

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Annual Report April 2011 - March 2012

Report of Council

Overview

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

These included working to enhance and improve policies of UK Government (UKG) and the European Union towards conservation in the UKOTs and CDs, through: submissions to various government consultations including on the forthcoming White Paper; organisation of a workshop on developing objectives and targets for biodiversity strategies; attendance at All Party Parliamentary Groups; and interventions with decision makers and officials in the UK and in the EU.

UKOTCF continues to support member and associate organisations by providing assistance to individual territories on project development, supporting project

Tropical dry forest on Grand Cayman. The MPASSE project is safeguarding more of this globally threatened ecosystem, for which several UKOTs are important. MPASSE, part-funded by the European Union, is one of the projects brought into play by a combination of UKOTCF and local NGOs, with the then support of UK and UKOT governments.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski



Ms Natalie Watson, teacher at Enid Capron Primary School, Providenciales, reports, in one of the project workshops for teachers, on the use of the teaching resources developed in the "Wonderful Water" project managed by Ann Pienkowski (right), UKOTCF's Environmental Education Co-ordinator. This joint project of UKOTCF and the Turks & Caicos Education Department was part-funded by OTEP, the only fund ear-marked for conservation in the UKOTs but now terminated by UK Government.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

proposals, helping manage projects, and with materials for publications, advice on specific issues and connecting with organisations with similar interests.

The OTEP-supported Wonderful Water project, jointly developed with the Education Department of Turks and Caicos Islands, has culminated in a curriculum framework to address sustainable use of water. This project, through its series of workshops, has been successful in focussing teachers and other stakeholder efforts into bringing global issues, particularly wise water use and sustainable management of natural resources, into the classroom. We look to find resources to expand this, to meet requests from TCI and other UKOTs.

Offers from volunteers continue to be received, and UKOTCF continues to explore these as part of a volunteer programme. Although, as yet, no funding has been achieved, UKOTCF continues to develop approaches to matching volunteers with the needs of organisations in the territories.

Much of the Forum's effort in this financial year has been directed towards achieving greater financial sustainability for the organisation and for member and associate organisations through locally-led projects. The UKOTs fall into a substantial "funding gap" – as UK territories, they are ineligible for many international environmental funding mechanisms, but many UK funding sources also exclude them, on the grounds that they are "overseas". UKOTCF has found this particularly challenging but does not view it as impossible to overcome; by continuing



to solicit potential funders in Britain, we hope to enable greater financial support for the UKOTs. The situation was exacerbated during the reported year due to UKG reneging on its commitments by suspending the OTEP small grants programme, and diverting other funds to its own agencies rather than NGOs – something of a contrast with its affirmations about the “Big Society”.

A renewed agreement was signed on Bioverseas, a joint initiative of the umbrella conservation bodies for the overseas territories of the Netherlands, France and UK (UKOTCF). (The Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA) is a regional network of protected areas set up to help and assist the park management organisations on the islands of the Dutch Caribbean to safeguard its natural resources and to promote sustainable nature management. The French National Committee of IUCN (UICN-F) has a committee which acts as an umbrella body for nature conservation in the French overseas regions and territories.) Partners wish to work more closely on relationships with the EU, as well as networking between members and lines of communication for those territories and outermost regions that may share challenges and innovative approaches/solutions to these.

Influencing policy

UKOTCF made several submissions to consultations in 2011 including to: the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) consultation which will lead to a White Paper in 2012; Defra’s questionnaire on environmental matters in the UKOTs which will feed into their submission to the White Paper; and the Big Lottery directions for future policy. (A summary of the main points of UKOTCF’s submission to FCO for the main White Paper is included in the box on pp. 3-4.)

Some changes following UKOTCF’s submissions to consultations have been noted. Most notable was the UK Government’s consultation paper by DEFRA on nature policy in England. UKOTCF pointed out that DEFRA’s responsibilities relate not just to issues in England but also internationally. The document had ignored this element and, in particular, made no mention of UK Overseas Territories. UKOTCF, in its submission, noted that most of the globally important biodiversity for which UK is responsible is in the UKOTs. UKOTCF was pleased that the Government took this into account. The resulting White Paper *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature* published in June said:

“We will also continue to give priority to the UK Overseas Territories (OTs) Biodiversity Strategy, through a co-ordinated



The north shore (and usual landing area) of Henderson Island. UKOTCF welcomed the grant to Pitcairn Council and RSPB for the rat-eradication exercise. Strangely, when announcing this at the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at Nagoya, the UK Secretary of State for the Environment did not mention that this uniquely important World Heritage Site is a UK Overseas Territory. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

approach across government that is led by the National Security Council. The Government will continue its engagement with the OTs in their efforts to conserve their biodiversity through programmes such as the Flagship Species Fund and one-off initiatives such as the £200,000 contribution towards a project to eradicate rodents on Henderson Island in the Pitcairn Group. Moreover, the Darwin Initiative is also making a significant difference to wildlife in our OTs. An additional £1.5 million has already been invested in Darwin projects in the three years from 2010, and this sum will increase further as a result of the new Darwin funding referred to above.”

Following this, UKOTCF contacted the Secretary of State to clarify the role of the National Security Council and how it would engage with relevant government departments as well as those in UKOTs. The response was rather ambiguous; playing down the significance of the role of the NSC in day-to-day matters involving the UKOTs and being more concerned with issues such as defence and natural disasters. Nonetheless UKOTCF remains concerned at the form of words used as it directly links the UKOTs Biodiversity Strategy implementation with an unknown role for the NSC – a body with which it is difficult to connect.

The House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee published, in May 2011, its report on the role of the FCO in UK Government. UKOTCF gave a submission to the Committee in respect of the FCO’s role in leading on UK Overseas Territories matters.

