



UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

Annual Report April 2005 to March 2006

Report of Council

Overview

Many people, if they consider the UK Overseas Territories at all, think of them as rather peripheral. In terms of global biodiversity, this is certainly not the case, with the UKOTs of central importance, greatly overshadowing domestic UK. The UKOTs support more than 200 endemic plants species and over 20 endemic bird species, with more endemics of these and other taxa being discovered with studies. The British Indian Ocean Territory includes more than 20,000 square kilometres of pristine coral reefs, including the Great Chagos Bank, the largest coral atoll in the world. So far, 393 invertebrate species have been recorded from the Central Peaks of St Helena; of these, about 55% are endemic to St Helena. Cayman Islands have two endemic sub-species of Rock Iguana and two of Parrot. Turks & Caicos Islands hold a Wetland of International Importance noted for its outstanding natural coastal ecosystem transitions amongst many other features. All these and many others contribute to the UKOTs' remarkable biodiversity. Their world importance for wildlife far outweighs their sizes. However, ecosystem loss and global extinctions – which could be prevented – are still occurring.

The Forum was established in 1986, as an unincorporated institution, when a number of UK-based science and conservation organisations recognised a



Endemic South Georgia pintails near Grytviken, South Georgia



Acropora cytherea, coral recovery in the Chagos reef previously badly damaged by warming in 1998



Endemic Bermuda skink

previously unaddressed need to promote and coordinate conservation of the diverse and increasingly threatened plant and animal species and natural habitats in the UKOTs.

The Forum has helped local people to form conservation NGOs, and helps both these and governmental bodies develop their capacity to run themselves and manage projects. It continues to provide assistance in the form of jointly managed projects and other expertise. It also

advises UK government and other institutions, as well as coordinating information, training and liaison between non-governmental organisations and government. The Forum has had a significant track record of achievements. Its *Conservation Review* (1996, with parts updated since on the Forum's web-database) outlined the situation and needs in the UKOTs. Some of the many key analyses since include *Overlooking Britain's Greatest Biodiversity?* (1998), a review

of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the UK Overseas Territories, and a special issue of the journal *Ecos* (1998) including the article *Paradise mis-filed?* - on nature conservation in UK's Overseas Territories and the role of UK Government and NGO. This started the ideas for an environment chapter in UK Government's White Paper on Overseas Territories (1999) and the Environment

Charters which it announced. Although the Forum did not have a hand in drafting the actual Charters, it has taken the lead in facilitating local stake-holders in developing Strategies for Action to Implement Environment Charters, notably in Turks & Caicos (2002-3) and St Helena (2004-5). The Forum has a strong commitment to strategic environmental planning, and continues to help several UKOTs.

Funding, both for the UKOTs and the Forum itself, remain very poor. Member organisations, now in both UK and the UKOTs, part-fund the Forum on a subscription basis, with other funds being raised from donations and project work. The Forum is currently under-resourced and excessive amounts of input of voluntary time have been required to achieve its goals. Because of their status as UK territories, the UKOTs are not eligible for most international grant sources, but nor are they eligible for most UK funding. The Forum is pleased to have worked with governmental colleagues to initiate and operate the Foreign & Commonwealth Office's (FCO) Environment Fund for Overseas Territories (EFOT), and more recently to advise and help on its successor, the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP), jointly run by FCO and the Department for International Development (DFID). This is the only fund committed to assisting environmental conservation in the UKOTs. OTEP, supported by voluntary effort by UKOTCF and its member organisations, is a great success for small projects, whether these be complete in



Bermuda endemic palmetto

themselves or pilots/ start-ups for potential large projects. However, no fund exists on an appropriate scale to fund larger projects. Just at a stage when, in domestic UK, a project would move into a species recovery plan, it stops in a UKOT because of the lack of such a fund. It is bizarre that the areas of UK territory which have most global endemics, and other features of world importance at risk, lack a funding source available to other (domestic) parts of UK. This is a fundamental reason why UK will fail to meet its internationally agreed 2010 targets. Neither does present funding allow for realistic capacity building, which can take several years. Those successes that the Forum has achieved have required a combination of huge volunteer effort and several funded projects strung together.

There are many important and urgent conservation needs in the UKOTs. Each UKOT has different priorities and different legislation, making each unique. It is for each Territory to work on their priorities and for the Forum to help in this process, as well as in helping design means to address these needs, help in finding funds, and co-managing projects. Following the pilot work in Turks and Caicos Islands, UKOTCF facilitated the development of a strategy to implement St Helena's Environment Charter. The Environment Charter strategy processes continue to develop reasoned



Yellow-nosed albatross sitting on flax, that has been cleared with help of OTEP funding, Nightingale Island

priority lists in several of UKOTs, and UKOTCF is reviewing Charter progress more generally. The Forum's recent review commissioned by Defra of actual and potential Ramsar Convention Wetlands of International Importance and the review by Forum-member RSPB of Important Bird Areas have also drawn attention to sites that are high priorities for conservation. UKOTCF and its member organisations are also managing, with local partners (often Forum members themselves) several projects to address some of the identified priorities.

