



UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Annual Report April 2008 - March 2009

Report of Council

Overview

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum promotes awareness and conservation of the rich and unique biodiversity, natural environment and related heritage of the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (UKOTs and CDs). It works in partnership with a wide network of bodies in the UK and UKOTs/CDs, many of which are Forum Member and Associate organisations, as well as individuals with relevant expertise. Aside from the general ongoing activities during the reporting period, the Forum has this year focused on three main areas, in particular:

- Planning and preparing for the UKOTCF-organised conference in the Cayman Islands to be held in May-June 2009;
- Influencing policy and policy makers, particularly in the UK, to support conservation of biodiversity and to promote effective environmental management in the UKOTs/CDs;
- Enhancing aspects of the Forum's own internal working arrangements.

All of these reflect different aspects of the Forum's work.

The conferences organised by UKOTCF on a roughly three-yearly basis since 1999 have been shown to be highly valued by Forum Member and Associate organisations and many others. Those concerned with conservation and environmental management in the widely dispersed UKOTs/CDs rarely have the opportunity to gather in one place to share experiences, as at these conferences. In many respects, they epitomise the work of the Forum in providing a network for mutual support and information exchange, particularly amongst (and for the benefit of) the smaller conservation bodies concerned. During the year, the Forum has also continued its other networking activities, including through regular e-mail circulations, enhancements to the UKOTCF website and publication of *Forum News*.

It is well recognised that attitudes to the UKOTs in the UK Parliament are important for influencing the approach of the UK Government and that pressure from parliamentary bodies can significantly affect HMG policy. Thus, it was pleasing to note that a number of points given in evidence by UKOTCF to the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee and Foreign Affairs Committee were taken up in the Committees' reports. There are signs

that this pressure is starting to have an effect in relation to support for environmental protection in the UKOTs. The Forum is aware also that, increasingly, influencing policy makers at a European level is also important for promoting conservation and sound environmental management in the UKOTs. The Forum's work in this area during the year has included submissions to formal inquiries and consultations, as well as less formal awareness-raising activities and liaison with key contacts. Influence of this

kind has the potential to direct future strategic, research and funding opportunities relating to 'overseas entities' (Outermost Regions/Overseas Countries and Territories - ORs/OCTs) of EU Member States, including the UK. It is pleasing to see the European Commission promoting ideas for support of conservation in these entities originally put to the Commission several years ago by UKOTCF and its partners in Bioverseas.

Council takes standards of governance and management of the Forum very seriously. It clearly recognises also the Forum's core role in representing the collective interests of particularly its smaller, Territory-based Member and Associate organisations. A wide-ranging consultation with Member and Associate organisations, to assess their views of the Forum and its work, was undertaken in the first half of 2008. This has informed a range of measures that Council has pursued, and continues to pursue, to enhance UKOTCF's operations. However, lack of core funding remains a major constraint on what the Forum can achieve. Whilst UKOTCF

is partly supported through grants, donations and subscriptions, it still relies substantially on the voluntary efforts of Council members and others.

Preparations for the Cayman conference - *Making the Right Connections*

A great deal of time during the year was spent planning and making preparations for the UKOTCF-organised conference on conservation in UKOTs, CDs and other small island communities, to be held in Grand Cayman, 30 May – 5 June 2009. This is the fifth in a series of conferences, following those held in London (1999), Gibraltar (2000), Bermuda (2003) and Jersey (2006). The wide-ranging consultation undertaken during the year with Member and Associate



Westminster Hall, UK Parliament (venue of the reception for UKOTCF - see also page 4), with the tower of Big Ben behind. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski. Inputs into Parliamentary discussions have been a major, successful feature of recent UKOTCF work.



Darter dragonfly, Grand Cayman. Photo: Thomas Hadjikyriakou

organisations indicated strong support and a very high rate of approval for these conferences. The Cayman conference takes *Making the Right Connections* as its theme, and aims to draw on similarities and differences in experience across the Territories and to provide insights into common challenges, leaving participants better equipped to address local needs. Council is grateful to the Forum's partners in the Cayman Islands and elsewhere, and to DFID, for funding and other support in organising this event.

It should be noted that there have been major challenges associated with organising this conference. First, striving for representation from governmental and NGO bodies from as many Territories as possible has been complicated by staff turnover in a number of key bodies, particularly in UKOTs in the South Atlantic, during the year. Second, considerable additional challenges arose from knock-on effects of the global economic downturn, particularly the dramatic fall in value of the pound (the currency of most income) against the dollar (to which most expenditure was linked). Nonetheless, by the end of the reported year, we looked forward to another successful conference, and the rare opportunity that it provides for representatives of Forum Member and Associate organisations, other UKOT/CD stakeholders, and those with wider relevant experience, to meet and to exchange ideas and views. Whilst there is always more material to be discussed than time available at such events, the themes of the conference sessions were chosen after wide-ranging consultations at an early stage to accommodate as many priority topics as possible. Main sessions address capacity constraints, profile raising, climate change, aspects of spatial planning and protected areas, joined-up approaches, and invasive species; short sessions focus on Environment Charter implementation and environmental education. All UK Territories will be represented in some way. This is also the first such conference to be attended by a UK environment minister, in the person of Huw Irranca-Davies MP, the Defra Minister for the Natural and Marine Environment, Wildlife and Rural Affairs.

Influencing policy

By influencing policy makers, particularly in the UK, the Forum enhances support for environmental protection and sustainable development in the UKOTs. Activities in this area included submissions to UK parliamentary inquiries, Government (and other) consultations, as well as wider awareness-raising efforts. Specific among these was provision of evidence to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) inquiry into *Overseas Territories*, launched in July 2007, which issued its report in July 2008. In line with the Forum's evidence, the FAC was critical of HMG, including the level of its support for environmental management in the UKOTs. The Committee also expressed particular concern over allegations of corruption in the Government of the Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI). (This issue has major implications for conservation because many aspects centre on the issue of allocation for built development of Crown Land, including notionally protected areas and others of importance to nature and heritage conservation.) Subsequently, a Commission of Inquiry was established to examine these allegations. Its interim report recommended suspension of the constitution, and strengthening of the Attorney General's office and courts. At the time of writing, the Commission's final report is still awaited, but it is to be hoped that, whatever new arrangements are ultimately put in place in TCI, there will be a major reduction in the scale of damage to the environment reported in *Forum News* 32.

The Forum also provided further evidence to the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (EAC). Last year's Annual Report noted criticisms by the EAC of the UK Government's approach to, and inadequate financial support for, environmental

protection in the UKOTs, in line with evidence which had been presented by the Forum. The EAC launched a further inquiry, in April 2008, into *Halting Biodiversity Loss*. Its report, published in November 2008, drew heavily on UKOTCF's submission, and again criticised the UK Government for its approach. Key recommendations from the EAC included that HMG should:

- adopt a truly joined-up approach to environmental protection in the UKOTs/CDs across the various Government Departments involved;
- make better use of the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Biodiversity in this regard;
- give Defra joint responsibility for the UKOTs (and reflect this in future spending settlements); and
- address the dire lack of funding and information for environmental protection in the UKOTs.

