



UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Annual Report April 2009 - March 2010

Report of Council

Overview

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum promotes greater awareness and more effective conservation of the rich and unique biodiversity, natural environment and related heritage of the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (UKOTs/CDs). In pursuing this purpose, the Forum works in partnership with a wide network of bodies, many of which are UKOTCF Member and Associate organisations based in the UK and UKOTs/CDs. UKOTCF works also with bodies concerned with conservation in small islands and other territories beyond the UKOTs/CDs, particularly the Overseas Countries/Territories and Outermost Regions (OCTs/ORs) of other European Union (EU) Member States, as well as drawing on the expertise of individuals worldwide.

This year has seen much UKOTCF effort devoted to the organisation and running of the Making the Right Connections conference, hosted by conservation bodies in the Cayman Islands. In bringing together conservation workers from governmental and NGO bodies across the Territories (and from other, similar, small communities), this event fulfilled one of UKOTCF's central objectives – to build partnerships through the exchange of information and experience, thereby enhancing capacity for conservation across the Forum's broad network. UKOTCF has taken other steps to facilitate the work of its network during the year, maintaining regular circulations of information to support, in particular, its Member/Associate organisations and to raise awareness generally of the challenges faced by UKOT/CD conservation workers. UKOTCF has continued to take opportunities to influence policy, particularly of the UK Government, in order to strengthen support for environmental protection in the Territories. Indeed, during the year, there have been signs of welcome changes in the UK Government's approach to environmental matters in the UKOTs, for which UK has responsibility under international conventions (Multilateral Environmental Agreements). It is apparent that these positive

changes were significantly influenced by UKOTCF's submissions to UK Parliamentary Select Committee inquiries, and consequent criticisms of the UK Government's approach, over recent years. The changes include a greater role for the Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA), alongside the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID), and a more 'joined-up' approach by these Departments. However, in parallel to these positive aspects, UKOTCF has noted some negative aspects which include concerns about a significant and general tendency to sideline it and other NGOs on both consultations and funding. These would seem to be counter-productive and backward steps – much to our regret – and ones that the Forum will seek to reverse in a continued spirit of partnership with government and its agencies.



'Bermudiana', the young Cahow, just beginning to grow its flight feathers, May 2010. This is the second year that the pair which first nested on Nonsuch Island, Bermuda in 2009, has reared a chick. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski.

The last 12 months have seen a number of conservation successes in the UKOTs/CDs, often the result of much hard work by small local bodies and dedicated individuals.

Many of these have been reported more fully in Forum News during the year, but the highlights include the following.

- After years of work under a recovery programme for the endemic Bermuda petrel (cahow) *Pterodroma cahow*, 2009 saw the first of these remarkable birds to hatch and fledge on Nonsuch Island for the last 400 years. This greatly increases their chance of continued survival as increasingly frequent storms destroy their previous nesting islets.
- In the Cayman Islands, and again after years of effort under a recovery programme for a local endemic species, it was announced that more than 200 acres of dry shrubland habitat would be protected. This significantly enlarged the area available for restoration of the wild population of the

Grand Cayman blue iguana *Cyclura lewisi*, acting also as a flag-ship for the protection of dry tropical scrub.

- In the British Virgin Islands, there was



Cayman Conference in session. Photo: Thomas Hadjikyriakou

victory for local environmental campaigners, after a lengthy court case in which they successfully challenged permission granted for a development on Beef Island that threatened to impact a fisheries protected area.

- Most recently, the FCO has announced the establishment of a globally significant Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), creating the world's largest marine no-take zone.

However, there have also been set-backs and unresolved challenges for conservation in the UKOTs/CDs during the year. Again, as reported more fully in Forum News, examples include:

- The on-going crisis in Montserrat following arrival there of the chytrid fungus, which threatens to devastate local populations of the Critically Endangered mountain chicken, a frog, *Leptodactylus fallax*.
- Disturbing reports from Cyprus have highlighted the threat to migratory songbirds and turtles from illegal activities within the Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs).
- In Jersey, local groups are greatly concerned over various aspects of pollution linked to waste management, and particularly the impacts of these on the island's longest-established Ramsar Site.
- The appalling impact of non-native rodents on the internationally important seabird populations of Gough Island (Tristan da Cunha) prompted an on-line petition, calling for greater action by the UK Government to protect the precious biodiversity of the Territories.
- On the Isle of Man, an apparent backward step has been the disbanding of the active and successful Wildlife and Conservation Division of the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry, in favour of integrating these officers into the other divisions (agriculture, fisheries and forestry) of the newly named Department of the Environment, Food and Agriculture. This is a novel approach to conservation and we await with the interest the progress under the new arrangements, especially in view of the Island's consultation over becoming party to the Convention on Biological Diversity, which indicated considerable public support for this move. Whilst integration might have some theoretical advantages, there are dangers of serious conflicts of interest, loss of a champion and possible loss of proactive initiatives.

Discussions during the Cayman conference and in other contexts have again highlighted a number of issues which are of broad concern to conservation workers across many UKOTs/CDs. Inevitably, climate change and invasive species are major



Tristan Wandering Albatross *Diomedea dabbenana* in front of Gough Island, Tristan da Cunha, where (apart from a few pairs on Inaccessible, also in the Tristan group) all of this species breed. The survival of this species and several others is at severe risk from predation of chicks by introduced mice. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

issues, as they are globally, given the severity of the threat that they represent to biodiversity and human livelihoods. Lack of resources, both human and financial, to address conservation challenges in the Territories is another recurrent theme. UKOTCF Member and Associate organisations have indicated that capacity building is a particular priority for them in many cases, and the Forum is seeking to help address this, including through development of a volunteers programme. The lack of open and transparent processes, and engagement of governments with civil society (including NGOs), is another area of widespread concern, particularly in relation to spatial planning and assessment of the environmental impacts of development. In addition, it is likely that the effects of the recent global economic downturn are yet to become fully apparent, although there is already increased strain on conservation bodies in many Territories as a consequence of budget cuts and political focus on other priorities. On a more positive note, there is some evidence of gradually increasing concern amongst local communities over environmental issues, and a greater willingness to challenge governments and others over these, as exemplified by the BVI court case noted above. There are also signs of an increasing acknowledgement (including through economic analyses) of the importance of maintaining the integrity and function of natural ecosystems, and the vital services that they provide to local communities and economies.

Making the Right Connections Conference

A notable characteristic of the UKOTs/CDs is their very wide geographic dispersal around the world, coupled with the resource constraints typical of small communities. This makes it very difficult for those concerned with conservation and environmental management in the UKOTs/CDs to meet in one place. Whilst opportunities for electronic communication have done much to overcome the feeling of isolation that can result, there is no real substitute for sharing experiences and ideas face-to-face, and thereby building a sense of collective endeavour and mutual support. Consequently, the roughly three-yearly international conferences organised by UKOTCF have become a most important meeting place for those from the wide range of bodies, particularly small conservation organisations, working to protect the natural heritage of the UKOTs/CDs and similar small territories.

The year 2009 saw the fifth conference, following those held in London (1999), Gibraltar (2000), Bermuda (2003) and Jersey (2006). 106 participants (including representatives for all 16 UKOTs and 3 Crown Dependencies) met in Grand Cayman from 30 May to 5 June. The conference theme of *Making the Right Connections* emphasised the objective of the meeting - 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. As determined by broad consultation during the planning stage, formal sessions addressed a range of key topics: *Progress on Environment Charter Implementation; Environmental Education; Climate Change – impacts and adaptation; Spatial Planning, Protected Areas and International Standards – assets or liabilities?; Raising Our Profile – engaging policy makers and the public; Enhancing Capacity – how on earth are we going to cope with the workload?; Invasive Species; and Joined-Up Thinking – institutional arrangements for environmental management.*

A particular highlight of the event was the participation, for the first time in this series of conferences, of a UK Government environment Minister. Huw Irranca-Davies MP, DEFRA Minister for the Natural & Marine Environment, Wildlife & Rural Affairs, acknowledged the particular geographic and resource constraints that affected the UKOTs. The Minister took the opportunity to



L to R: Mr Eric Blencowe (Head, International Biodiversity Policy Unit, Defra), Mr Huw Irranca-Davies MP (then UK Minister for the Natural and Marine Environment, Wildlife and Rural Affairs, Defra), and Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF Chairman. Photo: Thomas Hadjikyriakou

announce changes to DEFRA's Darwin Initiative, including the ear-marking of funds for UKOT-based projects and the establishment of a new Overseas Territories Challenge Fund. Mr Irranca-Davies confirmed also that the FCO and DFID were committed to continuing their support for the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) small projects fund. The conference warmly welcomed these announcements, but called on the UK Government to do more to help address the urgent environmental challenges faced by the UKOTs/CDs, including, in particular through provision of dedicated resources to enable sustained programmes, not just short-term projects.

Council is very grateful to the Forum's partners in the Cayman Islands and elsewhere, and to DFID, for funding and other support in organising the *Making the Right Connections* Conference. The local support provided by the Cayman Islands Department of Environment, and by UKOTCF Associate organisation the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, is particularly appreciated. The full Proceedings of the conference are available on the UKOTCF website. Feedback from participants strongly indicated support for this series of conferences, and the Forum is exploring actively options for the hosting and funding of a possible 2012 meeting. However, despite such positive feedback, it must be noted that preliminary indications of support from the UK Government so far have not been encouraging and, we would normally have had initial positive indications of funding for a conference two years away. At the end of the reported year, this is not the case. Without continued UK Government support, a further conference is very unlikely to be feasible.