Relationship with UK government and government agencies

The Forum has maintained a good working relationship with DFID, FCO and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). It has maintained its twice yearly meetings with UK government, jointly chaired by UKOTCF and FCO, as well as many informal discussions. UKOTCF provided input to the independent review of OTEP which was finalised early in 2006; unfortunately, earlier intentions of UK government to discuss the draft recommendations with UKOTCF did not materialise, and the Forum looks forward to sight of the review. OTEP is a very successful fund but oversubscribed (and unable to address large projects – see above); 35 projects were submitted in the third round, totalling about £900,000, for an available fund of £500,000. Continuance, and increase, in the fund is important. It is anticipated that the review will enable

DFID's funding for OTEP to be renewed from the end of the current phase in March 2007. The Forum welcomes FCO's commitment to OTEP's continuance as a rolling programme, with funding in the first instance to 2008 already confirmed.

A number of reorganisations at FCO have resulted in the loss of all senior environmental posts from the Sustainable Development and Commonwealth Group (previously the Environmental Policy Department). The Forum has expressed concern at this dropping of environmental functions, seriously reversing the trend of recent years, when FCO had achieved a great deal since 1998. However, it looks forward to the increase in activity in the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) which FCO indicated would take place. FCO will still be involved in environmental issues for the UKOTs, and the small OTEP team has transferred into FCO's Overseas Territories Department (OTD). The Forum's Chairman and Vice-Chairman had a most constructive meeting shortly after the reported year with Denise Holt, FCO Director for Overseas Territories, and were reassured by her commitment to maintaining the size of the OTEP budget, while increasing the potential for drawing also on other funds in support of UKOTs managed in the same department. They welcomed too Ms Holt's assurances that FCO would continue to provide a senior official to chair jointly the twice yearly meetings and provide other policy contacts and representation.

The Chairman and Vice-Chairman had a very constructive meeting with Phil Mason, the new Head of DFID's Overseas Territories Department, and the Chairman also with Marcus Yeo, JNCC Director. The Forum is investigating how better to engage Defra. As part of this process, the Chairman took part in briefing for Defra's Biodiversity Minister, Jim Knight MP, on the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity, where the Minister was supportive of the global biodiversity importance of UKOTs and the need for UK to address conservation of this. Ministerial responsibility has since changed. The Forum remains concerned at the lack of regular financial support from Defra (UK's lead department on environment) to the UKOTs (which hold most of UK's globally important and threatened biodiversity). The Forum welcomed awards from Defra's Darwin Initiative to UKOT projects, but noted that this is a world-wide fund to which potential projects in UKOTs can apply, but not a fund addressing UK's shared responsibility for conservation in the UKOTs.

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

At the request of FCO, UKOTCF coordinated applications for European Union funding for projects in the South Atlantic and the Caribbean. After 2 years and 2½ years, respectively, a decision is still awaited from the European Commission, but there are signs of activity on the former application, at least. Despite urgent work requested by

the European Commission at the beginning of the year on the proposal, with input from TCI, BVI and Cayman, and having the necessary supporting letters from each Territory, received by the Commission by the deadline, no further news has been received or any progress taken place for the Caribbean proposal. There is more positive news regarding the South Atlantic bid, and RSPB has been contracted to help.

The Defra-commissioned UKOTCF review of actual and potential Ramsar sites has been completed, with finished and accepted documents now on the Forum website. Work continues to help and encourage designations and related matters. Forum member Alderney Wildlife Trust has assisted the States of Alderney secure the designation of the first



Ortac gannet colony - Alderney

Ramsar site in Alderney; Jersey has designated three further sites during the review; Guernsey is in the process of designating its first site; Sark requested Forum advice on progressing its proposed site identified by the review; and it is understood that the Isle of Man Government has approved designation of its first site. The implementation process needs encouraging in the UKOTs, to match the progress in Crown Dependencies.

A special session on UK Overseas Territories was held at the UKOTCF-member British Ecological Society conference at Hatfield 4-7 September 2005, with eight presentations by Forum members. Over 100 people attended all or part of the session, which was very well received. BES would like to draw attention to its Small Ecological Projects grants, the announcement of which specifically refers to UKOTs and includes a link to the Forum web-site. Further details can be found on their website: www.britishecologicalsociety.org

Working Groups continue to meet regularly and maintain direct contact with the UKOTS. Reports from the four working groups follow this report. The problem of finding suitable meeting rooms both for the Forum and Working Groups continues and any help in this regard would be appreciated.

Conservation Priorities

The Forum has expressed grave concern regarding the reversal of UK Government (HMG) policy in Ascension. In the late 1990s, the companies using Ascension had indicated to HMG that, with changing needs, they would no longer run the island. HMG had commissioned a study of options. The University of Portsmouth produced a report of this study in March 2000: *Report on Ascension*. The consultants identified two options for the future of Ascension. One model, “modified status quo,” would lead to run-down; the other “public finance” option involved a move to a more normal system of government and economy, with an elected council, the introduction of property rights, right of abode, opportunities for self-employment and investment in new business, and the opening of the airport to more civilian traffic.