The main points in the FAC report relating to UKOTs include:

“73. In David Miliband’s 2008 Strategic Framework for the FCO, the reference to the OTs which had previously been included among the department’s priorities disappeared. It has not been restored in the various sets of priorities set out for the FCO under the current Government. In its major Report on the Overseas Territories in 2008, our predecessor Committee identified particular challenges that its role in relation to the OTs poses for the FCO, as well as serious problems arising in connection with a number of Territories, above all the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI). The Committee concluded that the FCO ‘must take its oversight responsibilities for the Overseas Territories more seriously’. In this context, the previous Committee welcomed the assurances which it received from the previous Government that the disappearance of any reference to the OTs from the FCO’s official priorities did not imply any downgrading in the importance which the department attached to this area of its responsibilities. Nevertheless, at the end of the previous Parliament (in its last Report on an FCO departmental annual report, in March 2010), and in light of continuing problems in a number of OTs (most notably TCI), our predecessor Committee felt obliged to declare itself still ‘unconvinced that the department [was] exercising its responsibilities for them with sufficient diligence’.

“74. We received two submissions to our present inquiry stressing the importance of the FCO’s role with respect to the OTs. The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) both emphasised the importance of: the FCO’s role in representing the OTs to Government and officialdom in London, and ensuring that the UK public is aware of the Territories; its duty to ensure that other departments take the OTs elements of their responsibilities seriously; and its direct responsibilities for the OTs, particularly with respect to biodiversity and the environment, and including the quality of OTs Governors’ work on these issues.

“75. The Government intends to publish a White Paper on the OTs later in 2011. The Foreign Secretary told the House on 10 March that he planned to secure cross-departmental agreement through the National Security Council (NSC) to the strategy underpinning

the White Paper. The Foreign Secretary also announced increased funding for some OTs projects and programmes. Both the RSPB and the UKOTCF welcomed what they saw as early signs that under the current Government the FCO was devoting greater effort to OTs matters. However, we have continued to be made aware of serious problems in TCI.

“76. We conclude that the FCO’s responsibility for the UK’s Overseas Territories (OTs) constitutes an important - but sometimes overlooked - part of its role in UK Government, and one that needs to be discharged with due seriousness. We welcome indications that the Government is seeking to strengthen the FCO’s work on the OTs, including by making a greater effort to lead across Government on OTs matters. We look forward to engaging with the Government on its planned White Paper on the OTs, and may return to the issue of the FCO’s role in respect of the Territories in that context.”

In March 2012, UKOTCF attended the joint meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Groups for British Zoos and Aquaria, Overseas Territories and Biodiversity. Parliamentarians enquired of the UKOTCF-organised conferences, and expressed shock that UK government funding had been withdrawn (see also *Relations with UK Government and Government Agencies*, p. 5, below). They suggested also complementary activities linked to Parliament, and UKOTCF will explore these.

UKOTCF’s Chairman attended a meeting with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and other (GB-focussed) NGOs on drafting of country strategies that will replace the UK Biodiversity Strategy and the mechanisms to be put in place for coordination across these. There are some significant changes being made in terms of devolved responsibilities and effectively there will be little difference between the metropolitan UK

devolved administrations and those in the UKOTs, making it possible to connect all the devolved strategies in a coordinated and coherent form. This would allow for monitoring and reporting in a consistent way across the UK government’s international responsibilities – but, sadly, this approach has not found favour. One of the purposes of the meeting was to address the relationship between the NGOs and JNCC, which the latter accept could be improved. During the discussion, UKOTCF Chairman suggested that each can do things the other cannot, and that this needs to be recognised and arrangements put in place that are beneficial to both parties. NGOs, for example, can propose to UK Parliament Select Committees questions that could address key points.

In August, the Cabinet Office began a 12-week consultation on proposed new policy directions for the Big Lottery Fund (BLF), which is “committed to bringing real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need and has been rolling out grants to health, education, environmental and charitable causes across the UK since June 2004”. The fund “helps communities and people most in need throughout the United Kingdom to improve the quality of their lives by making a difference to the things which matter most to them.” UKOTCF suggested the inclusion of UKOTs as eligible for grants, because they are parts of UK sovereign territory and their citizens are UK citizens. By specifically including the UKOTs, BLF would acknowledge the important role they play in the UK’s and, more specifically, BLF’s commitment to improving the lives of communities through the sustainable management of natural resources, an approach not currently taken by the Heritage Lottery Fund. UKOTCF suggested also that the future directions of the BLF should include the need to distribute funds to an exceptionally important part of UK heritage, not met elsewhere by specific funders and in areas in which fundraising is particularly challenging. Furthermore,

Consultation on Implementing the Overseas Territories Strategy: Response from the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum - Summary (full version: www.ukotcf.org/pdf/Consultations/submission.pdf)

UKOTCF has long been committed to working closely with government departments in the UK and in the UK’s Overseas Territories (and in the Crown Dependencies). We welcome this opportunity to contribute to a fresh look at how best to protect and improve the well-being of these far-flung parts of the British family. Key points we believe should be included in the proposed White Paper are:

- a) UKOTCF would wish to see in the forthcoming White Paper specific reference to environment and biodiversity conservation, given the general recognition of the global and local importance of the rich but vulnerable biodiversity of the UKOTs, and its relationships to the livelihoods and well-being of the UK citizens (and visitors) that reside in the UKOTs.
- b) Clarification of the relationships between the HMG bodies with apparently overlapping responsibilities would be welcome.
- c) We recommend that HMG both restore OTEP as a small-projects fund to respond to applications for environmental work in the UKOTs, as committed by the Environment Charters, and institute a larger fund for larger – and often urgent – conservation needs.
- d) We recommend that the White Paper address the issue of profitable engagement with civil society and that, for example, FCO explore with UKOTCF reconvening the bi-annual joint meetings between HMG bodies and NGOs.
- e) Given the FCO’s current oversight and lead on the proposed White Paper, we recommend that the White Paper clarifies strategic level planning and budgeting across HMG departments and agencies with respect to the UKOTs.
- f) Support from Britain is essential and the FCO thus has a dual role both in providing support and in making sure that appropriate

support is provided by other government departments and by NGOs.