Influencing policy and relations with UK Government

One of the ways in which the Forum seeks to further environmental protection and sustainable development in the UKOT/CDs is by influencing policy makers, particularly in the UK. Typical UKOTCF activities in this regard include submissions to UK parliamentary inquiries, Government (and other) consultations, support to governmental bodies in policy development, and wider awareness-raising efforts. Significantly, this reporting year marked a decade since the publication of the UK Government's 1999 White Paper *Partnership for Progress & Prosperity – Britain and the Overseas Territories*, which established the principles that have since guided the relationship between the UK and UKOTs. The White Paper had not originally been intended to include significant coverage of environmental matters but, with encouragement from the Forum, FCO and DFID officials at the time ensured that a relevant chapter was included. This outlined the UK Government's intention to develop, jointly with UKOT governments, a suite of Environment Charters, to provide

a set of guiding principles as well as specific commitments for enhancing conservation and environmental management in the Territories. The Charters remain critical documents, in providing unambiguous commitments by UK and UKOT governments to advancing protection of the natural heritage and environmental assets of the Territories. Progress in relation to implementing the Charters is discussed separately in a later section of this report. Before that, however, we consider several other aspects of the UK Government's policy and approach to UKOT environmental matters during the last, eventful year.

Last year's *Annual Report* noted robust criticism by the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) and Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) of the UK Government's approach. Both committees took significant account of evidence submitted to their inquiries by UKOTCF, and were deeply dissatisfied by the level of support provided by the UK Government for environmental management in the UKOTs. The EAC notably 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." The UK Government appears to have taken steps towards addressing some of the EAC's specific recommendations, including in relation to greater involvement from DEFRA in UKOT environmental matters, and in adopting a more 'joined-up' approach across the various Departments involved. In addition to the participation of a DEFRA Minister in the UKOTCF-organised Cayman conference, these steps were emphasised at a reception hosted by the FCO at the end of June 2009. This event involved three UK Ministers with responsibility for UKOTs: the aforementioned Huw Irranca-Davies (DEFRA), Chris Bryant MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, FCO) and Mike Foster MP (Minister for International Development, DFID). It was announced at the reception that DEFRA would, in future, lead for the UK Government on UKOT biodiversity matters. Greater involvement by DEFRA is something for which the Forum has been calling for well over a decade, and UKOTCF congratulates the Minister and his officials for progress made in this area.

The UK Government's formal response to the EAC report noted that the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) had been tasked with developing a strategy for biodiversity protection in the UKOTs. This document was published in December 2009, and UKOTCF was happy to meet a request from DEFRA to circulate copies with *Forum News* 35. However, in contrast to the approach taken to past policy developments in this area, UKOTCF and its network of Member/Associate organisations were not consulted during the development of the strategy. Accordingly, whilst welcoming the document and its underlying purpose, UKOTCF does not necessarily agree with all of the details. It is pleasing to note, for example, that the new policy recognises the need for larger funds, beyond the UK Government's current support for smaller projects. However, no commitment is made to providing such funds, needed to resource activities such as long-term species recovery or habitat restoration projects, or to eradicate the most damaging invasive species. Also, it is disappointing that the document entirely fails to acknowledge the efforts made over more than 20 years by UKOTCF and its largely NGO network in leading co-ordination work and supporting UK Government bodies, often on a voluntary basis. Indeed, there appears to be a move to keep UKOTCF out of the area that it has championed, often seemingly as a lone voice, for the last two decades. The informal working arrangement around the time of the 1999 White Paper and in the following years centred on FCO, UKOTCF, environment departments and NGOs in the Territories, and later brought in

DFID. The new group established to take the UK Government strategy forward will be chaired by DEFRA, have a secretariat from JNCC, and will include officials from FCO, DFID, other UK Departments and (on behalf of UKOT Governments) the UK Overseas Territories Association. There appears to be no place for UKOTCF or NGO bodies in the UK or UKOTs. Similarly, the modest increase in UK Government funding for UKOT conservation matters has coincided with a decrease in the amount of this routed through NGOs.



However, throughout the year, as previously, UKOTCF has worked hard to sustain good working relationships with officials in key UK Government Departments and Agencies. Contact has been maintained through formal meetings and communications, and also by less formal means. In the past, these relationships have been advantageous on both sides, and this continues to be so in many cases. However, it does appear that the change in approach described above has been accompanied by some new tensions, exacerbated by an apparent lack of institutional memory in relation to previous arrangements and the mutual benefits that they provided. The Forum remains well-placed and committed to work with UK governmental bodies to further environmental protection in the UKOTs/CDs and looks forward to some reciprocity in this regard. Particular effort has been made during the year to re-establish an understanding with JNCC (the UK Government's statutory adviser on nature conservation), although not with the degree of success that UKOTCF Council would have liked to have seen.

Several sites in the UKOTs would make excellent World Heritage Sites, and would help correct both the bias in UK designations against UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, and the global shortage of natural and mixed natural/cultural sites. One example is St Helena, the island combining an outstanding natural site with buildings of great cultural significance. The gate from the shore to Jamestown displays a huge picture of the endemic Wirebird. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

As noted in the last *Annual Report*, UKOTCF responded (in February 2009) to a consultation on the World Heritage Convention commissioned by the UK Government's Department of Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). The Forum submission emphasised points including problems with prospective UKOT World Heritage Sites being advanced through the UK's Tentative List (treating them, to their disadvantage, as though they were located within Great Britain & Northern Ireland but with none of the support that this should entail) and the current ineligibility of UKOTs for Heritage Lottery funding. The report arising from this consultation was published in December 2009, and the consultants that produced it clearly grasped some of the key points relevant to UKOTs. For example, they noted that World Heritage status has particular importance to the UKOTs/CDs, which are easily overlooked, both in the UK and internationally, and that the natural and cultural heritage of the UKOTs is often very distinctive from and (particularly in the case of biodiversity) of greater international importance than that of the 'domestic' UK, considerations not fully taken into account by the nomination of UKOT World Heritage Sites through the UK's Tentative List. The report went on to note that, of more than £268 million allocated by the UK Government to World Heritage Sites since 1994, none had been allocated to Sites in the UKOTs. It was suggested that DCMS was spending very little on World Heritage Sites in the UKOTs because it believed that they were the responsibility of the FCO, even though the FCO had little biodiversity expertise and few resources to support conservation work. [The new arrangements, bringing in DEFRA, could be considered as relating to this.] Consequently, existing World Heritage Sites in the UKOTs urgently required increased funding, notably to address threats from invasive species, needs which the local administrations, for example in Tristan da Cunha and Pitcairn, were in no position to

fund. Without increased funding, it was felt that there was a real possibility that these Sites would become eligible for inclusion on the World Heritage 'In Danger' List. The report identified Heritage Lottery funding as one possible source of the extra money required. The UK Government's (January 2010) response to the World Heritage report was, however, disappointing, noting rather blandly that "some support is provided" in relation to the invasive species issues threatening the World Heritage Sites of Gough and Inaccessible Islands (Tristan) and Henderson Island (Pitcairn). It did, however, announce at short notice the first review in over a decade of the UK Tentative List. UKOTCF is helping partners in several UKOTs to put forward appropriate sites in the short window of opportunity provided by DCMS.

In November 2009, the FCO launched a public consultation over proposals to establish an MPA across the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT), often referred to as the Chagos Archipelago. One option offered to create the world's largest marine no-take zone, more than doubling the global area with this level of protection. The consultation was inspired by a concerted campaign by UKOTCF Associate organisation the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT), and their partners in the wider Chagos Environment Network. BIOT contains the world's largest coral atoll and is the site of the greatest marine biodiversity in the UK and its Territories by far, including in largely unexplored deep-sea environments. The islands are amongst the most important breeding grounds for seabirds and turtles in the Indian Ocean. The BIOT reefs support corals, fish and other species found nowhere else in the world, and provide a stepping-stone that links the reef ecosystems of the eastern and western Indian Ocean. Furthermore, because it is so remote and relatively undisturbed, BIOT has some of the cleanest seas and healthiest and most resilient reef systems in the world, including more than half of the healthy reefs remaining in the Indian Ocean. However, the Territory is also at the centre of a long-standing controversy over re-settlement rights for the Chagossians, a matter which is currently before the European Court of Human Rights. On the basis that the consultation over environmental protection was being undertaken without prejudice to the outcome of these proceedings, UKOTCF was happy to support CCT in encouraging positive responses. The campaign achieved success at the turn of the reporting year (1st April 2010), when British Foreign Secretary David Miliband announced that the option to establish an MPA based on a no-take zone would be implemented in BIOT.

Environment Charters

The origins of the Environment Charters in the 1999 White Paper are noted above. Although it was not directly involved in their

drafting, the Forum was active in encouraging the development of the Charters, and had earlier provided a model for such documents by proposing Checklists for conserving the natural environment of the Territories. When the Environment Charters were signed jointly by UK Government and the governments of individual UKOTs in September 2001, they provided important statements of intent, outlining commitments by both parties to environmental protection and sustainable development. Since then, implementation of the Charter commitments has been patchy, with useful advances in some areas and disappointments in others. UKOTCF has been active in both encouraging and monitoring progress.