HMG accepted the report and, in 2001, announced their decision in favour of the “public finance” option. A first Council was elected. Some businesses were sold to local inhabitants. UK and local conservation bodies invested heavily in conservation projects. Late in 2005, there were signs of uncertainty over the crucial “right-of-residence” point. At the end of November, HMG personnel visited Ascension and announced to Ascension’s newly elected second Council an intended reversal of HMG policy, without any prior consultation. Conservationists were very concerned that the major, and so far highly successful, programme of work based on the earlier plan for the future would be



A female green turtle returns to the sea after laying; conservation has restored Ascension's population to the second largest in the Atlantic

seriously undermined, as this depended heavily on a stable and long-term population.

The Forum wrote a letter to Lord Triesman, the FCO Minister with responsibility, although no reply has been received at the time of writing 5 months later, despite several reminders. Articles by others were also published in the *New Scientist*, *Observer*, *Telegraph* and on the BBC Radio 4 *Today Programme*. Although admitting to UKOTCF that there has been a change, FCO continues to state publicly, and incorrectly, that there has been no change of policy. FCO had announced the new policy in 2000 and invited people to work on this basis, i.e. right of abode, ownership of property

and businesses, local representative democracy etc. Despite this, FCO continues to state offensively that there are no Ascension Islanders, despite several long residencies, in some cases over several generations. The Forum will maintain its stand both of principle and practical need, in support of Ascension Islanders and the conservation of the globally important biodiversity.

Happily, in most other UKOTs, HMG actions have been more in support of environmental conservation. This is reflected in the OTEP grants noted above. One programme with which UKOTCF has had a long involvement through a series of projects with its partner the Turks & Caicos National Trust (TCNT) concerns the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable management in and around the major Ramsar site of North, Middle & East Caicos – throughout in close partnership with local communities. This has passed through the major research phase (with some support from the Darwin Initiative and others), this year seeing the completion of much of the infrastructure, including “field-roads” (a local term being used for nature trails), the Middle Caicos Conservation Centre (renovated with local funding), training for local people in guiding and small business operation, and an integrated package of interpretation, which has already received international acclaim (and copying!). The completion of this phase allows a move into encouraging and managing the use of this infrastructure as a basis for a locally run sustainable economy on ecotourism, as well as for education and public awareness. A new OTEP project (as well as other support) is helping get this started. The Forum is using this project and some other opportunities to explore the potential for a wider coordinated volunteer programme to help UKOTs.

Public Awareness and Publicity

The Forum decided to take a stand at the Bird Fair held at Rutland Water in August 2005. It was generally felt that the first year had been a useful initial experience, warranting further development, and that the uniqueness of the UKOTs has to be promoted. It would be advantageous to have books, merchandise and input from more UKOTs, as well as videos to run.



Nigel Crocker, Dorothy Evans and Frances Marks at the Forum's stand at the 2006 British Bird Fair at Rutland Water

New *Friends of the UKOTs* are welcome, one way to show support for the work of the Forum. If a sponsor could be found for the newsletter it could be published in colour as it is on the website.

The Forum is in the second year of the DFID/FCO OTEP Communications Strategy contract. Material on the web site is being extended progressively, including information on the current round of approvals. Issues of *Forum News* continue to publish details of OTEP projects; both including information on successful bids and reports of current OTEP project work in the Territories. The Forum has agreed with OTEP that it needs to capture the main outputs of OTEP projects, to make them available on the OTEP web site, which is managed by the Forum. This is important to demonstrate the efficacy of OTEP. Individual letters have been sent to all project managers to capture any papers that they felt appropriate to publish. These can be included on the Forum's web site or linked to the site.

Information Management

Planning for the environment conference to be held in Jersey from 7th to 12th October 2006 is in an advanced stage. The

programme attempts to include a good balance between Territories (including the Crown Dependencies), with involvement also of the French and Dutch territories and some small independent states. There are also some activities related to the conference that should result in the database being made more complete and updated.

Forum News 28 contained the initial item on the performance monitoring of the implementation of the Environment Charters. The Forum is looking to use performance measures that are both practical and meaningful. Although some of this work has been resourced by OTEP, FCO and DFID officers have not been involved in preparing the initial draft, to allay fears by UKOTs that one party to the Charters has been put in the position of assessing both itself and the other parties as it is necessary to include measures of performance of HMG as well as of UKOTs. All parties are welcome to comment.

The Forum has produced three more territory-specific versions of the Environment Charter/OTEP information leaflet, which were delivered to DFID for distribution.

Organisational Development

The Forum has expressed concern over the loss of several member organisations in the UK. As far as can be ascertained, this resulted more from erroneous perceptions that, because the Forum is achieving much, it does not need support, rather than dissatisfaction with the Forum's work. This analysis is supported in that member organisations in the UKOTs continue voluntarily to convert from associate (non-paying) to full membership. The Forum continues to look proactively at its evolving role, including assessing why it is losing UK members. On the more positive side, the Forum and the UK Committee of IUCN (the World Conservation Union) have agreed various areas of cooperation, including the Forum's representation of IUCN-UK, as well as itself, in various Overseas Territories matters.