g) We recommend that HMG work with UKOTCF, its members and other NGOs, together with UKOT governments, towards a common view of biodiversity and other environmental targets. This will help pool resources and attract them from other funders, both charities and individuals.

h) We recommend that JNCC, together with representatives of relevant departments, and representatives of the NGOs, is tasked with preparing an action plan for biodiversity conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. This would not only progress a strategy lacking clear objectives and activities, but also generate wider and more collaborative working practices which should spread into other policy areas. We would wish to see the funding specifically allocated to JNCC, and indeed all parts of government, to be used most effectively for environmental protection and management in the UKOTs, but this would best be achieved in collaboration with the NGOs, not in isolation from them.

i) We would wish to see a strengthening of resolve on the part of the FCO (and other Departments) to ensure implementation and certainly no weakening of the commitments made under the 1999 White Paper, and reinforced by the FCO White Paper of 2006 Active Diplomacy for a Changing World: The UK’s International Priorities.

j) With regard to the different Ministries leading on policy for different UKOTs and CDs (FCO, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Defence), other involved departments (e.g. DFID, DEFRA), and the governing of both inhabited and uninhabited UKOTs, we recommend that HMG review the way it relates to UKOTs & CDs, drawing on recent experience in the development of the devolved

administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

k) We recommend that UKOTs introduce (where lacking) and implement legal requirements for EIAs in planning matters and, in accordance with best international practice, make these easily available for reasonable time periods for examination and comment by local people and outside experts, and that, if development goes ahead, the implementation of conditions are monitored and publicly reported, and infractions being prosecuted and publicised. We further recommend that HMG takes an active interest in monitoring and advising on such matters, as well as implementing adequately its own responsibilities under international agreements.

l) Whilst welcoming the one-off contributions by HMG to the eradication of invasive species on Ascension Island and, a decade later, Henderson Island, UKOTCF recommends that substantial, regular funding be made available to meet this aspect of HMG's global responsibilities for biodiversity conservation, and that HMG support also work in the UKOTs on prevention of arrival of invasive species.

m) We recommend that HMG fulfil its commitment under the Environment Charters to support work in UKOTs on environmental education and awareness, and such activities as rainwater harvesting.

n) With regard to water and its management, and the contrast between the funding opportunities available to the UKOTs (and other Overseas Countries and Territories) compared to those available to EU Outermost Regions, FCO should consider working with DFID to (a) assess such needs within the UKOTs and (b) put considerably more effort into undertaking negotiations within the EU on changing the funding rules in favour of the UKOTs.

o) UKOTCF would wish to see specific recommendations relating to the establishment of crisis management plans by HMG and related cross-departmental teams.

p) We recommend that, on many environmental issues, departments like DFID and DEFRA deploy in support of UKOTs their own technical and social expertise, as well as national and international links to companies and civil society organizations which will be quite unaware of needs in the UKOTs unless someone takes the initiative.

q) We recommend that HMG involves representatives of UKOTs in international discussions on MEAs and other aspects. We recommend also that the Department of Energy and Climate Change engage with the UKOTs.

r) We welcome the overall message from HMG that all HMG departments will now be expected to support UKOTs in the areas of their expertise. This will be a process that needs managing, and we call upon HMG to resource it adequately. UKOTCF, its member organizations and others have long experience in this area and could support this in a very cost-effective way, given modest support by HMG. In this context especially, we have endeavoured to maintain good working relationships with relevant departments, including FCO, DFID and DEFRA, but have found this increasingly difficult as HMG has more and more decreased its engagement with UKOTCF and other NGOs over the past five years. Engagement has now declined from a previously strong and effective level to a very weak and ad hoc process, and virtually always generated by those outside government. We wish to have really effective and meaningful engagement with government departments and call upon HMG to revert to its previous positive attitude and liaison practices.

s) UKOTCF considers strongly that the attitude taken by HMG's ministers and officials towards UKOTs needs to be based on recognition of the reality that they are not quasi-foreign countries, embarrassingly shackled to Great Britain so that HMG carries the can when things go wrong (as they have done over the years in several territories). The attitude should be positive: these are places whose citizens are British but with many distinctive

features, so that local democracy, rather than colonial rule from Whitehall is the guiding principle. However, there also needs to be recognition that, in ways analogous to local democracy in the UK, there needs to be acceptance of common standards in such areas as the rule of law, freedom under the law, freedom of information (subject to constraints affecting privacy of personal information) on matters of public policy, responsible fiscal and environmental management, and international obligations.

t) Support for UKOTCF-organised conferences has been the principal way in which HMG has been able to meet its commitment under the Environment Charters to "promote ...sharing of experience and expertise between ... other Overseas Territories and small island states and communities which face similar environmental problems." We note also that organisation by NGOs is generally considerably more cost-effective than organisation by a government body, due partly to the deployment of large amounts of unpaid voluntary effort. Accordingly, we recommend that HMG restore its financial support for UKOTCF-organised conservation conferences.

u) We recommend the opening of bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund to applications supporting conservation and other works for the UKOTs and CDs.

v) UKOTs have advised us that they would like to see greater engagement and interaction between Britain and the UKOTs with regard to education, training, and scholarships, as well the development of exchange visits, joint teams, sharing of knowledge, skills and potential resources between Britain and the UKOTs. UKOTCF supports this, has been engaged in this sort of approach for some years, and is currently developing further a skilled volunteers programme, as resources allow, despite HMG's unwillingness so far to support it.