In relation to encouraging progress, the Forum has consistently pressed the UK Government to fulfil its commitments under the Charters. At Territory level, the Forum has worked to promote cross-sectoral action – whilst signed by governments, the Charters emphasise the need to involve NGOs and wider civil society. For example, UKOTCF facilitated the development of local strategies for action to implement the Charters in TCI (in 2002-03) and in St Helena (in 2004-05). These exercises provided a model by which Charter commitments could be related to local priorities and forward planning, by discussion and agreement among the broad range of stakeholders concerned with the natural environment of a Territory. This is very much the approach promoted by the International Institute of Environment & Development when it reviewed aspects of the Charter process in 2007. However, more recently, UKOTCF has become concerned that momentum was in danger of being lost. Consequently, in September 2009, the Forum convened a meeting to address the theme of *Environment Charters – the way forward*. It was attended by representatives of a number of UKOTCF Member/Associate organisations, UK representatives of two UKOT governments, and officials from four UK Government departments. Discussions at this meeting confirmed that the UK Government remained very conscious of the Charters and their importance, and recognised that further facilitation work to develop local strategies for Charter implementation could be useful. This is one area in which UKOTCF and its Member/Associate organisations could, if government wishes to act in partnership, advance and re-invigorate the Charter process. Other areas include work on more focused projects, for example, to advance establishment of marine and terrestrial protected areas. Where local strategies exist, the next steps typically relate to the development, integration and implementation of annual work programmes for local bodies to address the priority actions identified. It is essential that such programmes are “owned” and operated by local stakeholder (governmental and NGO) partnerships, but experience has shown also that external support, including from UK Government, as well as from UKOTCF, is often vital. However, despite expressed enthusiasm from many players including UK Government to pursue such activities, financial support from UK Government remains lacking.

In relation to monitoring, at the request of various parties in the UK and UKOTs (including FCO and DFID), UKOTCF initially

undertook in late 2005 to review progress on Environment Charter implementation. A first report was published in August 2007, and UKOTCF committed to the Territories and others to update this every few years. The last year has seen much effort in completing the second review of progress, which was published in December 2009 and is available on the UKOTCF website (www.ukotcf.org/pdf/charters/indicatorsrev0912.pdf). While it is difficult to summarise the findings briefly, given the range of different Territories, local constraints, and aspects of environmental management considered, it is fair to say that the results provide, overall, a very mixed picture of progress, with perhaps less achieved in total than most would have hoped for. There were, however, a number of notable successes in individual cases. A draft analysis was presented at the Cayman conference, where the first impression from one commentator was that there appeared to have been more progress in “talking” (plan development, education initiatives, publications) than in “doing” (open assessment of environmental impacts, safeguarding of sites, funding of conservation work); indeed, there seemed to have been some significant steps backwards in relation to these last two activities. The final version of the second report acknowledges that this is probably a somewhat unfair generalisation. However, it is not entirely inaccurate. One conclusion of the second report was that conservation personnel (governmental and NGO) in the Territories are invariably not fully equipped to do the work that is required, and which they wish to undertake.

Working Groups and other networks

The activities of the Forum’s Southern Oceans, Europe Territories, and Wider Caribbean Working Groups during the year are summarised in subsequent sections of this report. In addition to these Working Groups and the Forum’s wider network, UKOTCF remains actively involved in a number of other bodies and liaison work, raising the profile of UKOT/CD interests and linking these into broader initiatives.

The United Nations has designated 2010 as the International Year of Biodiversity (IYB). The UK has established an initiative (IYB-UK), based on a major partnership of organisations, to use the International Year to promote the appreciation and conservation of biodiversity. UKOTCF has joined this partnership, to highlight that there is much more globally important biodiversity for which the UK is internationally responsible in the UKOTs than in Great Britain & Northern Ireland. At the launch of IYB-UK in November 2009, DEFRA Minister Huw Irranca-Davies specifically referred to the UKOTs, and later cited the Cayman Islands Blue Iguana Recovery Programme as an example of how iconic “flagship” species can be used to promote biodiversity and conservation.

Amongst its other activities, the United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) operates a Man and the Biosphere (MAB) Programme. UKOTCF is represented

A South Atlantic group at Cayman Islands’ reception on the occasion of the Overseas Territories Consultative Council, London, 8 December 2009: (from left): St Helena Councillor Cyril Gunnell; St Helena Government UK Representative Mrs Kedell Worboys MBE; Mr Malcolm Worboys; Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF; Mr Conrad Glass, Chief Islander Tristan da Cunha; Mrs Sharon Glass; Mr Chris Bates, Tristan da Cunha Government’s UK Representative. Photos: www.saraepstein.com



on the UK MAB Committee and, through this route, was able to contribute to a UNESCO-UK initiative under the IYB, resulting in the production of a resource pack which has been distributed to schools across the UK. UKOTCF input ensured that the *Biodiversity is Life* booklet, which formed part of the resource pack, included an item on the Gough and Inaccessible Islands World Heritage Site in Tristan da Cunha, and a link (www.ukotcf.org/pdf/TristanFactsheets.pdf) via the UKOTCF website to the *Natural History of Tristan da Cunha*, produced by the Forum for use in environmental education in Tristan. The Forum is represented also on the Executive Committee of UK's National Committee of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN-UK). UKOTCF has secured an invitation to speak on ecosystem management for human well-being in the UKOTs/CDs at the April 2010 IUCN-UK Conference in Edinburgh.

In September 2009, the Forum was represented at the International National Trusts Organisation (INTO) conference in Dublin, a meeting also attended by representatives of UKOTCF Member/Associate organisations from Bermuda and Montserrat. UKOTCF involvement in this meeting complemented earlier participation in the *Making the Right Connections* conference by an INTO representative. The Forum will continue to explore areas of mutual interest and future co-operation with INTO in relation to UKOT/CD matters. During the year, Forum personnel have also maintained contact with the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI) and the Commonwealth Foundation, who are implementing a Darwin Initiative project focused on building civil society capacity for conservation in the Caribbean UKOTs. In addition to its work on the Net-Biome project (see below), UKOTCF has maintained linkages with other initiatives concerned with OCTs/ORs ("overseas entities") of other EU Member States. This has included work through the *Bioverseas* partnership, in liaison with the IUCN Regional Office for Pan-Europe, and in preparations for a meeting to be held in the Canary Islands in September 2010, following up on the conference in Réunion in July 2008.

Awareness raising, information management and communications

Forum News 34 was published in July 2009, and *Forum News* 35 in December 2009. As ever, these featured articles on UKOTCF's own work, and the work of its Member/Associate organisations, as well as other issues, activities and policy developments relevant to conservation and environmental management in the UKOTs/CDs. In addition, reflecting the Forum's on-going agreement with DFID/FCO to disseminate information on OTEP, *Forum News* continued to feature summary reports from projects supported by this important programme. UKOTCF uses its website as another conduit for information on OTEP, as well as for a wide range of other information on the UKOTs/CDs, Forum partners and relevant environmental issues. This year saw transfer to a different internet service provider, allowing for further enhancements to the website. These included 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

Following on from activities described in the previous *Annual Report*, the Forum has taken further opportunities to raise the profile of UKOT/CD environmental issues amongst UK parliamentarians and other influential groups. These included working with a UKOTCF Member organisation – the British Ecological Society – and the Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management in preparing a position statement on *Conserving and Managing*



TV naturalist Nick Baker (centre) visits the UKOTCF stand, flanked by Rhian Guillem (L) and Keith Bensusan (R) Photo: Catherine Quick

Biodiversity Beyond 2010. This was launched at a parliamentary reception in October 2009, where speakers included Lord Selborne, Prof Bob Watson (DEFRA's Chief Scientific Adviser) and Pavan Sukdev (who leads the international study examining *The Economics of Ecosystems & Biodiversity*). A number of UKOTCF personnel participated in the reception, which was attended by over 120 delegates from across academia, the NGO sector, business, media and politics.

In August 2009, UKOTCF, as usual, operated its stand at the British Bird Watching Fair, which was attended by over 20,000 visitors, using this as a platform for raising awareness of the UKOTs/CDs and the conservation challenges that they face. Forum personnel were ably supported at the Bird Fair by Keith Bensusan and Rhian Guillem, welcome guests from UKOTCF Member organisation, the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS). Other opportunities to raise awareness of the biodiversity importance of the UKOTs/CDs have been taken during the year, including talks given by UKOTCF personnel at various meetings, including the annual symposium of the Cambridge Conservation Forum in January 2010. In the year ahead, the Forum hopes to increase its awareness raising activities through specialist groups and societies, including Member/Associate organisations. Initial 'pilot' steps taken this year included a talk given to the Shropshire Ornithological Society and an article published in the GONHS newsletter *Gibraltar Nature News*, both in December 2009. In addition, UKOTCF supports the efforts of others to raise awareness of biodiversity in the UKOTs, and was happy during 2009 to promote a petition posted on the Number 10 Downing Street website by a former Mayor of Wolverhampton. This highlighted, in particular, the devastating impact of invasive rodents on the birds of Gough Island, and called on the UK Government to enhance its support for conservation in the Territories generally.