The Treasurer is in the process of reviewing the financial strategy for the Forum, including both funding matters and, especially in view of changing rules for charities, accounting procedures. At present a main proportion of Forum funding is dependent on the overheads of projects and work by certain Council members, mostly in a voluntary capacity. Through tremendous efforts by these, the outcome for the year has improved from the initial deficit budget approved by Council to an approximately balanced position. The Forum has managed to secure small funding grants from an external charity for the St Helena Flax mill restoration project and for environmental education on Tristan da Cunha, both of which are progressing well.



It is a little-known fact that many of the United Kingdom's most significant biodiversity resources are not in the British Isles themselves. They are to be found in the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs), former colonies and territories scattered around the world. Endemic species – those which occur in only one place in the world – are critically important to the planet's overall biodiversity, and the UKOTs have at least ten times as many endemic species as Britain itself. Because of its remote location, Ascension Island's unparalleled biodiversity resources include eleven species of breeding seabirds, including the endemic Ascension Frigatebird, vitally important green turtle nesting grounds and a terrestrial ecosystem which boasts literally dozens of endemics. Under international treaties, it is the joint responsibility of the UK Government and the Government of Ascension to care for this precious biodiversity.



The world's only breeding site for the Ascension Frigatebird is on Boatswainbird Island; work is in progress to restore breeding seabirds to Ascension itself.

In 1999 the UK Government issued the Overseas Territories White Paper 'Partnership for Progress and Prosperity.' This recognised that responsibility for environmental issues in the Overseas Territories rested with the local governments, but that the UK Government had responsibility to support these local efforts. This concept was embodied in the Environment Charters; Ascension's Charter was signed by the UK Minister for the Overseas Territories and by the then Administrator Geoffrey Fairhurst on 26 September 2001 (see centre pages of this brochure). The Charter includes guiding principles and a set of mutual commitments by the UK Government and the Government of Ascension Island in respect of integrating

environmental conservation into all sectors of policy planning and implementation. Ascension's first commitment is to develop a detailed strategy for action to implement the principles of the Charter, and the first commitment of the UK Government is to help build capacity to support integrated environmental management. Ascension's capacity to develop such a strategy has grown greatly since the Island acquired its first elected government in 2001, and established a Conservation Centre. This forward-looking group has adopted a Protected Areas Ordinance, created Ascension's first national park, Green Mountain, and approved a suite of other proposed protected areas, all of which helps Ascension meet its obligations under the Charter.



Asplenium ascensionis, one of several endemic ferns which constituted Ascension's original mountain-peak cloud forest.

UKOTCF's Ascension Island Environment Charter leaflet for OTEP

A Memorandum of Understanding concerning a new alliance for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories of the EU (EU ORs/OCTs) is near to completion. UKOTCF leads the UK component of this, working alongside French and Netherlands partners (and potentially others) to help in improving EU policy and funding for OTs. The Chairman gave a presentation at the IUCN-UK December meeting in York and is continuing to cement relations between the Forum and IUCN. An IUCN-UK representative is now invited routinely to SAWG and WCWG meetings. In the first instance, this has been Dr Vin Fleming of JNCC, which provides the secretariat for IUCN-UK.

Acknowledgements

The Forum would like to thank the individuals and

representatives of member organisation who have given numerous hours of voluntary time to the Forum, both in the UK and in the Territories. The Forum is also very grateful for the financial assistance as project grants or donations, from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for International Development, Bryan Guinness Charitable Trust, Royal Bank of Scotland Group and anonymous donors. More *Friends of the UKOTs* have converted to direct debits, which helps in the administration of subscriptions; the Forum would like to thank all who have joined during the year and for those who have renewed their subscription. The Forum is grateful to member organisation for allowing meetings to take place at their offices: particularly Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Royal Society for Protection of Birds and Zoological Society of London; and to Falkland Islands Government and St Helena Government for allowing the use of their London offices for South Atlantic Working Group meetings.

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum
Summary Statement of Financial Activities (including Income and Expenditure Account)
for the year ended 31 March 2006

	2006 Unrestricted Funds	2006 Restricted Funds	2006 Total Funds	2005 Total Funds
Incoming Resources				
Subs and donations	11,397		11,397	27,564
Investment Income	2,582		2,582	2,212
Sundry Incoming Resources	200		200	231
Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities				
Project Income		130,280	130,280	148,940
Total Incoming Resources	14,179	130,280	144,459	178,947
Resources Expended				
Charitable Activities	8,184	119,056	127,240	99,384
Other Resources Expended	16,447	4,709	21,156	22,146
Total Resources Expended before transfer	24,631	123,765	148,396	121,530
less contributions to overheads from projects	-20,758	20,758		
Total resources used	3,873	144,523	148,396	121,530
Net incoming/outgoing resources	10,306	-14,243	-3,937	57,417
Balance brought forward as at 1st April 2005	38,339	76,004	114,343	56,926
Balance carried forward as at 31st March 2006	48,645	61,761	110,406	114,343

Report of UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

This year, the WCWG has met three times in the UK, and informally at the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB) conference in Guadeloupe. In addition, news and information has been circulated regularly amongst all Group members by e-mail. The Group is grateful to all those who have provided updates from the Caribbean Territories during the year, notably Damien Hughes and Farah Mukhida (Anguilla National Trust, ANT), Andrew Dobson and Jack Ward (Bermuda), Nancy Woodfield-Pascoe (BVI National Parks Trust, BVINPT), and Frank Roulstone and Mat Cottam (Cayman).