The EAC concluded that "One of the most important contributions that the Government could make to slowing the catastrophic global biodiversity loss currently occurring would be to accept its responsibilities and to provide more support for the UK Overseas Territories in this area." Following this robust assessment, there have been some signs of changes in the UK Government's approach to environmental protection in the UKOTs. In HMG's response to the EAC report (published in February 2009), for example, the Government notes that it has asked the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) to develop a strategy for HMG for biodiversity protection in the UKOTs. The Forum, while pleased that some progress is being made, has expressed concerns that, despite UKOTCF's previously accepted role, and the clear weight given to its evidence to Select Committees, ongoing policy development in this area lacks transparency, and that the NGO network which UKOTCF coordinates is being less involved than would have been the case until recently. The Forum has already taken, and will continue to take, steps to attempt to redress this position.

In June 2008, UKOTCF responded to HMG's consultation on the Marine Bill, essentially a piece of domestic legislation, calling for the UK's responsibility for the UKOTs under international conventions to be taken into account, and for Territory-based bodies to be given access to UK technical support structures for marine management proposed under the Bill. In February 2009, UKOTCF responded to HMG's consultation on the World Heritage Convention, noting (amongst other things) the problems associated with prospective UKOT World Heritage Sites being advanced through the UK's 'tentative list' (where they are essentially treated as being in the UK), and the apparent ineligibility of UKOTs for Heritage Lottery funding.

At a European level, UKOTCF contributed during the year to consultations on *Future Relations Between the EU and the*



Carvings by indigenous, Arawak people in Fountains Cave, Anguilla, one of the sites on the UK tentative list for World Heritage status.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Overseas Countries and Territories (October 2008) and invasive alien species (April 2008). A European Commission paper *Towards an EU Strategy on Invasive Species* was published towards the end of 2008. It specifically noted the particular impact of species invasions on isolated islands with high biodiversity value, such as the Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) of EU Member States, and acknowledged that they do not receive appropriate attention in this regard. Bioverseas, the group comprising UKOTCF and the roughly equivalent bodies for French and Netherlands OCTs, introduced to the European Commission some years ago the idea of support for nature areas in the OCTs. We were delighted that the Commission's Environmental Director has adopted this idea, in the proposed *Voluntary scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European Overseas* (BEST), and we will continue to support this. It will be important that any implementation avoids the excessive bureaucracy which has limited the use by UKOTs of previous European Commission initiatives.

Relations with UK Government and Government Agencies

The Forum has worked hard to maintain good relations with key UK Government Departments, particularly FCO, DFID and Defra, through formal meetings and informal contacts with officials. Unfortunately, there has been repeated postponement of the previously regular general meetings with the UK Government, jointly chaired by UKOTCF and FCO, through persistent staffing and room-availability problems at FCO. However, Council was delighted to receive confirmation from Defra that the UK Minister for Biodiversity, Huw Irranca-Davies, would participate in the Cayman conference. This represents a major achievement in itself and, we hope, reflects an increasing interest in support of conservation and environmental protection in the Territories on the part of HMG.

UKOTCF personnel have also ensured that UKOTs and CDs were not overlooked in other quarters, using a range of opportunities. These have included: meetings of the UK Executive Committee of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN-UK), on which UKOTCF's Chairman serves, and which works in partnership with UKOTCF on UKOT/CD issues; national meetings on the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands hosted by Defra; and meetings and events hosted by other organisations. Also, UKOTCF has held informal meetings to brief new Governors, Administrators Designate and their staff prior to taking up post, as and when UKOTCF was advised of these new appointments, as well as some subsequent follow-up meetings.

As noted in last year's Report, JNCC (the UK Government's statutory adviser on nature conservation) has increasingly focused its work in the UKOTs/CDs of late. Prior to the expansion of the agency's role in this area, UKOTCF worked informally and successfully with JNCC personnel, and indeed encouraged their greater involvement in work in the Territories. With JNCC's greater responsibilities, their relationship with the Forum unfortunately declined, for reasons that were unclear. UKOTCF representatives met with JNCC colleagues in January 2009, to explore re-establishment of the former close working relationship, and to discuss complementarities and potential points of tension in the respective work programmes of the two organisations. These discussions are ongoing, and JNCC will be well represented at the Cayman conference.

Working Groups and wider networks

The activities of the Forum's Southern Oceans, Europe Territories,



*UKOTCF informal meeting at the Réunion conference.
Photo: Dr Colin Hindmarch*

and Wider Caribbean Working Groups during the year are summarised in subsequent sections of this report.

UKOTCF, in July 2008, participated in a Conference (including as a member of the Steering Committee) on *The European Union and its Overseas Entities: Strategies in the face of climate change and biodiversity loss*, which was organized by the IUCN Regional Office for Europe (ROfE) and hosted by Réunion Island. This was adopted as an official event of the French Presidency of the EU and was the first meeting at a high level explicitly to promote environmental protection in the Outermost Regions/Overseas Countries and Territories (ORs/OCTs) of EU Member States collectively. UKOTCF also convened a side meeting of UK and UKOT participants in the margins of the conference. The statement (*Message from Réunion*) that arose from the conference made a range of recommendations on environmental management and sustainable development in the overseas entities of the EU.

The idea for the Réunion conference arose, in part, through discussions in Bioverseas, the consortium of umbrella NGOs noted above that is working with EU institutions to promote an integrated approach to conservation in the ORs/OCTs. In November 2008, UKOTCF hosted at the Zoological Society of London a meeting to discuss the way forward for Bioverseas, including in the context of the IUCN-ROfE's developing post-Réunion initiatives.

Environment Charters and conservation concerns

Since they were signed in September 2001, the Environment Charters have become important statements of intent by the governments of the UK and individual UKOTs, outlining commitments by both parties to environmental protection and sustainable development. In some cases, UKOTCF has facilitated the development of strategies for action by UKOTs to implement these.

In August 2007, the Forum published its first review of progress on Environment Charter implementation. The background to this exercise was outlined in last year's Report, along with a brief summary of its findings. During 2008/9, UKOTCF began collecting information for its second review of progress, and has already received input from a range of Territories on fulfilment of commitments by UKOT Governments. Relevant UK Government Departments also committed to providing input on fulfilment of commitments by HMG. An initial draft report will be presented at the Cayman conference, as an update on implementation progress and as an encouragement to stakeholders to provide further input. Information received to date as part of the second review of progress indicates that there remain serious concerns in a number of UKOTs over issues relating to planning procedures, especially on Environmental Impact Assessments and the impact of construction projects.

The 2008 hurricane season brought a sobering reminder of the

vulnerability of UKOTs to extreme weather events, and to the likely impacts of climate change more widely. In particular, TCI was severely affected by both Hurricane Hanna and Hurricane Ike, which arrived just a few days apart at the beginning of September. The Cayman Islands were earlier shaken by Hurricane Gustav. Cayman Brac (in particular) and Little Cayman were hit hard by Hurricane Paloma later in the season. Anguilla and BVI were affected by Hurricane Omar, although damage was mercifully not as bad as initially feared. Although hurricanes are basically natural events, interaction with human activities exacerbates their effects. This is both at a global scale, via human-induced climate change, and locally, because of increased sensitivity due to reduction and fragmentation of ecosystems.

