Forum's continuing efforts to obtain funding for internet links between the Overseas Territories for the exchange of environmental information. In the meantime plans are well advanced to provide attractive display boards (in the Forum's series) at Brize Norton drawing attention to the diversity and attractiveness of the flora and fauna of the South Atlantic Territories for the benefit of departing servicemen and other civilian travellers.

## Acknowledgements and Credits

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- [Annual Reports](#)
- [Environment Charters](#)
  - [Implementation Progress](#)
  - [History / Charters](#)
  - [Strategy devel.](#)
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