UKOTCF has continued to keep its Member/Associate organisations, and its wider network of contacts, informed of relevant developments through regular e-mail circulations. However, to further enhance internal communications, the Forum has this year developed an e-Digest for its Member/Associate organisations, with the first three issues produced in July 2009, October 2009 and January 2010. In addition, members of the Southern Oceans and Wider Caribbean Working Groups have benefited from new e-Newsletters, also introduced during the last year.

Organisational development

The year has seen further progress in the Forum's organisational development, following the comprehensive updating of the Memorandum & Articles of Association, and wide-ranging consultation with Member/Associate organisations, both completed in 2008. On-going core work has been supported in part by the grant to UKOTCF from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, for which the Forum reiterates its thanks.

During 2009, Council developed a summary document outlining a “refreshed” strategy for UKOTCF, based on input provided by Member/Associate organisations to the 2008 consultation. This was circulated amongst those organisations and discussed at the Members/Associates meeting following the UKOTCF AGM in October 2009.

At its December 2009 meeting, Council elected a new Chairman, Chris Tydeman, and established a new role of Honorary Executive Director, in which capacity Mike Pienkowski will continue his tireless and largely voluntary work for the Forum. It is anticipated that this sharing of the workload, and completion of major tasks including those related to the Cayman conference, will allow Forum personnel to focus more in the year ahead on areas of activity such as membership development, fundraising for core work, and awareness raising. Lack of core funding remains a major constraint and limits 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.

Projects

Another way in which UKOTCF supports its Member/Associate organisations and advances conservation in the UKOTs/CDs is through project work. UKOTCF’s role may be in assisting the identification of priority needs and funding opportunities, supporting project design and proposal writing, project implementation, or a combination of these. Some of the Forum projects operating during the year, but not described elsewhere in this report, are noted below. Project work is important in forging and maintaining strategic partnerships between UKOTCF, its Member/Associate organisations and others. Often, the Forum is well-placed to provide a co-ordinating role for activities across multiple UKOTs/CDs, and sometimes other Territories. Also, income generated by projects is important to the Forum, given its very limited resources. However, this is only possible because Council members and others are prepared to devote their time to project work at well below normal consultancy rates.

OPEP funding for UKOTCF’s cross-Territory Environmental Education project came to an end during the year. However, voluntary input, largely by the Forum’s honorary Environmental Education Co-ordinator, maintains and extends the facilities established by this project on the UKOTCF website (www.ukotcf.org). This includes moderation of the discussion forum, updating of the environmental education resources database and completion of virtual tours for each of the UKOTs/CDs. The last of these will provide an excellent general information and awareness-raising tool, as well as providing a resource more formally for environmental education across the Territories and beyond. Further material is being added to the Forum database; additional content can be added at any time by contacting the project coordinator, Ann Pienkowski (apienkowski@ukotcf.org).

During the year, approval was finally secured for an OPEP proposal prepared with local stakeholders by UKOTCF’s honorary Environmental Education Co-ordinator at the request of TCI’s Deputy Director of Education. At the time of writing at the end of the reported year, an implementation visit was underway to initiate work on this project, which will develop curriculum resources on the theme of freshwater for use in local schools. A range of other work has been undertaken in support of conservation in TCI. Meetings were held with government departments and NGOs.

The work on revision and extension of the Turks and Caicos National Trust’s (TCNT) Primary School Environmental Education course *Our Land, Our Sea, Our People*, requested by TCNT, was

provided in final draft form to TCNT. This work was completed voluntarily, as the UK-based team working on it donated their time, in the light of the extreme financial stresses the TCNT is currently experiencing.

UKOTCF continues its work under the multi-partner Net-Biome project, funded by the EU’s European Research Area NETWORK (ERA-NET) Programme. This project aims to support sustainable development objectives by enhancing co-ordination of biodiversity research in the tropical and sub-tropical OCTs/ORs of France, the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal and the UK. Amongst other activities this year, the results of an earlier stakeholder consultation to determine existing research activities and local/regional needs have been used to define priorities for a future joint research programme. Contributions to the funding of this programme have already been committed by a number of relevant OCTs/ORs and EU Member States. Eligibility of UKOTs for involvement in projects under the programme may be contingent on a contribution to this funding pool from the UK Government, and UKOTCF has been working to encourage a commitment to this.

For the last six years, UKOTCF has been working with local partners in TCI, the British Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands to secure funding from the European Commission (EC) for a project linking aspects of sustainable tourism to enhanced biodiversity conservation. As noted in the last *Annual Report*, the EC finally committed to funding this project in December 2007. However, yet more complications introduced by the Commission, exacerbated by on-going difficulties in communicating with the EC delegation in Kingston (Jamaica), have resulted in further delays and difficulties in defining UKOTCF’s role within the project. Nonetheless, work continues to address these problems and to move towards full project implementation. Contracts have been issued to TCNT and the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme (Cayman). The contracts for the British Virgin Islands National Parks Trust, and UKOTCF are in the final stages of negotiation, and it is hoped both organisations will be in a position to sign contracts shortly.

In addition to the project activities noted above, UKOTCF has worked closely with partners in the Territories on project development. Examples of proposals completed or in progress include those focusing on development of a cross-Territory volunteers programme, wetlands environmental education in the Cyprus SBAs, cross-Territory collation of baseline biodiversity data, involvement of Caribbean UKOTs in the UNESCO Sandwatch programme, aspects of environmental management in Pitcairn, and protection and international designation of salinas in TCI.

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, the Department for International Development and the Cayman Islands Government. The Forum is also grateful to Member organisations and others for contributions in kind, including hosting meetings 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 2010

	2010 Unrestricted Funds	2010 Restricted Funds	2010 Total Funds	2009 Total Funds
Incoming Resources				
Subs and donations	101,416	63,288	164,704	12,898
Investment Income	67	-	67	2,095
Sundry Incoming Resources	181	-	181	410
Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities				
Project Income	-	116,152	116,152	268,501
Total Incoming Resources	101,664	179,440	281,104	283,904
Resources Expended				
Charitable Activities	73,947	281,365	355,312	199,550
Governance Costs and Other Resources Expended	17,723	5,206	22,929	34,899
Total Resources Expended	91,670	286,571	378,241	234,449
Net incoming/outgoing resources	9,994	-107,131	-97,137	49,455
Balance brought forward at 1st April 2009	68,449	121,270	189,719	140,264
Balance carried forward at 31st March 2010	78,443	14,139	92,582	189,719

Note: Incoming and outgoing resources include donated time of £122,738.

Report of UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

The Wider Caribbean Working Group (WCWG) met on four occasions during the year, twice at the Royal Botanic Gardens (RBG) Kew, once at Foyle's Bookshop, Charing Cross Road, London, and once at the *Making the Right Connections* conference in Grand Cayman. The last mentioned of these represented a rare opportunity for so many WCWG members and others with an interest in the Caribbean UKOTs to meet face to face. At that meeting, Group members and non-members alike re-emphasised the value of the linkages that WCWG could help to provide, between Caribbean UKOTs, and between Territories and the UK, and stressed the need for effective communication across the Group's highly dispersed network. Accordingly, WCWG has continued to explore the use of Skype teleconferencing as a means of involving greater numbers of remote participants in its meetings. In addition, two issues of a new WCWG e-Newsletter were circulated amongst Group members during the year.

A number of conservation and broader environmental issues are of common concern across most (if not all) Caribbean UKOTs, as identified in Group discussions at the Cayman conference or as recurrent themes at other WCWG meetings. Whilst the UK Government's increasing interest in UKOT environmental matters over the last year was welcomed, including changes to the Darwin Initiative, there remained a need for dedicated funding for larger scale conservation projects in the UKOTs. This need reflected the long-term commitment required to undertake species recovery or habitat restoration projects, or the sheer scale of the challenge represented by environmental threats such as invasive species. The relentless spread of the pacific red lionfish *Pterois volitans* through

Caribbean waters over the last year emphasised that, as well as having profound local impacts, species invasions could afflict an entire region. The recent global economic downturn hit some UKOTs very hard, placing even greater strain on conservation bodies reliant on public funding for all or part of their work, and making it more difficult than ever to keep environmental issues on the local political agenda. Nonetheless, the year produced further evidence that local communities were prepared to fight for environmental protection, particularly in the face of inadequate planning processes and unsustainable development, which remained a major concern in Caribbean UKOTs. Reports of severe coral bleaching around Grand



Pacific red lionfish Pterois volitans.
Photo: Patrick Weir

Cayman during the year provided a sobering reminder of the environmental impacts of climate change. Attention to the challenges posed by this phenomenon, and to broad environmental issues including energy and waste management, were recognised as placing further strain on limited budgets, particularly where the modest funding available for more “traditional” biodiversity conservation was also expected to cover work in these areas.

Specific cross-Territory and regional activities discussed during the year included the long-standing proposal to the European Union (EU) for a project to link biodiversity conservation and sustainable tourism in TCI, BVI and Cayman, which continued to make agonisingly slow progress. The WCWG was kept regularly updated also on activities under another EU-funded initiative, the Net-BIOME project. In relation to cross-Territory work on invasive species, the year saw useful work conducted under an OTEP-funded project, led by the Cayman Islands Department of Environment (DoE), focusing on the development of awareness-raising materials and the integration of information on non-native species in the UKOTs into the Global Invasive Species Database. Working with JNCC, Cayman DoE aimed to develop further cross-Territory work on invasive species, through a proposal to the EU for a regional initiative. If funded, this would support individual projects, covering various aspects of invasive species work, in Anguilla, Cayman, BVI and TCI, as well as cross-Caribbean activities and information sharing.