As a threat to biodiversity which disproportionately affects small islands, invasive species remain a major concern in the UKOTs. Positive work has been ongoing in the Territories during the year, notably under the South Atlantic Invasive Species project managed by RSPB. Also, JNCC has commissioned Karen Varnham to update and extend her collation of information on non-native species in the UKOTs/CDs, an indirect outcome of the UKOTCF-organised 2003 Bermuda conference. UKOTCF was represented at a workshop to discuss this work, hosted by JNCC in March 2009. However, the potentially appalling impact of invasive species was only re-emphasised later that month, when chytrid fungus was detected for the first time in Montserrat. This pathogen causes a disease known as chytridiomycosis, which has devastated amphibian populations around the world. It is believed to have arrived in Montserrat from neighbouring Dominica, and represents a new and severe threat to the mountain chicken, a species of frog which is already classified as Critically Endangered.

Awareness raising and information management

Forum News 32 was published in July 2008, and *Forum News* 33 in November 2008. As well as reporting on UKOTCF's work, and other issues and activities relevant to conservation in the UKOTs/CDs, these featured reports from Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) projects, under the Forum's on-going agreement with DFID/FCO to make available information on this important programme. The UKOTCF website, another vehicle for dissemination of information on OTEP, benefited from a number of enhancements during the year. These included transfer to a different internet service provider, addition of regularly updated news features, and redesign of the existing on-line databases. The additional facilities developed under the Environmental Education project (see below), and other planned work, will further improve the functionality of the website, reinforcing its reputation as a primary source of information on the UKOTs/CDs, Forum partners and relevant environmental issues.

Complementing its submissions to Select Committee inquiries, the Forum took other opportunities during the year to raise awareness amongst UK parliamentarians of the UKOTs/CDs and the environmental challenges that they face. In April 2008, the Forum's Chairman gave a presentation to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Conservation & Wildlife, as part of a seminar organised with IUCN-UK. In January 2009, UKOTCF co-hosted, with Andrew Rosindell MP and the All Party Parliamentary Group on Overseas Territories, an evening reception for parliamentarians and key Government contacts. Following a brief presentation by the UKOTCF Chairman, a lively discussion ensued on environmental issues in the Territories, and the role of the UK Government in helping to address these.

UKOTCF has also continued to keep its Member and Associate organisations (and its wider network of contacts) informed of relevant developments, including funding opportunities,

consultations and internal activities, through regular e-mail circulations. In addition, in August 2008, the Forum again used the British Bird Watching Fair, an event that attracts 15-20,000 visitors annually, as a platform for raising awareness of the UKOTs and the important biodiversity that they support.



New quarantine building, South Georgia (see also page 10).

Photo: Brian Summers, RSPB

Organisational development

At the December 2008 AGM, Nigel Crocker stood down from Council, and John Cortes, Mike Freeman, Chris Tydeman and Karen Varnham were elected as new Council members. We are very grateful to Nigel for his support to the Forum over many years, particularly in the role of Treasurer, in which capacity he is succeeded by Bill Samuel. The Esmée Fairbairn Foundation grant, welcomed in last year's Report, combined with other re-adjustments, allowed for Oliver Cheesman and Catherine Quick to take on the part-time paid roles of Development Director and Co-ordinator respectively from the beginning of the reported year.

The year has seen a great deal of activity relating to the internal workings of the Forum, undertaken to ensure that the organisation is well positioned to work effectively with its network of Member and Associate organisations and other partners. UKOTCF's constitutional documents, the Memorandum & Articles of Association (M&As) were subject to a thorough review by independent legal advisers. The changes that they recommended, in order to bring the documents into line with recent changes in UK company and charity law, and to reflect best practice, were approved by Member organisations at an EGM in October 2008 and at the subsequent AGM. The consultation exercise with Member and Associate organisations, initiated at the end of 2007, and co-ordinated by the 'Review Team' of John Cortes (Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society), Rob Thomas (Royal Zoological Society of Scotland) and Oliver Cheesman (UKOTCF), reported to Council in July 2008. Council is very grateful to the members of the Review Team, and all those who contributed to the consultation, for the time that they spent on this important exercise.

The Review Team's report and Council's response (in which it welcomed and accepted almost all of the Team's recommendations) were circulated to Member and Associate organisations in September 2008, and were subject to discussion at Forum Meetings on the days of the EGM and AGM. Key elements were outlined in *Forum News* 33, but also merit summary here. The response rate was impressive (for a questionnaire-based survey) at 74%, and feedback was received from all but three of the 21 UKOTs/CDs. There was overwhelming support for the Forum's stated purpose: *to promote the conservation of the rich and unique biodiversity, natural environment and related heritage of the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies of the United Kingdom*. Most respondents felt that UKOTCF had met this purpose 'well' or 'very well', by providing the hub for a network of organisations, reducing the sense of isolation of Territory-based bodies and enhancing collaboration. Feedback suggested that the strategic approach and priorities already embraced by the Forum were essentially the right ones. Capacity building in UKOT/CD-based NGOs was seen as the most important future priority, followed by identification of local priority needs (and

development of strategies to address these), raising awareness in the UK of UKOT environmental issues, and exchange of information. Council undertook to develop a brief document, outlining a refreshed Forum strategy and steps towards its implementation. It also proposed to arrange individual meetings with Territory-based Member and Associate organisations to discuss their local needs, and (where they wished) to explore with Associate organisations a move to subscription-paying and voting Member status. It was also suggested that the Forum should do more to promote its own achievements, and this is another area that Council proposes to pursue.

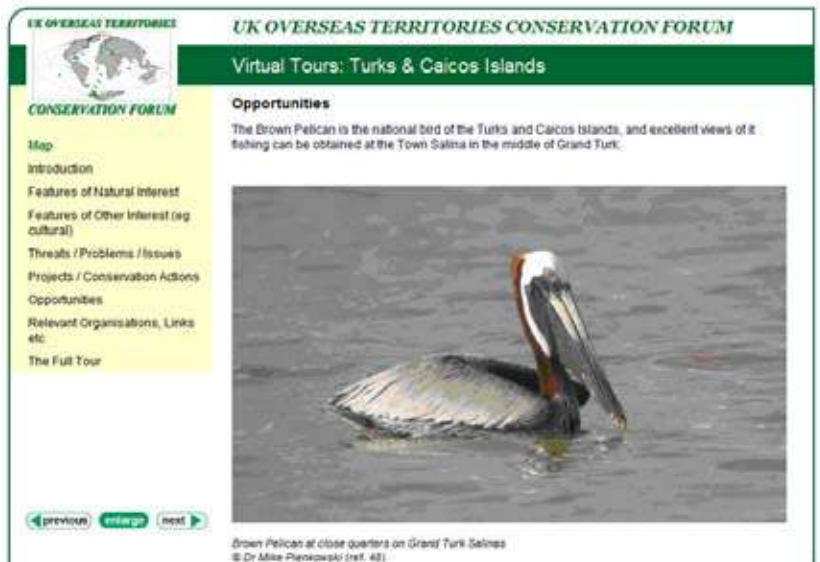
There was strong support for UKOTCF Council comprising individuals with the skills necessary to run the Forum, rather than directly representing Member organisations. While many expressed no strong opinion, those that did (particularly in the Territories) felt that Council nonetheless represented the interests of Member and Associate organisations 'well' or 'very well'. The majority of Member and Associate organisations rated their relationship with the Forum, the Forum's relationship with its Members and Associates in general, and the Forum's internal communications, as 'good' or 'very good'. Positive feedback was again strongest from Territory-based organisations. However, both the Review Team and Council recognised that there was always room for improvement. For example, participation in UK-based meetings is clearly difficult for those based elsewhere, and teleconferencing (although useful) is not a universal solution.