w) Local checks and balances need to be underwritten by a monitoring role by HMG. This should not be micromanaging, but checking that UKOTs are doing what is agreed periodically, especially in the areas of good governance and international commitments. HMG should be in a position of offering early help, if needed. This would be much less intrusive than having to intervene in a major way if failures become major.

x) Other HMG departments need to build up close working relationships with the equivalent departments in UKOTs.

y) Both HMG and the UKOT governments should be more ready to involve NGOs and other parts of civil society in support of good governance.

z) We recommend that HMG engage with the European Commission to reduce the bureaucratic load on applying for, accessing and reporting on grants, especially small ones.

aa) UKOTCF recommends that HMG give more support to NGOs and others attempting to access EU funding for UKOT conservation work.

ab) We recommend that a greater level of creativity be adopted by DFID for environmental funding in the UKOTs, especially given the primacy of the UKOTs in DFID's responsibilities.

ac) We recommend that HMG reviews its commitment to UKOTs in respect of EU matters and particularly its frequency and level of representation.

ad) UKOTCF recommends that HMG either meet the needs of UKOTs as part of UK or else uses its leverage as a funding body to modify the rules of operation of the international bodies so as to include UKOTs as eligible. Crown Dependencies also are excluded from most funding sources.

ae) We recommend that a specific output of the upcoming White Paper is the production and implementation of a communications strategy, with necessary funding, involving government in partnership with civil society, both in the metropolitan UK and in the UKOTs.

a flexible application process was needed, including core funds thus recognising the specific challenges facing small organisations such as those in the UKOTs, and applications should be encouraged actively on this basis.

At the end of March 2011, DCMS Minister for Tourism and Heritage, John Penrose MP, announced that UK Government is following the recommendations of the expert panel, on which UKOTCF's Honorary Executive Director Dr Mike Pienkowski sat, that the new UK Tentative List include three UKOT sites. These are: Gorham's Cave Complex, Gibraltar: a site important for remains of Neanderthal man and other features of human archaeology; The Island of St Helena: a site of quite staggering world importance for many endemic species, genera and ecosystems, as well as of great historical importance; The Turks & Caicos Islands: a site of great importance to endemic species, migratory birds, coral reefs and the location of an internationally important salt industry for centuries. UKOTCF will assist, where possible, in the further work necessary to take forward these cases for designation.

A minor re-shuffle agreed by UKOTCF's Council created a new position whereby Iain Orr became the Honorary Parliamentary Adviser for UKOTCF, to follow useful points of contact and developments in UK Parliament. This was an important aspect of requests by members during the review of UKOTCF activities conducted in 2008-9.

Following UKOTCF's seminar in September 2010 on UK Government's UKOTs Biodiversity Strategy (2009), it became clear that, whilst this document was an agreement between three UK Government Departments, it did not include the elements one would normally expect of a strategy. UKOTCF offered to help develop some complementary elements necessary to produce a more complete strategy. UKOTCF therefore convened a half-day workshop in London in June 2011 to make a start on developing objectives for the strategy. Paul Rose, Director of Evidence and Advice at JNCC, gave a presentation highlighting the role they had played in the development of the government's document and how they have been working together with other government departments to meet the challenges it addresses. This was followed by Liz Charter, Principal Biodiversity Officer from the Isle of Man Government, from the perspective of the Crown Dependencies which were not included in the strategy. Finally, Annie Glasspool, formerly of the Bermuda Government and on behalf of Bermuda National Trust, presented the results of discussions held between representatives of the Bermuda National Trust and the Bermudan Government, giving an analysis of how the strategy could be used to form objectives in the UKOTs. UKOTCF has drafted some objectives based on the discussions at the meeting, and on key earlier documents such as the Environment Charters, and has been seeking funding to continue developing the work on modifying and creating strategies related to meeting the Aichi targets, by developing the results of the workshop in discussions with members and associates, as well as other stakeholders.

UKOTCF has used several opportunities to attend meetings in a European Union (EU) context to highlight the UKOTs. These included a meeting of the European Parliament Intergroup on Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development "Island and Overseas Entities contribution to biodiversity conservation and the fight against climate change" which took place in December in Brussels. There were some interesting presentations, especially from the Commission on EU funds available and used by especially French territories inside the EU, but also regarding BEST (see elsewhere), with the representative



Clearance of invasive flax (remaining stand in middle ground) and related management are allowing tree ferns (foreground) and other native species to recover in St Helena. Access to UK Lottery funding would allow a much greater potential for these sort of proven conservation techniques, as well as protection of other natural and cultural heritage in the UKOTs. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

from the Environment Directorate-General (DG ENV) suggesting that it was "a fair and balanced outcome" – others disagreed (see analysis in *Forum News* 39). UKOTCF has subsequently followed up with DG ENV and will continue to work in a EU context where it can. It is encouraging that there will be a second call for BEST proposals in the first half of 2012.

In June, the IUCN UK Committee Peatland Programme published a report on the state of the peatlands in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. The Programme identified the need for technical reviews on key peatland topics to assist a Commission of Inquiry. One topic selected from a consultation was the UKOTs and CDs. A review team gathered information for a consensus on current knowledge and practice and policy needs, and thus working towards conservation action. The report included information supplied by UKOTCF. It was published online and is also available from UKOTCF's website.