In addition to activities in individual UKOTs (outlined below), a number of initiatives involving cross-Territory partnerships have been progressed by current and former Forum members, and by the Forum itself. Fauna & Flora International (FFI) are engaged in a review of cruise ship activity and its impacts in the Caribbean region. Much



The Anguillan racer snake is unique to Anguilla and important to biodiversity

relevant information is not readily available, and data are still sought. However, it is apparent that the industry, whilst being a significant component of the Caribbean tourism sector, is a source of concern in terms of both environmental and socio-economic impacts. CAB International is still building support for a major regional initiative on invasive species in the Caribbean. Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBG Kew) has recently appointed a Co-ordinator (Martin Hamilton) and Officer (Stuart Robbins) for its UKOTs Programme and, amongst other activities in the region, will be developing stronger links between its Millennium Seed Bank and partners in the Caribbean Territories. RSPB, with considerable Forum input, have put considerable effort into the preparation of an Important Bird Areas (IBA) Directory for the UKOTs, which is due to be published in summer 2006, with a possible official launch at an RSPB-sponsored reception at the Forum's Jersey Conference. Thanks to input from partners in the Caribbean Territories, this exercise has identified four IBAs in Anguilla, one in Bermuda, three in BVI, ten in Cayman, three in Montserrat, and nine in TCI. However, it had also identified particular gaps in knowledge which suggest that numbers of IBAs should be higher in some Territories. The Forum has continued to pursue opportunities for project support and enhanced co-operation within the EU. A revised proposal for work on conservation and sustainable

tourism in TCI, BVI and Cayman was submitted in 2005 (after initial submission in 2003); feedback has been positive, but a final decision on this project is still awaited. If successful, it may be possible to extend coverage by a further project to other OTs. In addition, the Forum was included as partners in a proposal prepared by the French Departments Outre-Mer, for a project to help co-ordinate environmental research in the Overseas Territories of EU member states. This project was approved in principle, but is likely to fall beyond available funding.

Anguilla

Mike Pienkowski visited Anguilla in July 2005, held useful discussions on a range of environmental issues with local stakeholders, and visited Sombrero Island, Fountain Cavern (potential World Heritage Site), and other important sites. The lack of protected status for the impressive field of Turks Head Cacti at Windward Bay Point was noted with concern, but moves to protect Sombrero have recently progressed, the Anguilla Government designating the island as a Marine Protected Area. WCWG applauded this flexibility in using existing statutes to protect this important site, pending the passage of new legislation, other parts of which should help to consolidate the position of the ANT in support of some government functions. The ANT has made progress on a number of projects and initiatives during the year, including work with Steve Holliday (RSPB) on enhanced bird monitoring in Anguilla, partly funded by OTEP.

Bermuda

Conservation efforts in Bermuda have attracted some well-deserved attention during the year, with restoration projects on Nonsuch Island, particularly work on the Cahow (Bermuda petrel), providing the subject matter for two well-received documentary films and a number of published articles. Local ornithologists were also treated to some unusual bird records in the wake of Hurricane Wilma late in 2005, including large numbers of magnificent frigatebirds and sandwich (and other) terns, as well as landbirds such as great blue herons, yellow-billed cuckoos and many warbler species.

Other good news included the success of the *Buy Back Bermuda* campaign (Bermuda Audubon Society / Bermuda National Trust), which raised \$1.4 million in just six months to purchase a pond and adjacent coastal farmland, saving the site from almost certain commercial development, and paving the way for establishment of a nature reserve following restoration work. Also, following extensive consultation, the Bermuda Government announced a management plan for Cooper's Island Nature Reserve and National Park. This is the site formerly used by NASA as a tracking station, and was the focus of a field management planning exercise arranged as part of the Forum's 2003 conference in Bermuda.

The most recent (third) round of the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) included two successful proposals for Bermuda, a project on habitat and native species restoration and another which aims to develop an interactive biodiversity web layer.

British Virgin Islands

BVINPT has made progress on a number of initiatives during the year, including existing OTEP activities (a marine protected area assessment and management project, and a project to develop an environmental CD atlas and teaching resource for BVI schools), and the on-going Anegada Rock Iguana rehabilitation project.

The Darwin Initiative Anegada project has continued to make considerable progress, thanks to the efforts of the project partners, the Marine Turtle Research Group (MTRG), RBG Kew, RSPB, BVINPT, the BVI Government's Conservation & Fisheries Department, and the H.Lavity Stouff Community College. Sadly, activities including bird ringing, action planning workshops, and redevelopment of the native plant nursery at the Botanic Gardens (where all threatened species known from Anegada and Virgin Gorda are now in cultivation), have recently been overshadowed by the tragic and untimely death of Raymond Walker (BVINPT), a significant figure in the project.