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

Since the Review Team reported, Council has gradually been implementing its recommendations. In addition to the website enhancements reported above, for example, a refreshed strategy and implementation plan is being drafted. Various steps have been taken to enhance internal communications, including further experimentation with teleconferencing in UK-based meetings, to facilitate participation by those elsewhere. Unfortunately, this progress has been accompanied by some pain. During the year, RSPB and Falklands Conservation resigned as Forum Member organisations.

Projects

Amongst its other activities, the Forum helps its Member and Associate organisations to identify, design, resource and implement projects, often involving the development of strategic partnerships between these organisations and sometimes others. Other projects in which the Forum is involved provide a co-



Example screen from one of the new virtual tours being implemented on UKOTCF's website: www.ukotcf.org

ordinating role for activities across multiple (sometimes including non-UK) Territories. Income generated via projects provides an important source of funding for the Forum, although this relies on Council members and others providing their time to project work at well below market rates. Some of the projects operating during the reported year are noted below.

An important focus of project work during the year has been the cross-Territory Environmental Education project led by the Forum and funded by OTEP. This has developed a range of new facilities on the UKOTCF website, based on three modules. A discussion forum has been piloted, and is now live and accessible from the home-page of the website, where new participants can register. Although designed principally for use by students, this facility allows stakeholders to share and discuss their ideas, insights and experience, and to learn from one another about environmental issues across the Territories. The second module is a database of environmental education materials and other resources, allowing those developed for one Territory to be shared (and potentially adapted) for use in others. The third module provides for a virtual tour of each Territory, structured around their location and a map (the first point of entry), and then features of natural (and other, including cultural) interest, conservation issues and actions, links to relevant local organisations, etc. Although this facility is still under construction, at least one pilot tour for a UKOT should be on-line in time for demonstration at the Cayman conference. Ultimately, as well as providing useful educational material for students, the virtual tours will provide an excellent resource for wider awareness raising of the Territories and the value of (and threats to) their environment.

Led by UKOTCF's honorary Environmental Education Co-ordinator, a voluntary team continue, at the request of the Turks & Caicos National Trust (TCNT), to revise and extend TCNT's Primary School Environmental Education course, *Our Land, Our Sea, Our People*. At the request of TCI's Deputy Director of Education, an OTEP proposal for the development of a school course on freshwater was prepared with local stakeholders by UKOTCF's honorary Environmental Education Co-ordinator. Although the project was approved in principle, a final decision is awaited at the time of writing. UKOTCF has continued other work in support of conservation in TCI, including jointly with the National Museum on interpretive work at Grand Turk Salinas (although the scope of this was limited because the financial crisis there meant that a grant awarded by the local Conservation Fund was not paid), and through advice and support to TCNT and parts of the TCI Government.

UKOTCF has also continued its work under the important Net-Biome project. This multi-partner initiative aims to enhance co-ordination of biodiversity research in the tropical and sub-tropical ORs/OCTs of France, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal and the UK, thereby underpinning sustainable development. It is funded by the EU, under the European Research Area NETWORK (ERANET) Programme. The Forum is providing input in relation to relevant UKOTs, and has recently approached a wide range of stakeholders to survey and 'map' existing research activities and priorities across those Territories. As is often in the nature of such initiatives, however, a great deal of time has also been expended in dealing with issues relating to the overall management and co-ordination of the project.

In December 2007, the European Commission (EC) finally committed to funding a project proposed in 2003, linking TCI, British Virgin Islands (BVI) and the Cayman Islands, which will use aspects of sustainable tourism to enhance biodiversity conservation. Whilst the TCI Government provides the formal lead in this project, the Forum has had the co-ordinating role, and UKOTCF's Chairman has spent much time over the last four and a half years steering development of the proposal through the complex and shifting requirements of the EC. This work has been totally voluntary, as no support to meet the substantial work

was available from the Commission. Unfortunately, problems at the European Commission delegation in Kingston, Jamaica have further delayed this project and UKOTCF has had difficulty in securing responses from that office. Work will continue in the hope of overcoming these difficulties, so that this long-delayed project can start.

Acknowledgements

The Forum Council would like to thank the individuals and representatives of Member and Associate organisations who have given numerous hours of voluntary time to the Forum, both in the UK and the Territories. The Forum would also like to thank existing Friends, and encourage those who have an interest in the UKOTs/CDs to join the scheme. The Forum is very grateful for financial assistance as project grants and donations, from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for International Development, Cayman Islands Government and others. The Forum is also grateful to Member organisations and others for allowing meetings to take place at their offices during the year, particularly, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the Zoological Society of London, and Foyle's Bookshop.

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Summary Statement of Financial Activities (including Income and Expenditure Account) for the year ended 31 March 2009

	2009 Unrestricted Funds	2009 Restricted Funds	2009 Total Funds	2008 Total Funds
Incoming Resources				
Subs and donations	12,898	-	12,898	44,408
Investment Income	2,095	-	2,095	4,106
Sundry Incoming Resources	410	-	410	286
Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities				
Project Income	-	268,501	268,501	132,474
Total Incoming Resources	15,403	268,501	283,904	181,274
Resources Expended				
Charitable Activities	38,453	161,097	199,550	127,640
Other Resources Expended	23,099	11,800	34,899	25,030
Total Resources Expended before transfers	61,552	172,897	234,449	152,670
Net incoming/outgoing resources before transfers	-46,149	95,604	49,455	28,604
Transfers between funds	28,371	-28,371	-	-
Net incoming/outgoing resources	-17,778	67,233	49,455	28,604
Balance brought forward at 1st April 2008	86,227	54,037	140,264	111,660
Balance carried forward at 31st March 2009	68,449	121,270	189,719	140,264

Report of UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

The Wider Caribbean Working Group (WCWG) met three times during the year, at the Royal Botanic Gardens (RBG) Kew, and began to explore options for teleconferencing using Skype, in order to enhance remote participation in its meetings.