Relations with UK Government and Government Agencies

In late September 2011 (see *Forum News* 38 p. 6: Circular on OTEP of 26 September 2011 from FCO and DFID), the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development announced the suspension of their OTEP small grants programme, despite assurances from both present and previous governments that this would continue. This means that, for the first time for some 20 years, there will be no FCO fund to which those working on environmental conservation in the UKOTs can apply – for even the modest funding previously available. This is a remarkably negative achievement by the UK Government, especially in view of the Foreign Secretary's underlining just before the reported year (on 10 March 2011) the Government's ongoing commitment to "cherish the rich environmental assets" of the UKOTs "for which, together, we are responsible." It is all the more extraordinary given that the commitment to OTEP funding was one of the very few specific commitments made in the "UKOTs Biodiversity Strategy", produced in 2009 but endorsed by the present government:

"The UK Government will:

- i. provide project funds for biodiversity conservation and wider environmental management, within the resource limits of each department, aiming to increase the amount of money available to at least £2 million pa. This will be achieved by:



The Pribby (inset) is restricted to Montserrat and is critically endangered because of loss of habitat and feral livestock. Montserrat National Trust's Botanic Gardens has grown a good stock, including this hedge. Development of the Botanic Gardens and other conservation projects here and elsewhere were partly supported by OTEP. UK Government has now discontinued grants from this

programme being available to NGOs, thereby losing a very cost-effective set of potential conservation projects. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

a) maintaining OTEP (which funds some biodiversity projects and some wider environmental projects) with a budget of at least £1million pa”.

Additionally, the small grant which helped UKOTCF fulfil UKG's request (which is still current, without funding – see *Forum News* 38 pp. 13-16) to publicise and disseminate information on OTEP has been cancelled. Furthermore, after two years of prevarication, UKG indicated in 2011 that it would no longer contribute to the UKOTCF-organised 3-yearly conferences, highly valued by conservation practitioners in the UKOTs (see *Forum News* 38 p7). The decisions that have been made leading to the suspension of OTEP have taken place without consultation with NGOs or others – a markedly retrograde step and one which seems to reflect a worrying trend, contrary to the UK Government's “Big Society” philosophy. We understand that the OTEP funding may have been reallocated to other programmes relating to UKOTs but information on this and the process of allocation has been impossible to pin down. It seems that UK Government may be rechanneling any remaining element of this funding towards its own work, rather than allowing UKOTs and others with on-the-ground experience to continue to build and implement their own proposals.

UKOTCF personnel have ensured that UKOTs and CDs were not overlooked in other quarters, using a range of opportunities. These have included: meetings of the Executive Committee of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature UK National Committee (IUCN-UK), on which UKOTCF's Honorary Executive Director serves, and which works in partnership with UKOTCF on UKOT/CD issues; and meetings and events hosted by other organisations. UKOTCF has held informal meetings to brief new Governors, Administrators Designate and their staff prior to taking up post, as and when

UKOTCF was advised of these new appointments, as well as some subsequent follow-up meetings.

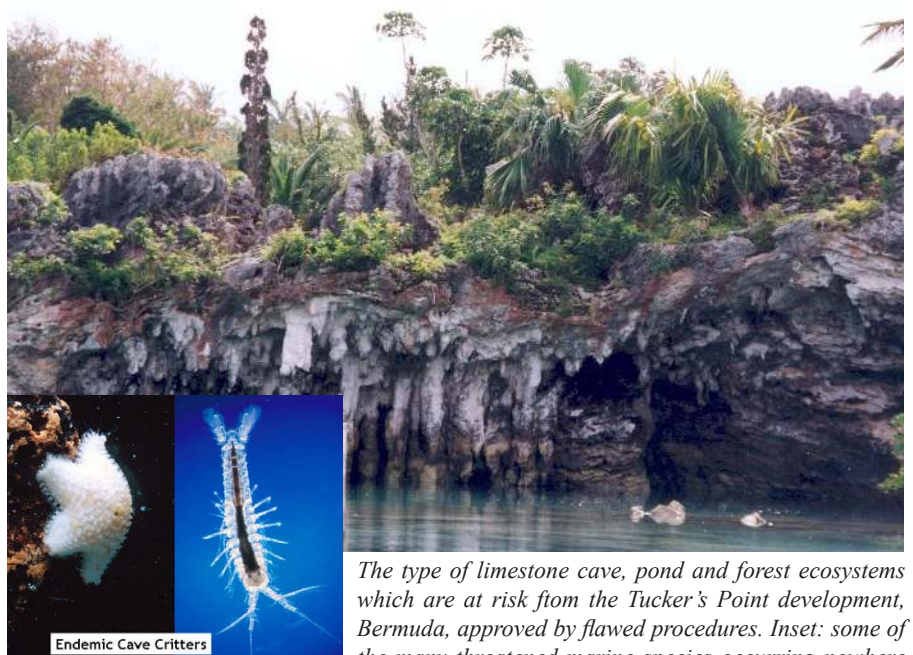
Environment Charter and conservation concerns

UKOTCF has been following the Tucker's Point special development order case in Bermuda, which would allow for development on one of Bermuda's few remaining natural areas. In February 2012, Bermuda's Ombudsman, Arlene Brock, published a report which stated that the Bermudan Government had acted unlawfully by failing to require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) prior to sending the draft Tuckers Point Special Development Order (SDO) to the House of Assembly. This was in conflict with the Environment Charter and other requirements.