The Forum currently awaits with interest the outcome of the planning phase (including EIA) of a proposed development on Beef Island.

Cayman Islands

A new Darwin Initiative project commenced in 2005, led by the MTRG, with RSPB, RBG Kew, the CI Government's Department of Environment, and the National Trust for the Cayman Islands as key partners. Major objectives include terrestrial and marine mapping to assist with monitoring, evaluation and targeting of conservation efforts in the wake of widespread damage caused by Hurricane Ivan in September 2004, and the development of a Biodiversity Action Plan for the Cayman Islands. Mat Cottam is acting as Darwin Project Officer.



Banana orchid Schomburgkia thomsoniana
is endemic to the Cayman Islands

In addition to their work on the Darwin project, the National Trust and the Department of Environment (with their various partners) have reported progress on a number of fronts during the year. This includes on-going work under the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme, the establishment of an iguana reserve for Little Cayman, and the preparation of a wetlands policy

for Sister Islands. In November 2005, as a part of the *Forests Forever Programme*, the National Trust completed an important land purchase, finally consolidating the Brac Parrot Reserve, with financial support from the CI Government's Environment Fund and the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

The second edition of the Cayman Islands *Flora* is eagerly anticipated, and the third round of OTEP included one successful proposal for work in Cayman, a project to develop a flagship financing strategy for shrubland preservation.

Montserrat

A new Darwin Initiative project (*Enabling the People of Montserrat to Conserve the Centre Hills*) began in 2005, led by RSPB, with RBG Kew, the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (DWCT), the Montserrat National Trust, the Montserrat Government's Department of Agriculture, and Montserrat Tourist Board as key partners. Carole McCauley is acting as Project Manager, and is based at MNT. Biodiversity surveys under the project have already collected data on plants, insects, herpetiles, birds and bats (all 10 species known from Montserrat have been recorded, including one not seen for 30 years), while providing training in biological assessment.



Teachers take part in workshop to learn survey techniques

Socio-economic assessments are also an important component of the project, and all of the information collected will be used to inform a management plan for the Centre Hills, to be prepared at a workshop in September 2006. The recent OTEP awards included support for projects in Montserrat aimed at improving environmental legislation and increasing capacity for strategic planning and management.

Turks & Caicos Islands

The Turks & Caicos National Trust (TCNT) continues to make valuable progress on a number of projects and initiatives, including some major activities undertaken jointly with the Forum, supported by regular visits to TCI during the year by Mike Pienkowski. Further field-road leaflets have been designed and published, and interpretive materials for the Middle Caicos visitors' centre developed. These provide

the foundations for the next implementation phase of the biodiversity and sustainable development plan, focusing on further education and awareness-raising activities, and the development of within-country ecotourism. This is receiving support from OTEP, which is also funding work on new environmental legislation to aid TCI's joining of CITES and the Convention on Biological Diversity. Despite these (and other) positive developments in TCI, concerns have been brought to the Forum's attention during the year over damage to salinas on Grand Turk (areas of international importance for birds) and the need to give them protected area status, potential negative impacts of the opening of a cruise liner dock in Grand Turk, and aspects of a TCI Government review of Protected Areas.



The invasive Brazil pepper found through out the Caribbean

Report of UKOTCF British Indian Ocean Territory Working Group

This Working Group is provided, under agreement with the Forum, by its member organization, the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT).

In the past year the major (and inter-related) scientific and practical efforts for nature protection in the vast maritime area of the British Ocean Territory (BIOT) have included:

-“Chagos 2006”- the ship-based research group visit, completed in March this year.

-The Chagos Ecological Restoration Project 2006, which aims to clear invasive and destructive black rats from Eagle Island- the second largest island in the archipelago.

-Continuing developments in favour of national and international conservation structures, related especially to the Chagos Conservation Management Plan, the BIOT Environmental Zone, and designation of new conservation sites under the international Ramsar Convention. (Progress on Chagos Ramsar sites would fit well with the wider work done on new Ramsar sites by UKOTCF.)

All these programmes involve active co-operation between the Government and NGOs. The contributions from the OTEP fund and the role of BIOT's support vessel, the “Pacific Marlin,” were vital for the success of the Chagos 2006 and Eagle Island projects.

The Working Group shares the view of Dr Charles Sheppard of Warwick University and leader of the Chagos 2006 Expedition that, given the immense and increasing pressures on natural resources and life from the human population, every ocean and every sea needs its own haven for wildlife, “its own Chagos Archipelago where human impact is negligible.” The Expedition successfully concentrated on understanding, preserving, and managing the Chagos – the haven for the Indian Ocean.

One subject for concern which emerges is that of fisheries conservation. There are indications of over-fishing in the Chagos area, for example with a recent negative impact on the tuna stock. There is also clear evidence of illegal inshore fishing. An illegal operation from Sri Lanka was recently caught red-handed in the course of an independent scientific visit, and others were also arrested last year. The Government has separate regimes for fisheries and conservation in BIOT; they need to be co-ordinated.