Amongst the general conservation issues of importance in the Caribbean region, the Group heard about on-going concerns over planning processes and the impact of poorly regulated built development on natural habitats. Such issues, in the context of good governance, were amongst those noted in UKOTCF evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) inquiry on

Overseas Territories, which reported in July 2008. However, there were also encouraging signs during the year of increasingly effective local campaigning for the protection of habitats in a number of Territories. As noted in the main report above, the 2008 hurricane season brought damage and disruption to some Caribbean UKOTs, particularly TCI and the Cayman Islands, providing a reminder of the increasing threats posed by climate change. Invasive species were also a regular theme at WCWG meetings, including discussion of the spread of the Pacific red lionfish through the marine waters of the region, and the shocking news of the discovery of chytrid fungus in Montserrat. In addition

to these now perennial issues, WCWG heard during the year about the environmental impacts of the offshore finance sector, based on an initial study by a Cambridge PhD student, Katrina Jurn, conducted in her home Territory, the Cayman Islands. This demonstrated that the offshore finance sector there has contributed to negative impacts on the environment, as exemplified by loss of mangrove wetland habitats, due to 'spill over' effects via real estate and property development markets. For example, as offshore finance activity increased, so did associated demand for (and investment opportunities in) luxury property developments, leading to clearance of mangrove habitats for construction. The extent of this habitat loss was also influenced by other local factors, including aspects of local environmental and (again) planning policy.

In relation to cross-Territory activities, a number of WCWG members have been actively involved in the UKOTCF Environmental Education project described in the main section of this report. Also noted above is the energy expended by UKOTCF over a number of years, with partners in TCI, BVI and the Cayman Islands, in pursuing European Commission funding for a major project to link aspects of sustainable tourism to biodiversity conservation. In addition to these cross-Territory activities, WCWG heard reports during the year of various activities under the regional *Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) Targets 1 & 2* project, funded by OTEP and led by the Cayman Islands Department of Environment and RBG Kew. Fieldwork conducted in Caribbean UKOTs has made useful contributions to this project, and attracted a high profile in related publications.

Anguilla

During the year, WCWG members were able to welcome a number of positive developments in Anguilla. These included the appointment of Farah Mukhida as Executive Director of the Anguilla National Trust, and news of progress in the development of local environmental legislation. New projects in Anguilla were also welcomed, including that being undertaken by Calvin (André) Samuel, one of the OTEP Fellows studying at Exeter University, in conjunction with RBG Kew, towards a comprehensive plant checklist for the Territory, including baseline distribution maps. However, aspects of planning and development in Anguilla remained a concern locally, as reflected in submissions to the FAC inquiry. Invasive species also remain a cause for concern, exemplified during the year by reports of beach morning glory *Ipomoea pes-caprae* having spread rapidly across Sombrero Island.

Bermuda

Encouraging news from Bermuda during the year included further successes under the recovery programme for the Endangered cahow (Bermuda petrel) *Pterodroma cahow* on Nonsuch Island, the designation of adjacent Cooper's Island as a National Nature Reserve and National Park, and extensive reef survey work. Once again, however, aspects of the local planning process and its ability to protect sensitive sites from development were called into question. The proposed construction of a beach bar facility on Warwick Long Bay caused controversy locally, with suggestions that it had been approved by the Environment Minister, over-ruling the previous rejection of the proposal by the Development Applications Board and an independent planning inspector. Although reportedly a temporary (seasonal) structure, there was particular concern locally that such a proposal should be approved for an area which was reportedly a National Park Conservation Area and Bermuda's "last 'pristine' large public beach". Opposition to the project, organised by the Bermuda

Environmental and Sustainability Taskforce, resulted in a 5,000 signature petition being delivered to the Premier of Bermuda.

British Virgin Islands (BVI)

As noted last year, the approval of a proposed resort and golf course development on Beef Island by the BVI Government in February 2007 proved controversial locally, and opposition to the decision was reported to have influenced the change of administration that came about at the August 2007 general election. A coalition of local groups, under the banner of the Virgin Islands Environmental Council (VIEC), has been pursuing legal action against the approval of the development. Towards the end of 2008, the objectors won a hearing allowing them to proceed with a full legal challenge, with the case due to begin as this report is being written.

During the year, BVI hosted a climate change workshop, involving local stakeholders and those from a number of other regional UKOTs. This event was part of the initiative funded by DFID to enable UKOTs to participate in the wider work of the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre. At a more local scale, the estate of Laurance S. Rockefeller donated Sandy Cay to the BVI National Parks Trust (BVINPT), the culmination of a series of projects over an eight year period to characterize the ecosystems of this 14-acre island, develop a management plan and assist BVINPT in institutional capacity building. The Rock Iguana Headstart Facility on Anegada benefited from the construction of 14 additional cages, funded by the Governor's Office, who also assisted in the construction of the cages as part of a team-building exercise in collaboration with BVINPT staff.

Also in BVI, the Jost van Dyke Preservation Society (JVDPS) began work under its OTEP project, implementing a range of community-based activities, such as environmental research, monitoring, education, and development of resources including an information centre.



JVDPS's Community-based Programme Advancing Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development is successfully involving local parents, students and teachers, here using the project newsletter to find answers to a limericks quiz.

Photo from JVDPS Green Newsletter, February 2009, Susan Zaluski.

Cayman Islands

As elsewhere during the year, the Cayman Islands saw increasingly vocal local campaigning for environmental protection. Opposition to a proposed road construction project that threatened the Ironwood Forest, the only surviving area of dry forest in western Grand Cayman, resulted in this project being halted, at least in the short term, and perhaps for the foreseeable future. Concerns are now being expressed over a proposed \$200million project to redevelop George Town harbour, which would combine work

to enhance access by large cruise ships with work to expand the port's cargo handling capacity.

June 2008 saw the publication by RBG Kew of Fred Burton's *Threatened Plants of the Cayman Islands - the Red List*, the first such assessment of the entire Cayman flora, covering all 415 species and varieties considered to be truly native to the islands. It reached the sobering conclusion that 47% of Cayman's native plants are threatened with extinction. Also threatened with extinction is the Critically Endangered blue iguana *Cyclura lewisi*, endemic to Grand Cayman. The recovery programme for this iconic species, established by the National Trust for the Cayman Islands and partners, suffered an appalling attack during the year. The captive breeding facility at the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park was broken into, and seven iguanas were killed (see *Forum News* 33), sparking outrage locally and further afield.

Montserrat

In culmination of years of hard work by many partners in Montserrat, including with the support of the Darwin Initiative and OTEP, the substantial *Montserrat Centre Hills Biodiversity Assessment* report was published during the year. This is available on the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (DWCT) website, www.durrell.org. Further progress was also made under related projects, including work on development of Botanic Gardens facilities and through Species Action Planning workshops. Other positive reports from Montserrat included progress on the development of environmental legislation.

Sadly, just before the end of the reporting year, it was confirmed that the much-feared chytrid fungus *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* had arrived in Montserrat, probably from neighbouring Dominica. This pathogen has already devastated amphibian populations around the world, and represents a new and very serious threat to Montserrat's Critically Endangered mountain chicken *Leptodactylus fallax*, a species of frog now confined to Montserrat and Dominica. Fortunately, rapid intervention by DWCT secured a number of mountain chickens as the nucleus of a healthy, captive breeding population, and work is on-going to assess and tackle the threat posed to the local herpetofauna by the fungus.

Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI)

TCI faced a number of challenges during the year, not least from



Another unfortunate effect of the hurricanes in TCI has been the dumping of rubble from damaged buildings into the old salt-pans at Grand Turk. The continually reducing area of these is likely to threaten the internationally important numbers of birds using the area, as well as making the land areas and buildings more susceptible to storm flooding.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

the devastating impacts of Hurricanes Hanna and Ike, which hit the islands just a few days apart at the beginning of September. This resulted in major damage to infrastructure, in particular, on Grand Turk, South Caicos and Salt Cay, and destroyed the recently constructed causeway between North and Middle Caicos.

Concerns in TCI over lack of planning controls and damage to the natural environment (including in nominally protected areas) were summarised in *Forum News* 32. The FAC report emphasised even deeper concerns over governance (which embraced these land issues), and led to the announcement in July 2008 of a Commission of Inquiry into possible corruption in the TCI Government. At the time of writing, the final outcomes of this inquiry are still awaited, although the interim report identified major problems which would need to be addressed by UK Government.

On a more positive note, the TCI Conservation Fund approved funding for one year to the native pine recovery project. Since 2005, RBG Kew and partners in the Turks & Caicos National Trust (TCNT) and local Government departments have been working on measures to tackle the devastating impact of an invasive scale insect on *Pinus caribea* var. *bahamensis*. The new funding allowed activities under this project to be stepped up, including through the establishment of a tree nursery and more detailed surveys of the status of the pine in the wild, although work was interrupted by hurricane impacts. Some other aspects of joint work with TCI partners are noted in the main section of the report.

Report of the UKOTCF Southern Oceans Working Group

The Southern Oceans Working Group (SOWG) met twice during 2008-9. Following earlier consideration of the key conservation issues in the UKOTs of the Southern Oceans, these meetings discussed progress on ongoing projects and emerging issues. All the Territories share some common challenges, notably those associated with remoteness, small human populations (and no permanent residents on some islands of great importance for their biodiversity), and vulnerability to climate change and invasive species. Bringing together those with an interest in all the SOWG Territories is a major challenge: it simply is not feasible to hold meetings with all members present, especially those resident in the remotest Territories. The Group hopes to develop the use of teleconferencing, which has proved successful in other contexts for UKOTCF meetings. However, technical problems, and restrictions on the use of cheaper solutions imposed by Cable and Wireless where this is a monopoly supplier, present particular challenges.

Sustainable management of fisheries is a major problem for Territories with extensive Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs)/

Exclusive Fisheries Zones where there are limited arrangements for observing and reporting evidence of Illegal, Unregulated or Unreported (IUU) fishing. SOWG suggested that the Forum respond to the Defra consultation on the Marine and Coastal Access Bill, for which UK marine conservation bodies have lobbied. Whilst the Bill is very much focused on the metropolitan UK, and was not designed to apply to UKOTs, it does include the establishment of an important expert advisory group. Accordingly, UKOTCF called for access to the expert group to be made available to UKOTs in support of their own efforts to improve management of the marine environment.

Invasive species brought to remote islands by visitors can have a massive impact on native fauna and flora. Relatively pristine (particularly rat-free) environments require strict measures to prevent unwanted introductions. This is sometimes easier for small islands with few people, compared with more intensively developed islands. However, close attention is still needed to manage the importation of living material and implement enhanced quarantine arrangements, and the Group discussed development

of guidance documents to help raise awareness amongst visitors of invasive species threats to remote islands.

Another significant problem is staff turnover in conservation bodies. This means that continuity in communication between the Territories and UKOTCF (as well as other external organisations) can be lost or interrupted for long periods. This year has seen many staff changes and vacant posts in key organisations in the Southern Oceans region, but the period ahead hopefully promises to be one with greater continuity.

The past year has seen growing attention to the need for HMG to give fuller support to environmental protection in the UKOTs. In June 2008, a House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) report criticised HMG's lack of a strategic assessment of funding requirements for conservation and environmental management, noting that current levels of funding appeared to be "grossly inadequate". Also noteworthy was the FAC's support for islanders, such as the exiled Chagossians (see section below on BIOT) and its acknowledgement that HMG had raised expectations that rights of property and abode would be granted to those living and working on Ascension. Both these cases have major implications for environmental conservation, as effective management of disturbed but important ecosystems depends on the presence and support of people, either resident or deployed for the purpose, the latter being very expensive.

The South Atlantic Invasive Species (SAIS) project is a three-year (December 2006 - December 2009) regional initiative funded by the European Union, and initiated by discussions within UKOTCF's regional Working Group. The purpose of the project is to increase the capacity of the UK's South Atlantic Overseas Territories to deal with invasive species issues. The Territories involved are St Helena, Tristan da Cunha, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, Falkland Islands and Ascension Island. The project is managed by the RSPB on behalf of the partner governments. In addition to the partner governments, two NGOs (Falklands Conservation and the St Helena National Trust) are key stakeholders. The SAIS project is laying the basis for a new strategic approach to one of the most challenging areas of environmental management for remote islands.

Ascension

The SAIS project has been very active in Ascension, particularly through staff recruitment and biological surveys. This has helped strengthen the Ascension Island Government (AIG) Conservation Department, improving its capacity to deal with long-standing issues such as the Mexican thorn bush (mesquite) *Prosopis juliflora* which threatens turtle nesting beaches, the surviving unique desert flora and fauna, and some of the island's geological features. A control plan for the Mexican thorn has concentrated on specific sites, in addition to work on the base area, and residents are attempting to stop the spread of this plant. There is also a need to assess more thoroughly the impact of previously released biological control agents. Regular reports of activities on Ascension are detailed in the Ascension Conservation Quarterly newsletter, available via the AIG Conservation Department website (<http://www.ascensionconservation.org.ac/quarterly.htm>). A recently successful OTEP bid will see the development of an education centre at the Red Lion barracks site on Green Mountain. This will provide an excellent opportunity for the school children of Ascension to learn about their native flora and fauna and what is being done to try and protect it for future generations.

St Helena

Many of the conservation priorities most recently discussed in St

Helena have been directly related to the air access project, which has now been paused by HMG. Environment Impact Assessments have been carried out and Species Recovery Programmes developed for critical species such as the endemic wirebird (St Helena plover) *Charadrius sanctaehelenae*. Such measures were all necessary as part of the preparations for the air access project, so there has already been some benefit for conservation. However, the pause not only puts the aspirations of the local population on hold but may also have a detrimental effect on the conservation efforts of the Environment Officer and the St Helena National Trust. In January 2009, SOWG's Chairman attended a meeting organised in London, where Governor Andrew Gurr addressed various aspects of the air access project.

Students from St Helena, amongst others, have been well involved in the OTEP-supported UKOTCF Environmental Education project discussion forum (www.ukotcf.org/forums - see Report of Council).