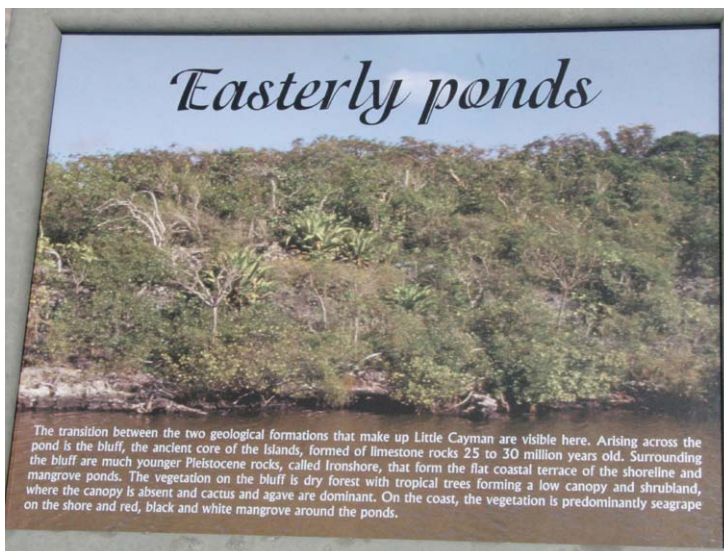
The report analyses past Privy Council decisions, as well as international best practices and standards for public consultation, data gathering and analysis. The report recognises the significance of the Environment Charter, which was signed by the Government of Bermuda and the UK Government in 2001, as more than just a statement of good intentions. It notes also that, whilst there is no annual reporting requirement, several of the other UKOTs voluntarily report on their adherence to the letter and spirit of the UK Charters. In addition to suggesting the concept and facilitating the development of the Charters, UKOTCF compiled a review of progress in implementing them, at the request of UK Government in 2007, and repeated the exercise in 2009. The Ombudsman's report acknowledges that protecting the natural environment in the UKOTs as set out in the Charters is not merely “a national priority but is of international importance”.

The report highlights the importance of – and requirement for – Environmental Impact Assessments, which are considered as international best practice for all development proposals. In Bermuda an EIA would: identify costs of economic activities adversely affecting the environment; guard against approval of unrealistic development; promote transparency and public trust; ensure developments benefit Bermuda as a whole; and promote international best practices.

UKOTCF notes that several of the recommendations from the



The type of limestone cave, pond and forest ecosystems which are at risk from the Tucker's Point development, Bermuda, approved by flawed procedures. Inset: some of the many threatened marine species occurring nowhere else in the world. Photos: Liz Charter; Bermuda conservation bodies



Interpretation sign at Easterly Ponds, Little Cayman, part of one of many proposed Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, identified by UKOTCF in a 2005 report commissioned by UK Government, but still awaiting designation.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

report are significant to other UKOTs.

Another of the Ombudsman's recommendations is to designate further Bermuda sites as Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. In 2005, at the request of UK and UKOT Governments, UKOTCF undertook a review of actual and potential Ramsar sites in the UKOTs; this identified as appropriate for designation several of the sites mentioned in the report. The Ombudsman's report is an important focus, not just for Bermuda, but also for other UKOTs on a number of issues relating to the protection of natural resources in light of pressure from developers. UKOTCF has continued to support member and associate organisations and others in their desire to protect important wetland areas under the Ramsar Convention and will continue to do so.

Projects

Prominent amongst its other activities, the Forum helps its member organisations to identify, design, resource and implement projects, often involving the development of strategic partnerships between member organisations and sometimes others. Other projects in which the Forum is involved provide a co-ordinating role for activities across multiple (sometimes including non-UK) territories. Income generated via projects provides an important source of funding for the Forum, although this relies on Council members and others providing their time to project work free or at well below market rates. Some of the projects operating during the reported year are noted below.

At the request of several territory partners, in the Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands and Turks & Caicos Islands, their governments and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UKOTCF coordinated an application in 2003, *Managing Protected Areas to Support Sustainable Economies* (MPASSE), donating much time in the years since to overcome disproportionately complicated European Commission procedures. It is pleasing that, as reported in *Forum News* (39: 7), the National Trust of the Cayman Islands was able to use funds from the project to purchase a strategic piece of land to extend its Salina Reserve which protects globally threatened tropical dry shrubland and is also key habitat for the Grand Cayman blue iguana.

The project has been granted an extension for two years without additional funds. This will allow the UKOT partners a chance to

complete their work, despite the many delays of the European Commission in approving the grant and the disproportionately bureaucratic procedures that the Commission insists that partners use. The extension will, however, cause some problems for UKOTCF as, unlike the other partners, most of its costs are proportional to the duration of the project. As one way of reducing time and financial costs, at UKOTCF's suggestion, the physical Steering Committee meetings have been reduced from quarterly (as originally required by the Commission) to annual, with the remainder conducted by Skype.

Net-Biome is an EU-sponsored project designed to help coordinate and promote programmes of regional and thematic research for Tropical and Subtropical Biodiversity in the EU's Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries & Territories. It was successful in assembling a fund for biodiversity research in the Overseas Entities of European Union member states which enabled a call for proposals. Successful bids were announced in October. While partners in the United Kingdom are involved in several projects as part of a consortium, unfortunately, UK Government failed to contribute any funding for the call. This meant that UKOT and UK bodies could not be lead partners in bids. UKOT involvement in some of the successful applications is due to the generosity of France, Spain and Portugal and their overseas entities.

The 11th meeting of the Net-Biome Executive Board (EB) was held in Noumea, New Caledonia in November, in parallel with the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) seminar *Oceans at Risk: Protection from the ocean to the coast, sharing marine resources*. UKOTCF Chairman, Dr Chris Tydeman, attended on behalf of UKOTCF, a partner in the project. At the meeting, the EB considered the outcome of the joint call for research proposals, preparation for the final conference, the future of Net-Biome as a network, a communications strategy and the possibility of a second funding call. Net-Biome was an ERA-NET project funded by DG Research of the European Commission, the funding for which extended to February 2012. A final series of meetings, including a conference, was held in Paris in February 2012 to review the operation of the project and to look at the possibility of continuing the partnership without funding from the Commission. There was general agreement that the partners would continue to work together as Net-Biome, although it would no longer be part of the ERA-NET process, as a networking arrangement and look towards establishing and launching a second call for research proposals during 2013.