There is, however, also much good news.

The 2006 Expedition found the Chagos coral reefs to be in generally better condition than they were at the time of the last scuba survey of 2001.

The rat-free islands of the great Chagos Bank including Nelson, Three Brothers and Danger islands are teeming with birds and other wildlife. Shearwaters and brown boobies have moved into Nelson. At least 18 (threatened) white-tailed tropic birds were seen in the Salomon atoll. Even on Diego Garcia itself, the Royal Naval Bird Watching Society counted no fewer than 3340 pairs



Jellyfish found in the waters around the Chagos

of nesting red-footed boobies in the strict reserve area at Barton Point. (Some 20 years ago, the writer of this note was proudly shown just a couple of pairs there, apparently new arrivals.)

As for Eagle island, when David Bellamy visited there some 30 years ago he wrote of it in his book, “Half of Paradise,” as “silent for want of birds, but alive with the scuttling of rats”. The Eagle Island project, directed by Fauna and Flora International, stands to provide for the recovery of (*inter alia*) turtles, seabirds and rare island hardwood trees, recreating a true tropical paradise.

Organisations or individuals with an interest in the conservation of the British Indian Ocean Territory are warmly invited to contact CCT through its Secretary: simonhughes@hughes-mccormack.co.uk

Report of UKOTCF South Atlantic Working Group

Four meetings have been held during the year 2005-06: in April, July, October 2005 and February 2006. The Group brings together key individuals with an extensive knowledge of conservation issues in the South Atlantic. It welcomed Ron Lewis-Smith as permanent representative of the South Georgia Association, Vin Fleming (representing IUCN through the Joint Nature Conservation Committee), and guests Cllr Eric Benjamin of St Helena Government, Cathy Hopkins of the St Helena National Trust, and James Glass of the Tristan Natural Resources Department. The Group is grateful to Frances Marks for continuing to provide administrative support to the Group on a voluntary basis, and much appreciate the contribution by Judith O'Brien of RSPB who has recently provided help with taking minutes. Thanks are also due to the Falkland Islands Government for use of their premises for meetings.

In addition to benefiting greatly from the attendance of South Atlantic Territory residents and their Government Representatives in the UK, group members remain in close touch with the South Atlantic Territories. This has benefited from visits to the South Atlantic by Mike Pienkowski, Forum Chairman, and his wife Ann (who both earlier facilitated St Helena's development of its Environment Charter strategy), Sarah Sanders (RSPB), John Hughes (Services Ornithological Societies), Ann Brown (Falklands Conservation) and Ron Lewis-Smith (South Georgia Association).



Leopard seal on ice, British Antarctic Territory

The Group has enjoyed a number of presentations during the year. Sally Poncet, South Georgia Surveys, provided an overview of conservation issues and wildlife initiatives on South Georgia, Neil McCulloch gave a first-hand account of the status of the endemic St Helena Wirebird, Alex Jones updated on progress of the Falkland Islands Invertebrates Conservation Project and Steve Alton outlined his work on Ascension, St Helena and the Falklands for the Millennium Seed Bank.

Protection of seabirds and the marine environment has again been a key item for attention. On the Falkland Islands numbers of black-browed albatross continue to decline (as highlighted by the 2005/06 census of this bird by Falklands Conservation), in spite of dramatic reductions in mortality

in Falkland waters. Tristan da Cunha endemic species remain severely threatened by illegal commercial fishing. The Group was delighted to hear that, in February 2006, local legislation here was updated to comply with the international Agreement for the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, with Tristan being included within this Agreement shortly after the end of the reported year. On Ascension Island it was good to hear that there had been no reports of feral cats all year, and even better to learn of seabirds beginning to recolonise previously abandoned mainland breeding areas. An International Workshop held in the Falkland Islands in March, to address albatross and petrel conservation in the Overseas Territories, provided a unique opportunity to draw up a detailed programme of positive action required to address the dramatic seabird declines across the South Atlantic. The Group hopes to assist in taking forward some of its wide-ranging recommendations next year.



Wandering albatrosses display on breeding grounds at Prion Island, South Georgia

During the year celebrating the 500 years since Tristan da Cunha's discovery, the Island has finalised its Biodiversity Action Plan, following completion of the three-year RSPB-led Darwin Initiative project. The new appointment of a Conservation Officer was most welcome in taking the Plan forward. However, communications remain a real barrier to this. The Group believes that this remotest of islands would derive substantial benefits from a good, and much cheaper, internet connection, and welcomed news of some progress in this area. It has become clear that mice predation on the albatross population on Gough Island is a serious problem. The Group strongly supports investigations into this, and will follow with interest how this might be tackled effectively. The Guidelines on Export of Wildlife from Overseas Territories were finalised and circulated in July 2005, following concerns over the export of rockhopper penguins to South Africa in 2004. The Group welcomed these, but considered that references need to be added on sources of expert help, and not just website details which are difficult for some Territories to access.