A proposal for European Union funding for a scoping project to support the implementation of the management of National Protected Areas, co-ordinated by Rebecca Cairns-Wicks, has been developed, with the Forum providing some requested input. Amongst the valuable work undertaken on St Helena by the SAIS project during the year were botanical surveys which led to the remarkable rediscovery of the neglected tuft sedge *Bulbostylis neglecta*, which had not been seen for 200 years.

Shortly after the end of the reported year, a new Executive Director of the National Trust was announced and will start a 2-year contract in August 2009. The Forum congratulates Jamie Roberts (formerly of Buglife) and looks forward to working with him in the future. The Trust's newsletter details many past and current activities and is available on the Trust's website (<http://www.nationaltrust.org.sh/>). The Helena Tourist Office, which had launched a new website in September 2008 (www.discoveroursecret.co.sh), produces an e-newsletter (anyone wishing to subscribe should contact Pamela Young, Director of Tourism: director@tourism.gov.sh).

Tristan da Cunha

Following the fire that destroyed the fish processing plant and generator facility on Tristan early in 2008, much assistance was needed to transport generator materials from Cape Town for repairs to power supplies and communications. No-one was harmed in the fire, and the impact of the loss of fish processing capacity was fortunately lessened by the approach of the end of the fishing season.

The review of actual and potential Ramsar Convention Wetlands of International Importance in the UKOTs/CDs carried out



Rockhopper penguins in the Falkland Islands, the subject of a new study by New Island Conservation Trust (see page 10).
Photo: Georgina Strange, Design In Nature/NICT

in 2005 by UKOTCF included four proposed Tristan sites. Subsequently, in 2007, an OTEP grant was awarded to John Cooper (University of Cape Town, and long involved in voluntary conservation work at Tristan) to finalise the descriptions for two of these sites, Gough and Inaccessible Islands. UKOTCF provided voluntary support for this. With further encouragement, the UK Government implemented Tristan da Cunha's request to designate these sites just before the Ramsar Conference of the Parties in late 2008. Gough and Inaccessible Islands are now Wetlands of International Importance, as well as a World Heritage Site. This serves as an example to other UKOTs, and UKOTCF looks forward to providing help where requested to move forward with the designation of other proposed sites.

The Tristan Conservation Department, with help from RSPB and others, has carried out some successful work on Gough Island as well as acquiring a new Assistant Conservation Officer. Work has been undertaken on the invasive plant *Sagina procumbens*. Attention is now focusing on mouse eradication, seen as an increasingly high priority. A feasibility study, comparing eradication work on New Zealand's Campbell Islands with Gough, suggests likely costs based on activities including helicopter bait-dropping. The need for this work is emphasised by reports that the breeding success of the Tristan Albatross was at its lowest ever during the last year, at just 14%.

British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)

In October 2008, the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords decided by a majority verdict (3-2) to accept as lawful the 2004 Order in Council which made the exiled Chagossians subject to immigration controls, rather than them having a right of return which had been confirmed in the High Court and Court of Appeal. The case is now before the European Court of Human Rights, which has set a deadline of 17 July 2009 for HMG and the Chagossians to respond to a suggestion that they reach an out-of-court settlement.

At the AGM of the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) in November 2008, the BIOT Commissioner, Colin Roberts, spoke on the way forward in actively protecting the area, and the importance of raising awareness of its marine environment. Options included declaring the area a "no-take zone". There have been reports of extensive poaching in the northern atolls (where fisheries patrols are limited). CCT has developed a new website (www.chagos-trust.org), where the booklet *The Chagos Archipelago: Its nature and the future* can be downloaded; this proposes the establishment of a conservation area across the Chagos Islands. This was launched at an event held at the Royal Society in early March 2009, for which invitations were extended to several Chagossians now living in the UK. A scientific document has also been produced to support the proposals.

Falkland Islands

The OTEP-funded *Beaver Island Restoration Project* has progressed in 2008-9, with further work towards the eradication of rats and foxes on key islands, and useful plant surveys carried out in gardens in order to determine species being cultivated in the Falklands. Falklands Conservation have made two new appointments: Craig Dockrill as Chief Executive, and Pierre Pistorius as Conservation Officer. Falklands Conservation are now in their 30th year and can look back with pride on much valuable work, as well as many successful projects. New projects forthcoming include work to implement the Cobb's Wren *Troglodytes cobbi* Species Action Plan. The Forum pays tribute to the tireless work of Robin Woods, who was awarded an MBE during the year for his contribution to conservation work.

The New Island Conservation Trust were successful in bidding for OTEP funding for the project *Ocean Climate and Rockhopper Penguin foraging strategies*, led by Ian Strange MBE and Georgina Strange. The rockhopper penguin *Eudyptes chrysocome* population has dramatically declined on the Falkland Islands. The main cause is believed to be marine environmental change, but it remains unclear what factors play the key role. Advanced logger technology enables study of foraging behaviour in combination with environmental conditions, and will be used as part of a monitoring programme for Falkland Islands marine biodiversity, to help to identify appropriate conservation measures.

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

A rat eradication feasibility study (partly funded by OTEP) has been carried out for South Georgia. Whilst eradication remains a high priority in principle, technical challenges mean that full-scale eradication measures are unlikely to be possible in the immediate future. The full report from the feasibility study is available on the Government of South Georgia website (<http://www.sgisland.org/pages/sghome.htm> – see under Government/Reports). The long-standing issue of the introduced reindeer on South Georgia may soon be tackled under the management plan for the territory. The South Georgia Association publishes and archives back issues of its newsletter online on their website (<http://www.southgeorgiaassociation.org/>). The SAIS project has carried out botanical and entomological baseline surveys on South Georgia, as well as collecting seeds of endemic flora. A quarantine building was put up in summer 2008/2009, and a programme has started to try to eradicate the invasive bittercress from South Georgia.

Pitcairn

A major achievement in 2008 was the production of the *Pitcairn Islands Environment Management Plan* by Noeleen Smyth of the National Botanic Gardens of Ireland and Trinity College, Dublin. This document is available via the UKOTCF website. Dr Mike Brooke, from Cambridge University, continues his work in support of conservation on Pitcairn, including work on the feasibility of rat eradication on Henderson Island, including with support from OTEP.

Over the past year, Pitcairn has undergone a governmental restructuring, with several new positions created. As of 1 March 2009, conservation, environment, quarantine and biosecurity come under Michele Christian, as Manager of the Natural Resources Division; Jay Warren remains the Director of Biosecurity. There are major development plans for Pitcairn. Problems with transportation have meant that residents leaving the island are never sure when they will be able to return. Improvements to the harbour and shipping schedule will enhance the lives of all.



The main landing point at Bounty Bay, Pitcairn. Photo: Noeleen Smyth

Report of the UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group

The Europe Territories Working Group (ETWG) continues to play a key role in testing the feasibility of holding virtual meetings, using teleconferencing via Skype as a means of involving remote participants in UKOTCF discussions. The Group has held two such meetings during the last year, and has stimulated related side discussions, covering a range of topics of mutual interest to Working Group members in the Channel Islands (Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark), the Isle of Man, Gibraltar and the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs).