UKOTCF participated in the Society for the Conservation & Study of Caribbean Birds meeting in Antigua, 14-18/7/09, with the theme *Beyond the Beach - Birds and Tourism for Sustainable Islands*. Also during the year, UKOTCF maintained contact with the Commonwealth Foundation/CANARI Darwin-funded project *Building civil society capacity for conservation in the Caribbean UKOTs*, which has the potential to link conservation bodies in the UKOTs more closely with similar organisations elsewhere in the region. In addition, UKOTCF’s Honorary Environmental Education Co-ordinator, Ann Pienkowski, worked with local partners to enhance the participation of Caribbean UKOTs in the UNESCO-sponsored *Sandwatch* programme. *Sandwatch* is a grassroots network of schools and community groups, working together to monitor and conserve local beach and near-shore environments and to build resilience to climate change. There are currently active teams in Montserrat, TCI and BVI, and *Sandwatch* would like to build on this and encourage participation from Anguilla, Cayman and Bermuda. It is hoped to hold a joint workshop in BVI later in 2010, provided that DFID support can be found to complement the main funding from UNESCO and enable UKOT participation alongside small independent states in the region.

Anguilla

During the year, significant and welcome progress was reported on a suite of new environmental legislation in Anguilla, with the passing of the Biodiversity & Heritage Conservation, CITES and National Trust Acts. Other relevant legislation remained in development, along with new policy instruments in areas such as energy. Amongst specific projects for conservation locally, the Anguilla National Trust and the Department of Environment have been working with partners from RBG Kew and Fauna & Flora International towards a major initiative focused on the restoration of Dog Island. Species-level work has included the



Restored wetland and interpretative sign at Somerset Long Bay Pond, Bermuda. Adjacent parts of the site were already designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. This restoration, extending the protected site, is one of the areas bought by public contributions to the Buy Back Bermuda campaign, operated by Bermuda National Trust and the Bermuda Audubon Society. Despite the huge sums contributed by Bermuda sources to safeguard this site, for which UK is jointly responsible under international agreements, UK Government felt unable to contribute to the costs of management planning. UKOTCF is working with Bermuda partners to assist in this respect. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

successful dissertation project undertaken by OTEP Fellow Calvin Andre Samuel, working with RBG Kew, on *Spatial Patterns of Rondeletia anguillensis: Anguilla’s sole Endemic Plant*, including development of a management plan.

Bermuda

There were further successes during the year under the recovery project for the iconic, endemic cahow (Bermuda petrel) *Pterodroma cahow*, including the first chick to hatch and fledge on Nonsuch Island in 400 years. This great achievement was skilfully linked to the Territory’s own 400th anniversary by the Bermuda Audubon Society, usefully raising the profile of conservation in Bermuda and demonstrating the value of ‘flagship’ species (see *Forum News* 34).

In relation to wider environmental issues, the state of Bermuda’s species protection legislation was noted, as was the pressing need for an Invasive Species Act or equivalent. As elsewhere, energy issues were considered increasingly important, as was the development of best practice guidance in relation to Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs). The Bermuda *Climate Change* report, written by Annie Glasspool and commissioned by the Bermuda National Trust (which celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2009), was tabled in the House of Assembly in February 2010. The report examined the effect of climate change on Bermuda, and how the Territory could develop strategies to protect it from the resulting threats, which were exacerbated by the economic, social and physical vulnerability characteristic of small islands. One of the many elements considered was sea level rise, a threat to Bermuda’s infrastructure through increased flood risk during high tides, with up to 14% of total land area affected. WCWG welcomed this report, which provided a model for similar assessments in other UKOTs.

British Virgin Islands (BVI)

Following a lengthy battle by the Virgin Islands Environmental Council (VIEC), WCWG was able to welcome the success of a legal challenge mounted against 2007 Government approval for a

major development on Beef Island. Judgement was finally handed down in September 2009, finding that there was “good reason for quashing the development approval on grounds of illegality.” As VIEC had argued in court, a key consideration was the fisheries protected area status of Hans Creek (see *Forum News* 35). Despite this landmark victory for local environmental campaigners, concern remained over the sustainability and environmental impacts of other proposed developments in BVI. A proposed dock development at Nail Bay on Virgin Gorda was amongst the specific examples which generated local opposition during the year.

BVI hosted a *Conservation Showcase* in late January 2010, involving the Ministry of Natural Resources & Labour, the BVI National Parks Trust and The Nature Conservancy (TNC). The event highlighted the range of conservation work underway in BVI, and linkage of the Territory into TNC’s regional *Caribbean Challenge* initiative. Amongst the organisations working for conservation in BVI, the Jost Van Dyke Preservation Society completed valuable work during the year under an OTEP project, leading to the publication of an impressive *Environmental Profile* for the island. Jost Van Dyke is the fourth largest of the inhabited British Virgin Islands, lies to the northwest of Tortola, and has escaped some of the intensity of development seen elsewhere in BVI. It has a relatively small population (less than 300 residents) and “finds itself positioned between a past it does not want to lose or squander and a future that promises more options with expanded growth.” The Profile, produced in partnership with the Island Resources Foundation, was completed at the end of 2009 and provides an assessment of the natural and cultural resources of Jost Van Dyke, including key natural features, sites and species, and the environmental pressures and related issues affecting the maintenance of these resources.

Cayman Islands

A new Government was elected in Cayman in May 2009, and statements made at the opening of the *Making the Right Connections* conference indicated that the new administration would give serious attention to environmental matters. For some years, WCWG has been hearing reports of much-needed legislation, notably a Conservation Law, which it is hoped will now be a high priority for the Government. Such legislation would help to address local concerns over a number of environmental issues, including aspects of the planning process. There has been local discontent during the year over proposals for a major redevelopment of George Town harbour, as well as other developments including that proposed for Emerald Sound, the environmental impacts of which have been central to local protests. Despite Government assurances, there are concerns that other controversial and environmentally damaging developments are planned.

Like Bermuda’s cahow, the Grand Cayman endemic blue iguana *Cyclura lewisi* is an iconic local species with the potential to act as a ‘flagship’ for conservation more widely. This year saw valuable progress made by Fred Burton and his colleagues under the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme. After seven years of lobbying, the Cayman Government agreed to establish a nature reserve encompassing 200 acres of xerophytic shrubland habitat, contributing to the area required to support a self-sustaining population of the Critically Endangered reptile. There has been progress too in relation to Cayman’s endemic plants, including successful cultivation (locally and in UK) of *Salvia caymanensis*, a species unique to Grand Cayman, which had been thought lost until rediscovered in 2007. Good work continues also in the marine environment, and a project led by John Turner (Bangor University) to assess the effectiveness, enhance management and potentially extend the scope of Cayman’s marine protected area

network was amongst those recently awarded funding under the Darwin Initiative.

Montserrat

Last year’s *Annual Report* noted with great concern the arrival in Montserrat of the pathogen *Batrachochytrium dendrobatidis* (or chytrid fungus), which has decimated amphibian populations around the world (see also subsequent report in *Forum News* 34). As feared, the fungus has impacted heavily on the mountain chicken *Leptodactylus fallax*, a species of frog found only in Montserrat and Dominica. This year has seen intensive efforts by the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (DWCT) and its partners in Montserrat to protect this Critically Endangered species, including through the establishment of a captive breeding programme. Most recently, WCWG was pleased to hear that DWCT had received a Darwin Initiative grant in support of this programme of work, which is described in regular updates to the blog on DWCT’s website: <http://blog.durrell.org/>

The Soufriere Hills volcano again produced some very dramatic scenes at the beginning of 2010, although impacts on the inhabited area in the northwest of the island were limited to relatively minor ash-falls. An active volcano notwithstanding, limited local capacity is regarded by many as the greatest constraint on environmental management in Montserrat. This is an issue for most UKOTs, and other small island communities, although the small number of hard working personnel that comprise Montserrat’s environmental bodies seem to have been particularly over-stretched. Nonetheless, thanks to their efforts, in addition to project work, progress was made during the year in developing important environmental legislation (based on a single, broad-ranging instrument, in contrast to the suites of Acts being adopted in other Caribbean UKOTs) as well as advances in other policy areas, including energy.

Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI)

Environmental work, as with most other activities in TCI, has come under considerable strain during the year. In addition to on-going difficulties arising from damage caused by Hurricanes Hanna and Ike in the latter half of 2008, investigations by a Commission of Inquiry into alleged local Government corruption resulted in the suspension of parts of the Constitution in August 2009, with the Governor becoming responsible for exercising executive and legislative functions of government. The budgetary deficit bequeathed by the former locally elected Government, in combination with the global economic downturn, has resulted



Under flamingo artwork from a local school, Ann Pienkowski (UKOTCF Environmental Education Co-ordinator) and Edgar Howell (Turks & Caicos Islands Director of Education) finalise the agreement and plan for Wonderful Water. This OTEP-supported project is a collaboration between UKOTCF and TCI personnel to develop curriculum materials on all aspects of the vital freshwater resource for upper primary and early high-school years in TCI. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

in major financial difficulties, including for nominally Non-Governmental Organisations which rely on public funding for core activities, including the TCI National Trust.