The Group has continued to keep a watchful eye on progress towards building an airport on St Helena. Environmental

issues are being taken seriously, with the invertebrates and wirebird studies (which the Group strongly recommended be undertaken) being fully taken into account within the Environmental Impact Assessment. The endemic wirebird population needs particular protection in view of its 42% decline in recent years. Some concerns remain over associated developments, and details connected with access routes. The Group notes with pleasure the activities of the St Helena National Trust and welcome its new Director, Cathy Hopkins. Restoration of the Flax Mill (with some financial support obtained by the Forum) was completed. However, locating funds to support conservation of the Island's historic buildings remains an on going problem.

On neighbouring Ascension Island (albeit 800 miles away), Green Mountain National Park was officially opened in June 2005. The Group was surprised and troubled by a reversal of policy by the UK Government concerning the right of abode for Ascension's residents, where it seems permanent residency will not after all be permitted. The Group considers it will be very difficult to carry out effective long term environmental action without a permanent population here, and is continuing to press for a reply to the Forum's letter to the Minister on this issue. Excellent progress had been made with other protected areas on the Island, but this has stalled following UK Government's policy reversal. The spread of Mexican thorn also remains a major problem.

A regional funding bid to the EU for an invasive species project on the South Atlantic Overseas Territories, initiated by this Group, has progressed well, and approval is expected to go ahead with this in 2006. The work by RSPB and the St Helena Government in developing this proposal is gratefully acknowledged. The focus of the work will be on direct action to prevent the spread of and control importation of invasives, which have proved so damaging to the fragile, and precious, ecosystems of these remote islands.

It has been particularly encouraging over the past twelve months to see real progress with strategies to implement Environment Charters. On St Helena a first Strategy for Action document has now been produced, facilitated by the Forum's Mike and Ann Pienkowski. On the Falkland Islands, a draft Conservation and Biodiversity Strategy is being finalised. The Tristan Biodiversity Action Plan is agreed. A new management plan for South Georgia is in its final stages. Over the next twelve months the Group will be looking to see all these plans being adopted. It will do its best to support these plans by addressing the challenging task of getting resources identified, particularly in the UK, so that they can become a much needed reality in protecting the very special wildlife of the UK's South Atlantic Territories.



Heteropteran bug found on St Helena during the survey undertaken by Philip and Myrtle Ashmole

Report of the UKOTCF Pitcairn Working Group

Conservation work in the Pitcairn Islands has centred around three main issues, the on-going roseapple removal project linked to the island nursery, a new project to develop an Environmental Management Plan for the islands (both projects funded by OTEP), and putting into effect recommendations of the 2004 Henderson Management Plan.

The nursery has had to be moved again, because of land requirements associated with the judicial proceedings. With luck, no further moves will be necessary. Work on propagating native species has progressed, and further monitoring and weeding of the roseapple removal plots established by Noeleen Smyth has proceeded. Funding for the project ends in December 2006. There is a clear need to extend this project into the future, to provide continued support for the nursery to propagate native species for conservation and restoration. The continued commitment to salaries, consumables and other costs, could come from OTEP (or equivalent). Another mechanism which might help is to utilise outside paying volunteers to provide labour. Their payments would not only be an asset to the Pitcairner families with whom they stayed, but could also generate income to sustain paid local positions at the nursery.

Another major development is the drafting of an Environmental Management Plan for the Pitcairn Islands, under the guidance of Noeleen Smyth working for BEC (Botanical, Environmental and Conservation) Consultants Ltd. A first draft of the plan is to be circulated shortly. Its remit covers all four islands in the group. Drawing on the aspirations of the Environment Charter and utilising the Forum's pilot work in Turks & Caicos and St Helena, the aim is to deliver an agreed, workable plan which will be published and acted upon by Her Majesty's Government. Some specific conservation actions will be recommended, including the routine adoption of Environmental Impact Assessments. The final draft is scheduled for submission to the Foreign Office by mid-2007.

Membership of the Henderson Island Management Committee was agreed and work has started on producing a leaflet that will help visitors to Henderson, Oeno and Ducie enjoy an informed and responsible visit.

Why not become a Friend?

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Photographs courtesy of: Alderney Wildlife Trust; Philip Ashmole; Bermuda National Trust; Fred Burton; Glenn Gerber; Lisa Kitson; Stephen Mendes; Tara Pelembe; Mike Pienkowski; Peter Ryan; Sarah Sanders; and Charles Sheppard

Membership

The current UK members of the Forum are:

British Ecological Society; British Microbial Biodiversity Association; Herpetological Conservation Trust; The National Trust; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; Royal Zoological Society of Scotland; Zoological Society of London.

Current members of the Forum in the UK Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies are:

Alderney Wildlife Trust; Anguilla National Trust; Ascension Conservation Centre; Ascension Heritage Society; Bermuda Audubon Society; Bermuda National Trust; Bermuda Zoological Society; Chagos Conservation Trust; British Virgin Islands National Parks Trust; National Trust for the Cayman Islands; Falklands Conservation; Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society; La Société Guernesaise; Société Jersiaise; National Trust of Jersey; Isle of Man Wildlife and Conservation Division; Manx Chough Project; Montserrat National Trust; St Helena National Trust; South Georgia Association; National Trust of the Turks & Caicos Islands.