Whilst the facility for virtual meetings is a major asset across a dispersed network of participants, there is no doubt that face-to-face meetings retain the greatest value for exchanging experience and ideas. Consequently, UKOTCF was delighted to be involved in the first inter-island meeting for environmental workers in the Channel Islands to be organised for some years, in September 2008. The event was convened by ETWG member Charles David, of La Société Guernesaise, and held at La Société's headquarters in Candie Gardens in Guernsey. Representatives from all of the Channel Islands attended, and there were wide-ranging discussions about issues of common interest, such as linking biological recording efforts, co-ordination of seabird monitoring, energy policy and tidal power projects, environmental legislation and invasive species. The meeting was followed by visits to various sites on Guernsey where there are problems with invasive plants such as parrot's feather *Myriophyllum aquaticum* and Hottentot fig *Carpobrotus edulis*. It is hoped that this meeting will become an annual event, with plans already being explored for a gathering in Alderney in the latter half of 2009, possibly extending coverage to all Crown Dependencies (CDs).

Policy-related Initiatives

ETWG has been investigating ways of making an impact on policy development in a number of areas, and hopes to drive forward this work over the coming months. July 2008 saw the publication of the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) report into *Overseas Territories*, which placed a strong emphasis on governance issues, and the UK Government's response followed in September 2008. ETWG is exploring ways of using the published evidence as a basis for discussions with UK Government departments that work with the CDs, particularly in relation to issues such as environmental legislation and the involvement of civil society in the development planning process. Discussions in ETWG have also considered the extent to which the UK's approach to World Heritage supports the interests of the UKOTs/CDs in protecting and promoting their cultural and natural heritage, related to the UK Government's Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) consultation on this issue in February 2009. The Group is also concerned with policy developments at European level, and (for example) encouraged a number of ETWG members to respond to the European Commission consultation on invasive alien species during the year.

Environment Charters and Environmental Education

Whilst the Territories covered by ETWG do not have Environment Charters in the usual form (i.e. the formal agreements of shared responsibilities and commitments signed by the UK Government and most of the individual UKOTs in September 2001), many have adopted broadly equivalent documents. This allows conservation priorities to be more clearly defined, and progress in specified areas of environmental management to be monitored, a task that UKOTCF has agreed to undertake as part of its independent

review of implementation of the Environment Charters. Members of ETWG have contributed information to this review, a process which has helped to highlight local conservation issues and areas where regional or thematic co-operation may be particularly valuable.

Such areas include environmental education, and ETWG has continued its support for the Forum's OTEP-funded, cross-Territory Environmental Educational project (see main section of this Annual Report), which was originally inspired by discussions at the Jersey conference in 2006. Although CDs are not eligible for OTEP funding, their involvement in this project has been made possible by in-kind contributions by UKOTCF and by those in the CDs. UKOTCF has also developed increasingly strong links with the Cyprus SBAs, especially in relation to environmental education activities.

Reports from the Europe Territories

During the year, Jersey has benefited from the establishment of an Advisory Group on Environmental Sustainability, initial work towards an energy policy white paper, and finer-scale legislative developments, with (for example) a schedule of protected plants coming into force in February 2009 under the Conservation of Wildlife (Jersey) Law. Prospects for marine conservation have been boosted by the appointment of a Marine Officer and the adoption of an Integrated Coastal Zone Management Strategy by the States of Jersey. However, local concerns have been expressed over the potential impacts of a new 'Energy from Waste' incinerator facility on reclaimed shoreline immediately adjacent to the island's first Wetland of International Importance designated under the Ramsar Convention.

Energy has been a key issue elsewhere in the Channel Islands over the last year, with a new energy policy agreed by the States of Guernsey in the latter half of 2008. This highlighted the place of renewable energy in the island's future energy mix, and instructed the island's Commerce and Employment Department to set up a Renewable Energy Commission to license potential wave, tidal stream and off-shore wind generation. A Renewable Energy Forum has also been established, to ensure that all local stakeholders are fully consulted over future developments at an early stage. Key issues for the Energy Forum (membership of which is also open to neighbouring islands) include the interests of wildlife, fishing, navigation, and boat owners. It will be involved in the spatial planning process and environmental impact assessment and, as a priority, will be undertaking a Strategic Environmental Assessment of potential sites for tidal stream generation. This source of energy is also recognised as having particular potential for Alderney, where relevant technologies are being actively explored.

Pressures arising from built development continue to be a matter of great concern on Sark. Some threats have apparently receded over the last year, including the potential impacts of a proposed helipad close to the largest breeding colony of guillemots in the Channel Islands. However, the local population remains sensitive to other construction projects that could disproportionately affect their way of life and the fragile environment of this small island.

Issues discussed during the year by ETWG in relation to the Isle of Man included challenges associated with a proposal to construct a new airport hangar building on the best of three bee orchid *Ophrys apifera* sites. Mitigation will include a substantial habitat translocation project that will see an area of species-rich grassland moved to another part of the airfield. In 2008, four departments established a marine spatial planning project group. Through the Irish Sea Region Platform, a bid has been submitted to INTERREG



Cyprus SBAs: the Good (left), Cyprus Warbler, endemic to the island (Photo: Michael Gore FRPS); the Bad and the Ugly (right), illegal, permanent mist-net stands for catching migrant birds in the Eastern SBA (Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski). These illegal activities could at least be impeded if these permanent fixings were removed frequently.

for an Irish Sea-wide project to develop regional marine spatial

planning. This will run in parallel with the establishment of the first Marine Nature Reserve in Manx waters.

Disturbing reports from Cyprus suggest that illegal trapping of migrant songbirds in the Eastern SBA has again reached significant levels. The large-scale netting of birds during their migration between northern Europe and Africa was identified as a major issue some years ago, with potentially millions of birds being killed, and resulted in a campaign which appeared to have reduced this unacceptable practice. However, it appears that the infrastructure for netting has been re-established, and UKOTCF (through Michael Gore and ETWG) are encouraging the SBA authority to take robust action against illegal trappers operating on its land.

Concerns in Gibraltar (the only UKOT which is also part of the

European Union, meaning that instruments such as the Habitats Directive apply there) include those that have arisen over the status of a local Natura2000 Site of Community Interest (SCI). The Southern Waters of

Gibraltar SCI was designated in July 2006, but the same area has more recently been included in an SCI designated by Spain, resulting in confusion over responsibilities for monitoring and marine environmental management in this important area.



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Membership

The current UK and international Member and Associate organisations of the Forum are:

British Ecological Society; British Microbial Biodiversity Association; Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust; Herpetological Conservation Trust; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Royal Zoological Society of Scotland; Zoological Society of London; Army Ornithological Society; Royal Air Force Ornithological Society and Royal Naval Birdwatching Society.

Current Member and Associate organisations of the Forum for individual UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies are:

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

Information and advice given on behalf of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum are given on the basis that no liability attaches to the Forum, its directors, officers or representatives in respect thereof. Views reported are not necessarily those of UKOTCF.