As previously reported, teachers' workshops were held in Turks and Caicos in February 2011, as part of the OTEP-part-funded *Wonderful Water* project, developed and managed by UKOTCF at the request of TCI Education Department. An outcome of the workshops was that teachers requested materials relating to mangroves. Seven units related to mangroves, and linked to the curriculum framework, were developed and circulated to TCI teachers, the Education Department, and other stakeholders. Feedback on these materials was very positive. A curriculum framework to address sustainable use of water was developed under the theme of *Vital Water*. This theme includes the natural and historical sources of water, current water supply, including desalination, water conservation, and water for agriculture. This theme was the focus of teacher and other stakeholder workshops held in TCI in February 2012. Participants at the workshops were informed by presentations from local experts, and were engaged in developing ideas and practical activities for the *Vital Water* teaching resources.

UKOTCF and its associate organisation, the Turks & Caicos National Museum, opened a walking trail and a driving trail, highlighting the salt-pans (or salinas) of Grand Turk, which are

internationally important for birds, and one of the best places in the world for seeing normally shy water-birds up-close. As well as the official opening, the week of events from 12-15 July included a guided walk for high-school students and their teachers, a guided coach trip on the driven trail, and a film-night with a programme including a short film made in-house by UKOTCF on the birds of the Grand Turk salinas. In addition to the lead and major contributions by UKOTCF and TCNM, implementation of the trails was made possible by a grant from the Carnival/TCInvest/TCI Government Infrastructure Fund and equipment and operators were supplied by Turks & Caicos Utilities.

The volunteer programme which aims to match volunteer skills with the needs of partners in the UKOTs and CDs continues to be developed. In 2012, a student will be assisting UKOTCF associate organisation Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre over the summer, after some funding was obtained for travel and living costs. Updates on this will be published in *Forum News* later in the year. Although no funding has been obtained for the management of the programme, UKOTCF aims to continue pursuing placements and volunteers as and when it is able. This programme is directed by the needs of member and associate organisation in the UKOTs to increase capacity and support their conservation objectives.

Working for our partners

The UK Antarctic Heritage Trust joined as an associate organisation. An article introducing their work appeared in *Forum News* (39: 12). UKAHT focuses on built heritage, rather than natural heritage (but in practice they also look after a quantity of penguins). This gives UKOTCF an associate active in British Antarctic Territory - something that it lacked previously. A profile of the organisation can be found on UKOTCF's website.

UKOTCF recorded, with regret, the death of Professor Tony Atkinson. This led also to the ending of activities by member organisation British Microbial Biodiversity Association. Tony and BMBA had been effective in the study and conservation of several UKOTs, notably a previous threat to the caves of Bermuda and their many endemic species (now in the news again from a newer threat).

UKOTCF has continued to keep members and associates informed of funding opportunities through regular circulations. These included, for example, the European Commission's BEST pilot scheme which was launched in May. Many members supported the proposal by Bioverseas, coordinated by UKOTCF, but unfortunately it was unsuccessful. The application procedure had been very lengthy and could potentially discourage partners in the territories from applying in the future. The second funding call for BEST proposals was announced in March. UKOTCF will continue to keep members and associates informed of the scheme and its plans to submit a proposal on networking in the EU Overseas Territories and Outermost Regions.

UKOTCF has continued to support partners in their project proposals and funding applications (for example: marine protected area management in BIOT and sustainable fisheries in Pitcairn). It also offered expert advice in response to requests from partners including on the designation of the Isle of Man's first marine reserve (see *Forum News* 38: 18 & 20), which will protect extensive horse mussel reef and associated soft corals, maerl beds and kelp forests which support hundreds of other species of animals and plants.

Awareness raising and information management

Forum News 38 was published in October 2011 and *Forum News*

39 in December 2011. As well as reporting on UKOTCF's work, and other issues and activities relevant to conservation in the UKOTs/CDs, these featured reports from Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) projects, under the Forum's past agreement with DFID/FCO to make available information on this important programme. The UKOTCF website, another vehicle for dissemination of information, benefited from a number of enhancements during the year. These improvements will reinforce the website's reputation as a primary source of information on the UKOTs/CDs, Forum partners and relevant environmental issues. This was supported by a report from the Institute of Zoology to Defra in April concluding that the projects database "provides a valuable resource for conservation practitioners in the Overseas Territories".

UKOTCF has also continued to keep its member and associate organisations (and its wider network of contacts) informed of relevant developments, including funding opportunities, consultations and internal activities, through regular e-mail circulations via its eDigest. In addition, in August 2011, the Forum used the British Bird Watching Fair, an event that attracts 30,000 visitors annually, as a platform for raising awareness of the UKOTs and the important biodiversity that they support.

During 2011, Duncan Hutt, who (with his wife Sally) has previously volunteered with the Forum in the botanic garden and historic graveyard mapping for associate organisation, Turks and Caicos National Museum, gave a series of lectures to local wildlife enthusiasts in the northeast of England. UKOTCF supplied some information on the UKOTs which was well received. Duncan kindly donated the funds from his talks to the Forum to continue its work.

Working Groups and wider networks

The activities during the year of the Forum's Southern Oceans, Europe Territories, and Wider Caribbean Working Groups are summarised in subsequent sections of this report.

The signing of a renewed agreement in 2011 of the Bioverseas initiative (see above) has been, in part, assisted by the presence, throughout much of 2011, of Catherine Wensink, Forum Coordinator, as a DCNA volunteer based in Bonaire (while she continued her UKOTCF role), and an increase in activity in Brussels for which UKOTCF has been represented on several occasions by Chairman Dr Chris Tydeman and once by Tony Gent, Executive Director of UKOTCF member Amphibian and Reptile Conservation. Following the unsuccessful application to the EU-BEST Scheme (reported in *Forum News* 39: 8 and see above), UKOTCF hopes to work with its partners in Bioverseas to build a successful bid in the second round.