Despite these challenges, thanks to the hard work and resilience of dedicated individuals, important conservation and related work has continued. Management of the project to secure long-term recovery of the native pine (and National Tree) *Pinus caribea* var. *bahamensis*, severely blighted by a non-native scale insect, has been taken over by the Department of Environment & Coastal

Resources (DECR). This project benefits from collaboration with the UKOTs team at RBG Kew, who have been able also to provide support to other botanical work in TCI during the year. In relation to environmental education, a project proposal (jointly developed by UKOTCF, the TCI Deputy Director of Education and others) for curriculum development focused on freshwater resources was finally approved by OTEP, and implementation has just started as this report goes to press.

Report of the UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group

The Europe Territories Working Group (ETWG) continues to explore new ways of working. There seems to be an overall preference for issue-based networking, and this is taking over from more formal audio-meetings as a way of doing business. In fact, dealing with issues as they emerge capitalises on the energy and sense of urgency that so often generate momentum when enthusiasts confront difficult local issues. This focussed approach has proved a very useful way of raising such issues as illegal bird-trapping, turtle deaths and politically-charged difficulties over freedom of information, as well as environmental impact assessment legislation and UKOTCF's relationship with UK Government departments and agencies. It helped also during the run-up to the Cayman Conference, by flagging-up priority issues and later preparing the ground for follow-up discussions on how best to organise the ETWG. Although audio-conferencing will continue to provide the basis for consolidating effort at occasional business meetings, it seems increasingly likely that local exigencies and the concern of committed individuals will drive the day-to-day work of the group. This has important implications for the way the ETWG develops.

ETWG met at the *Making the Right Connections* Conference in Cayman in June 2009. This was a lively, well attended meeting that provided a welcome opportunity for ETWG members and others to meet in person and review progress since the Jersey conference in 2006. It provided also a productive and excellent medium for debating current issues and considering perceived priorities. These included the need for UKOTCF to monitor actively and to interpret environmental policy; secure links with the European Commission, including through its interaction with other NGO umbrella bodies concerned with conservation in the Outermost Regions/Overseas Countries and Territories of EU Member States; and upgrade the ETWG skills database to include information on the development and implementation of environmental legislation. Importantly, the meeting recognized that the ETWG had an important role to play in helping to 'raise the bar' on environmental issues, and that the on-line environmental educational resources held in UKOTCF's database could play a crucial role in this, by providing material with which to inform politicians and the wider public. The vigorous and wide-ranging discussion provided the basis of a renewed and more focused approach to the work of the ETWG.

Isle of Man

During the year, the Isle of Man hosted the first International Basking Shark conference. This was a great success, attracting scientists from the US, New Zealand, Ireland and South Africa. The focus on estimating the global population led to collaborations on DNA analysis and much discussion of shark tracking systems.

The Isle of Man Government continues to progress the Marine Nature Reserve project to designate a site by 2011. Recent organisational changes have meant that this is being led by the Fisheries Division where the marine biodiversity officers are now based. The Department of the Environment, Food and Agriculture



Basking Shark Cetorhinus maximus. Photo: Maura Mitchell

is experimenting with a new way of working, having disbanded the Wildlife and Conservation office, established as a separate entity in 1998. The new arrangement bases biodiversity officers within Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry Divisions.

Issues of marine development, especially offshore wind, are coming to the fore, making it essential to progress the marine spatial planning project. At the airport, the runway extension is now complete, but the VIP hangar continues to threaten the bee orchids (see 2008/09 *Annual Report*). The recent consultation on signing-up to the Convention on Biological Diversity was overwhelmingly (94%) in favour. Progress is being made also towards a fully functioning Manx Biological Records Centre.

Alderney

This year's inter-island meeting of Channel Islands' environmental bodies was arranged and hosted by the Alderney Wildlife Trust, in October 2009. The meeting moved from a one-day to a two-day format and encompassed a wider range of NGOs, governmental bodies and individuals, including delegates from the UK and the Isle of Man. Presentations ranged over international conventions, conservation legislation, strategic planning in Jersey and Guernsey, seabird monitoring, coastal zone management, marine invasive species, renewable energy initiatives, the importance of volunteers and environmental education in the Channel Islands. Delegates heard also about JNCC's expanding work in relation to UKOTs/CDs, and about UKOTCF's experience with networking groups, as well as benefiting from valuable opportunities to network informally among themselves.

Sark

La Société Sercquaise has expressed concern over the destruction of the natural habitat of the Moinerie Headland. Despite the refusal of permission for a helicopter landing pad, the developers appear to be levelling the cliff top site and destroying much of the

natural habitat. Legal advice has been taken by Sark's planning authorities, and a proposal to designate the whole of Sark a conservation area is being discussed as a way of addressing the issue of over-development. Other Société Sercquaise initiatives and events during the year have included participating in an Open Air Laboratory (OPAL) Silwood Park survey of lichens and spots on sycamore leaves, and ringing and recording of Sark's seabirds by Paul and Catherine Veron, who presented their preliminary findings to the public in Sark in March 2010. In addition, following attendance at a conference in Guernsey on Marine Protected Areas in 2009, Jean-Luc Solandt of the Marine Conservation Society UK has been invited to Sark by Sue Daly (underwater wildlife photographer) and the Sark Fisheries Committee, to give a presentation to fishermen and the public on the three sites in Sark waters that are considered particularly worthy of protection.

More generally, in order to highlight Sark's unique and diverse habitats and wildlife, Artists for Nature Foundation are planning to invite 14 of the world's best wildlife artists to the island in 2011 to depict its natural environment. The island has also taken the first steps to gain the status of a "Dark Sky Island" by the International Dark Sky Association. Steve Owens, UK co-ordinator for the International Year of Astronomy 2009, will measure the 'darkness' of Sark's night sky and complete a lighting audit and a Lighting Management Plan is being written by a UK lighting engineer.

Guernsey

A Strategic Environmental Assessment for the use of Renewable Energy in Guernsey and Sark is progressing well. A scoping report was published in autumn 2009, followed by workshops for contributors. It is anticipated that the consultation report will be ready by July 2010, when it will be available on-line. Background material on this ground-breaking initiative are available through press reports.

Jersey

The Planning & Environment Department of the States of Jersey has recently launched a publication on climate change and, during the year, designated a number of new geological and ecological Sites of Special Interest. It has also continued to work towards enhanced systems for local biological recording. Such conservation work is being supported actively by the Société Jersiaise, which is currently compiling a historical introduction to Jersey. There are also reasons to be cheerful about Jersey's priceless maritime zones. The National Trust for Jersey has launched a major initiative, *A Line in the Sand*, which demands better conservation of coastal areas, and the States of Jersey is working towards implementation of the Integrated Coastal Zone Management Strategy adopted in October 2008, having recently appointed a new Marine and Coastal Officer.

Jersey's South East Coast Wetland of International Importance has been listed by Wetlands International as their "Threatened Wetland of the Month" because of the likely impact of a municipal waste incinerator (*Forum News* 34, p.11). This is to be built on reclaimed land adjacent to this first site in the Channel Islands designated under the Ramsar Convention. Although this will be the largest civil engineering project on the Island to date and should vastly improve local air quality, it will be built on a toxic landfill site that leaches material into the marine reserve with every high tide. The development will not remediate this long-term threat to the marine reserve, raising questions over the competence of the



Part of Gibraltar Bay from the Rock. Below in the view are the town, with the airport to the right and Spain beyond. Despite the level of usage, the Bay remains a very important nature site, including for dolphins (below).

Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski (above) and Eric Shaw (below)



initial Environmental Impact Statement and the efficacy of the design solution (www.scrutiny.gov.je/review.asp?reviewid=1140). There is some concern over a suggested remedy to the impact of pollution that involves moving the boundary of the marine reserve and accommodating more coastal development!

Gibraltar

The Gibraltar Government is pursuing court action over an issue raised by a recently designated marine Site of Community Interest (SCI) (see *Forum News* 34). The SCI has become an issue because the UK declared a marine reserve in the southern waters of Gibraltar in 2008, while in 2009 Spain independently secured EU agreement for a similar but larger designation that included all of the British territorial waters off Gibraltar. In effect, this put Spain and Gibraltar in the invidious position of having joint responsibility for monitoring and protecting the SCI. Apart from the diplomatic tensions inherent in this arrangement, it is becoming clear that, since Spain has no jurisdiction over the 'designated' British waters, this joint responsibility has the potential to work against effective conservation of the SCI by confounding effective enforcement. The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) is supporting the court action, and is calling on the Gibraltar Government to update and implement the Marine Nature Reserve Regulations published in 1995.

Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs)

Whilst demand from schools in the Republic of Cyprus is increasing continuously, facilities at the Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre remain unchanged, with less than half the required capacity. About 6000 students took part in educational programmes this year, along with about 10 university groups (300 students), as well as other visitors. The Centre has become a model for developing teaching techniques and in demonstrating how the nature and the culture of an area can be used for environmental education. However, funds are not available for new buildings

or field educational facilities, and personnel at the Centre and at the SBA Environment Department have limited resources and are struggling to cope with the work load. Despite this worrying situation, the Centre enjoys considerable support from local authorities, NGOs, Government Departments of the Republic of Cyprus, the SBA Authority, and the public at large. Encouragingly, students on EU-funded programmes are doing a great job helping with the maintenance of the Centre, the construction of educational facilities, and research on the Peninsula. Currently, the impact of the educational programmes at the Centre is being evaluated by the Cyprus Government's Ministry of Education, and so far the results are encouraging.

The illegal trapping of migratory birds continues to be a problem in the Eastern SBA. Although there had been some success in recent years in reducing the practice, over the past two years it seems to have been on the increase, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of birds a year. The SBA Commissioner of Police has been asked to take regular and effective action against the trappers. ETWG continues working with the SBA Administration and local NGOs to raise the profile of the problem and to try to ensure that effective action is taken against the illegal trappers in the British SBA. Concerns have also been expressed over deaths of turtles in the Western SBA, believed to be linked to illegal fishing.

Report of the UKOTCF Southern Oceans Working Group

The Southern Oceans Working Group (SOWG) met three times during 2009-10, first in the Cayman Islands during the *Making the Right Connections* conference and subsequently at Foyle's bookshop in London. The meetings discussed progress on various ongoing projects and emerging issues. The SOWG meeting in Cayman was the first since 2006 (in Jersey) to bring together representatives of all the Southern Oceans Territories, and was well attended despite the tightly packed schedule of the conference. The Southern Oceans UKOTs are particularly widely dispersed and (in many cases) remote, which creates difficulties for communication and participation in meetings. Conscious of these challenges, SOWG has continued to experiment with Skype teleconferencing, with some success in several meetings. However, restrictions on the use of this technology, imposed by Cable and Wireless where this is a monopoly supplier, represent an obstacle to participation by some parties, for example in St Helena. Other means of enhancing communication at minimal cost have been discussed by SOWG, including using the discussion forum on the UKOTCF website and online social networking facilities. One useful development in this area during the year has been the instigation of an e-Newsletter for the Group. This aims to keep SOWG members informed of recent activities in other South Oceans Territories, facilitate communication between Group members, and to provide information between meetings in order to strengthen the network. The first issue, in August 2009, summarised the most recent tranche of OTEP awards and gave an overview of the Cayman conference. The second issue, in December, highlighted the FCO consultation over the establishment of a Marine Protected Area in the British Indian Ocean Territory, and provided details of funding opportunities and recent publications.

Two important cross-Territory projects came to an end during the reporting year. UKOTCF's OTEP-funded Environmental Education project (see main section of this report) has attracted much involvement from Territories in the Southern Oceans. The facilities established by this project on the Forum website – a discussion forum, environmental education resources database, and virtual tours of the UKOTs – will continue to be developed, maintained and updated on a voluntary basis, including with input via SOWG. The South Atlantic Invasive Species (SAIS) project, a regional initiative funded by the European Union, managed by RSPB and initiated by discussions within UKOTCF's Working Group, ended in late 2009. The purpose of this project was to increase the capacity of the South Atlantic UKOTs to deal with the substantial environmental threat posed by invasive species. Some of its main activities included the development of island biosecurity plans, surveys of various taxa (particularly plants), steps towards eradication of the most damaging alien species (notably rodents), control of invasive plants with herbicides, training courses and workshops, production of awareness-raising materials and media outreach. Whilst there is no funding available to continue the over-

arching regional initiative, further local projects will be developed stemming from the work carried out by the SAIS team.

Ascension

In 2009, the Ascension Island Government Conservation Department (AIGCD) received an OTEP grant to establish a research and education centre at the Red Lion Marine Barracks on Green Mountain. The project aims to underpin local education, and promote the natural environment on Ascension. In September 2009, Mr Ross Denny was appointed as the new Administrator, and has been very supportive of, and enthused by, conservation. The AIGCD team under Stedson Stroud continues to produce an excellent newsletter *Conservation Quarterly* giving updates on the full range of activities undertaken by the Department, visiting scientists and volunteers. These activities include other OTEP-funded work such as the Endemic Plants project, for which RBGK are key collaborators, as well as on-going work under the seabird restoration programme.

St Helena

In addition to involvement in the two cross-Territory projects noted above, activities in St Helena over the last year have included those under two OTEP-funded projects which aim to enhance awareness, study and conservation of the island's unique flora. The Critical Species project promotes cooperation between local stakeholder groups and is enhancing capacity, particularly in the government's Agricultural & Natural Resources Department, to conserve a range of endemic plants. The project combines *in situ* and *ex situ* approaches, including seed collection and training in horticultural techniques, and the development of a native plant nursery which has propagated thousands of plants for restoration of wild populations. A separate project will support the development of illustrated field guides to the flora of St Helena, enabling non-specialists to identify the plants that they encounter in the wild, including understudied taxa such as bryophytes and lichens.

Inevitably, the St Helena Air Access project is a major preoccupation on the island, with significant time and effort having been spent on investigating issues associated with the proposed airport. At present, the project is "on pause" and the ultimate outcome is unknown. There are some positive environmental aspects to the Air Access project: an Environment Impact Assessment has been carried out; contractors have drafted an Environmental Management Plan; landscape and ecological mitigation projects have been identified as future activities to improve the appearance of the island together with critical species recovery work. Furthermore, a protection plan has been developed for Prosperous Bay Plain, an important site for many endemic invertebrates. Threats to the site include off-road bikers, and an application has been made to fence an area around the central basin. A further mitigation project



Prosperous Bay Plain, St Helena - the site of the proposed airport - is immensely important for invertebrates, many of which are endemic. St Helena has over 100 species of spiders, of which at least 45 species and 12 genera are endemic. At night, many spiders, such as these, emerge on

the Plain. Note that the one on the left is carrying a brood of young.
Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

reported that the endemic wirebird *Charadrius sanctaehelenae* is in decline, and steps are being taken towards its rehabilitation. Encouragingly, the SHNT's 2010 Wirebird census count showed an increase in Wirebird numbers over 2009 by almost a quarter. However, the uncertainty over the outcome of the airstrip proposal has created difficulties for the local community. Major on-island developments, including roads, renewable energy infrastructure, and other important projects have all been put on hold, and are dependent on air access being implemented. The UK Government's "pause" in moving towards a decision on whether to proceed with the airport construction has meant that some procedures and practices are in place to deal with more people on the island should the project recommence. Currently, the government is the main local employer, and so greater private sector involvement is being sought. The organisation of government has a direct impact on the environment sector and creates more fragmentation on environmental matters. For example, there is no one to work on marine issues. St Helena has lost many residents and numbers are likely to decrease further without improved transport links. The local population has dropped to around 4000, and the age structure is skewed by the lack of local opportunities for those of working age. In turn, this has resulted in a lack of local capacity to fill posts (including in the environmental sector) when they become available, and so recruitment is often from overseas. However, local salaries are typically modest by international standards, creating further challenges.

Illustrating the difficulties in recruiting to key posts, the St Helena National Trust struggled for some time to fill the position of Director. However, there was good news in 2009 when the organisation attracted into this role Jamie Roberts, formerly of Buglife in the UK. SOWG welcomed this appointment, and Jamie is now hard at work developing projects and seeking to develop the capacity of the National Trust and the wider community to undertake conservation work. In addition to the island's many endemic species and other threatened biodiversity, cultural and built heritage sites on St Helena are also important to conserve, and this will be part of Jamie's role. There are also land and underwater sites of archaeological importance, including Rupert's Valley, exploration of which has recently been supported by DFID, and the historic wreck of the Dutch East Indian ship *Witte Liewu*.

Tristan da Cunha

One of the most significant threats to Tristan da Cunha's biodiversity is that posed by the invasive "super mice" on Gough Island that are known to prey on the eggs and chicks of ground nesting birds such as the endemic Tristan albatross *Diomedea dabbenena*.

Indeed, during the reporting year, this specific issue prompted the posting on the Number 10 Downing Street website of a petition calling for greater protection of biodiversity in the UKOTs generally (see main section of this report). OTEP funding is supporting preparations for the proposed eradication of mice, as well as control of the invasive plant *Sagina procumbens*, on Gough Island.

OTEP project funding is also supporting development of the recently formed Tristan Conservation Department (TCD), headed by Trevor Glass (with Norman Glass as Assistant and Kirsty Green as Clerk) and established by the Tristan Government separate from the Agriculture & Natural Resources Department.

Priority within TCD has been given to work on the eradication of loganberry *Rubus loganobusacc* and control of other invasive species, alongside management planning and other activities. In Tristan's marine environment, there remain concerns over the impacts of the oil rig which ran aground in a storm in 2006 while being towed from Brazil to Singapore. Although the rig was eventually refloated and then sunk in deep water, non-native marine invertebrates and other organisms introduced with it could negatively affect native species and the local langoustine industry. The situation is being monitored carefully in order to protect the main livelihood for the Tristan community.

Falkland Islands

In addition to work under the SAIS project, a range of activities have continued in the Falklands to protect native biodiversity and counter the threat posed by invasive species. The on-going project work, part-funded by OTEP, towards the conservation of the endemic Cobb's wren *Troglodytes cobbi* made further progress during the year. In August 2009, plans to clear Tea Island (in the Beaver group) of rats went ahead as scheduled, despite some difficult weather conditions. Bait was spread around the island by hand-broadcasting, although not on the slopes of Tea Mountain or the dense tussac grass *Parodiochloa fabellata* at Tea Point. The project leaders are optimistic that Tea Island will become the largest island in the Falklands, and one of the largest in the world, to be cleared of rats using this method, although it will be some time before this is known. The next step in restoring Tea Island habitats will involve the planting of tussac grass in key areas. With assistance from the Falkland Islands Government's Environmental Studies budget, several students stayed on after the rat baiting to revive the traditional practice of winter contract tussac planting.



Tussac grass ecosystem, with Fur Seals Arctocephalus australis, Falkland Islands. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Several other OTEP projects have continued or been initiated throughout the year, including in support of the establishment of a Native Plants Programme managed by Falklands Conservation. In collaboration with others including RBGK, this project will enhance survey and monitoring efforts, particularly in relation to 15 identified Important Plant Areas. It will work towards the implementation of Action Plans for species and habitats, and the development of a National Vegetation Classification system. A new nursery will supply native plants to the local horticultural market, with plans to scale up to supply plants for restoration projects.

A new book by Ian and Georgina Strange, from the New Island Conservation Trust, *A Penguin's World* was published in 2009 (see *Forum News* 35).

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI)

South Georgia is notable for having no resident population. There is no air access, and it is expensive to charter and run a ship from the Falklands. Consequently, the costs of carrying out conservation work on South Georgia are much higher than on less remote islands. Nonetheless, important work has been undertaken in the Territory during the year, including under the SAIS project. Activities have included steps towards the eradication of wavy bittercress *Cardamine flexuosa*, a pernicious invasive weed, and plans are also being made for rat eradication. The South Georgia Heritage Trust are investigating logistics and formalising their relationship with the SGSSI Government, potential funders and other stakeholders. A draft report relating to reindeer eradication will be published on the SGSSI Government website www.sgisland.gs before a final



South Georgia Pipit *Anthus antarcticus* is one of the species threatened by introduced invasive rats, the risk being increased as glaciers retreat and allow access by rats to previous rat-free areas. The proposed rat eradication is thus vitally important.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Officers and Contact Points

First contact on any issue should normally be:

Company Secretary/Development Director: Dr Oliver Cheesman, 108 Cholmeley Road, Reading, RG1 3LY, UK. Tel: +44 118 9265926; email: oliver@dipsacus.org

Co-ordinator: Catherine Quick, 110 Nottingham Road, Stapleford, Nottingham, NG9 8AR, UK. Tel: +44 7955 888795; email: cquick@ukotcf.org

COUNCIL

Chairman: Dr Chris Tydeman, Tel: +44 1483 274653; Mobile: +44 7900 241169; Email: ctydeman@lineone.net

Honorary Executive Director: Dr Mike Pienkowski, 102 Broadway, Peterborough PE1 4DG, UK. Tel: +44 1733 569325; Fax: +44 208 0207217; email: m@pienkowski.org

Members: Liz Charter; Dr John Cortés; Bruce Dinwiddy; Mike Freeman; Dr Dace McCoy Ground; Dr Colin Hindmarch; Iain Orr; Bill Samuel; Joseph Smith Abbott; Karen Varnham

WIDER CARIBBEAN WORKING GROUP

Chairman: Bruce Dinwiddy, 8 Connaught Avenue, London SW14 7RH, UK.

Secretary: Dr Oliver Cheesman, 108 Cholmeley Road, Reading, RG1 3LY, UK. Tel: +44 118 9265926; email: oliver@dipsacus.org

SOUTHERN OCEANS WORKING GROUP

Joint Chairmen:

Karen Varnham. Email: Karen.Varnham@Bristol.ac.uk

Iain Orr, 12 Otto Close, London SE26 4NA, UK. Tel: +44 208 6933584; email: biodiplomacy@yahoo.co.uk

Secretary: Catherine Quick, 110 Nottingham Road, Stapleford, Nottingham, NG9 8AR, UK. Tel: +44 7955 888795; email: cquick@ukotcf.org

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.

© 2010 UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum
Printed on 100% recycled paper

EUROPE TERRITORIES WORKING GROUP

Chairman: Liz Charter, Principal Biodiversity Officer, Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture, Thie Slieu Whallian, Foxdale Road, St John's, Isle of Man IM4 3AS. Email: liz@iom.com

Secretary: Dr Colin Hindmarch, 97 Oakwell Court, Hamsterley Vale, County Durham NE17 7BE, UK. Tel: +44 1207 565717; Mobile: +44 7877 282850; email: colinhindmarch@talktalk.net

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Voluntary Co-ordinator: Ann Pienkowski, 102 Broadway, Peterborough PE1 4DG, UK. Tel: +44 1733 569325; Fax: +44 208 0207217; email: apienkowski@ukotcf.org

Membership

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

Amphibian & Reptile Conservation; British Ecological Society; British Microbial Biodiversity Association; 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; Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre, Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas; Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society; La Société Guernesaise; Société Jersiaise, National Trust of Jersey; Isle of Man Wildlife and Conservation Division; Montserrat National Trust; Pitcairn Natural Resources Division; St Helena National Trust; La Société Serequaise; South Georgia Association; National Trust of the Turks & Caicos Islands.



Left: *Bristle-thighed Curlew Numenius tahitiensis* at Henderson. Breeding in Alaska and wintering in the Pacific islands, this species makes some of the world's longest continuous migratory flights. Oeno supports globally important numbers. Both Oeno and Ducie (pictured right) atolls support globally important colonies of breeding seabirds, being the most important sites for some species.
Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski.



decision is made over this proposed activity. The document will put forward a scientific case, and is part of a wider habitat restoration plan. If this project goes ahead, it is hoped that the first population of reindeer might be removed by 2011.

British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)

The Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) and its partners in the Chagos Environment Network (CEN) campaigned vigorously throughout 2009 for the creation of one of the world's largest marine protected areas (MPAs), involving an area of ½ million square miles, across BIOT. Their vision was outlined in *The Chagos Archipelago: its nature & the future*, a publication which was instrumental in prompting the UK Government to launch a public consultation on this issue in November 2009 (see main section of this report). Also, the implications were discussed in detail at workshops to explore the scientific dimensions (at Southampton University in August 2009) and socio-economic considerations (at Royal Holloway College in January 2010). The case for protection of the environment in BIOT is overwhelming, given the exceptional water quality, near-pristine coral reefs and other important biodiversity that occur in this UKOT. However, the political context is complex, and needs to consider relations with Mauritius, which claims sovereignty over the Territory, and the Chagossian community, which is currently fighting in the European Court of Human Rights for its right to return to the islands.

In addition to the work towards establishment of a new BIOT MPA, which dominated activities in relation to this Territory during the year, new OTEP projects were announced to underpin conservation efforts. These focused on environmental monitoring, including through an expedition to the Archipelago in February 2010, and development of a birdwatching guide to BIOT.

Pitcairn Islands

Plans for a new breakwater and harbour are being considered, to enhance access to Pitcairn and thereby increase capacity for tourism on the island. The landing site would be connected to the rest of the island by a new road, for which EU funding is available. However, SOWG heard concerns that the route could cut across important botanical sites, and that provisions for

robust Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) would need to be built into the process. Capacity for conservation (and other) work on Pitcairn is inevitably constrained, with such a small local community sharing tasks and responsibilities. Nonetheless, the last year has seen development of the Pitcairn Natural Resources Division, including appointment of a new Manager (Michelle Christian) and a Biosecurity Director (Jay Warren).

Recent years have seen much effort directed towards study of the feasibility of rat eradication on Henderson Island (a World Heritage Site). In August 2009, researchers from Cambridge University visited Pitcairn to follow up on this. Previous OTEP-funded work highlighted three main areas of concern: the potential competition for bait between rats and land crabs; the risk to the endemic Henderson rail *Porzana atra*; and the possible impact of bait on Henderson's endemic land snails. Over six weeks of fieldwork, the team was able to establish that these concerns were either unfounded, or could be overcome, thus removing the last remaining obstacles to a rat eradication programme. Funds are now being raised to carry out this priority operation.

In September 2009, Noeleen Smyth from the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin received a grant from the Mohammed Bin Zayed Conservation Fund to continue species recovery work on Pitcairn. The work will focus on the yellow *fatu* *Abutilon pitcairnense*, which is one of five plant species identified as critically endangered on the island. This Conservation Fund is a significant philanthropic endowment, established to support species conservation. It is hoped that, through discussions in SOWG, it might be accessed by other organisations working in the UKOTs, and particularly those in the Southern Oceans.

In February 2010, Mike and Ann Pienkowski visited the Pitcairn Islands and held discussions with officials and others interested. Ways were identified to improve the flow of conservation information to and from the island. Assistance was provided with applications for project funding, including for further sustainable energy investigations. Arrangements were made to assist Pitcairn in arranging for the designation of certain Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.



Pitcairn Reed-Warbler *Acrocephalus vaughani* (left) and the closely related Henderson Reed-Warbler *A. taiti* are two of the six endemic birds of the Pitcairn group. They are found throughout their respective islands, including the excellent Eco-trail on Pitcairn (right). Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