In January 2012, a reception organised by UKOTCF, kindly hosted by Bill Samuel at Foyles gallery in London, welcomed UK Overseas Territory Association (UKOTA) members: Kimberly



Gray kingbird (as well as human residents and visitors) finds some benefit in the work of Turks & Caicos National Museum and UKOTCF in establishing the bird trails at Grand Turk.
Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski



UKOTCF Council held a reception for UKOT Governments London-based Representatives in January, kindly hosted by Bill Samuel in the Gallery at Foyles Bookshop. From left: Ann Pienkowski (UKOTCF), Bruce Morrissey (Cayman Islands), Janice Panton (Montserrat), Bruce Dinwiddy (UKOTCF), Catherine Wensink (UKOTCF), Kedell Warboys (St Helena), Bill Samuel (UKOTCF), Kedrick Malone (BVI), Kimberly Durrant (Bermuda); others out of view. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Durant, UK Representative Bermuda Government; Kedrick Malone, UK Representative British Virgin Islands Government; Bruce Morrissey, Executive Assistant to Lord Blencathra, Director of the Cayman Islands Government Office; Kedell Worboys, UK Representative St Helena Government; and Janice Panton, UK Representative Montserrat Government. It was an opportunity to meet and strengthen relationships and discuss areas of collaboration.

Organisational development

At the AGM in September 2011, Mike Freeman stood down from Council. UKOTCF is very grateful to Mike for his support and contributions over the years, undoubtedly reaching a magnificent peak in organising the Jersey conference in 2006, but continuing in other contributions, notably on Council. We look forward to Mike's continued involvement via the Europe Territories Working Group. Colin Hindmarch's term on Council also ended at the AGM. Colin contributed to the Net-BIOME project attending meetings with partners over several years. In January 2012, Karen

Varnham stood down from Council and as joint chair SOWG, due to limited time since the birth of her first child whilst completing her PhD at the University of Bristol. Karen has underlined her continuing support for UKOTCF, and her wish to stay involved in UKOT matters, especially if her time availability increases. Officers are exploring with Karen ways of utilizing her kind offer.

Council welcomed its newly elected members, Rob Thomas, of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, and Alison Debney, of the Zoological Society of London. Rob is Conservation and Research Manager for the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, with a particular focus on UK native species and UK Overseas Territories. He has been an active member of the Forum for several years, attending two UKOTCF-organised conferences and was part of the review team in 2008 which carried out a wide-ranging consultation with members and associate organisations to assess their views of the Forum and its work. Alison is the Programme Manager for the Marine & Freshwater Conservation Programme in UK, UKOT & Europe, for the Zoological Society of London. A marine ecologist by training, she is responsible for building and managing a coherent set of conservation projects around the world.

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 encourages others 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 Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Department for International Development, European Union and others. The Forum is grateful also to member organisations and others for allowing meetings to take place at their offices during the year, particularly the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the Zoological Society of London, the St Helena, Falkland Islands and Gibraltar Governments and Foyles Bookshop.

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Summary Statement of Financial Activities (including Income and Expenditure Account) for the year ended 31 March 2012

	2012 Unrestricted Funds	2012 Restricted Funds	2012 Total Funds	2011 Total Funds
Incoming Resources				
Subs and donations	140,000	59,290	199,290	197,940
Investment Income	34	-	34	43
Sundry Incoming Resources	261	-	261	273
Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities				
Project Income	-	160,112	160,112	75,847
Total Incoming Resources	140,295	219,402	359,697	274,103
Resources Expended				
Charitable Activities	142,263	193,566	335,829	275,913
Governance Costs and Other Resources Expended	18,779	1,306	20,085	19,138
Total Resources Expended	161,042	194,872	355,914	295,051
Net incoming/outgoing resources	-20,747	24,530	3,783	-20,948
Balance brought forward at 1st April 2011	63,650	7,984	71,634	92,582
Balance carried forward at 31st March 2012	42,903	32,514	75,417	71,634

Note: Incoming and outgoing resources include donated time of £190,155 (2011: £156,438).

Report of the UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group

This year, ETWG met three times by Skype, thanks to the efficiency and gentle persistence of the Secretary. Numbers attending increased from 6 to 9 participants and the item “rejuvenating the group” dropped off the agenda; also we have two student participants, this being very encouraging and rejuvenating.

On 6-7 October 2011, the Chair of UKOTCF’s Europe Territories Working Group, Liz Charter, attended the Channel Islands Interisland Meeting on behalf of both UKOTCF and the Isle of Man Government. UKOTCF was represented also by Mike Pienkowski, Honorary Executive Director. This is an excellent annual event for exchanging information, sharing knowledge and conservation ideas, and updating on important issues, such as news from the islands – and also this year from neighbouring France. This time, the event was convened by ETWG member John Pinel, Principal Ecologist in Jersey, and held at the Les Creux Bowls Club near St Brelade, Jersey. Representatives attended from all the Channel Islands, as well as from a number of other organisations. Common issues between territories included airport grassland management and loss of species-rich turf, offshore energy and red data books.

Mike’s presentation was directed at stimulating discussion on ways in which UKOTCF may be able further to help Channel Islands partners. Liz was typically multi-tasking: as Principal Biodiversity Officer of the Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture, she spoke on the Island’s Biodiversity Strategy and Aichi Objectives, linking well to UKOTCF’s work in this area. She gave also, on behalf of her colleague Dr Fiona Gell, a marine update, including on the recently designated nature reserve and, on behalf of JNCC, a presentation on their training and research programme.

As a direct result of the presentation by Lindsey Napton from Jersey on their legislation review, Liz Charter organised a legislation workshop on the Isle of Man, funded by JNCC. This proved very worthwhile and was attended by people from Jersey and Guernsey, as well as government ecologists and wildlife crime and bird conservation people from the Isle of Man. The airline made an attempt to derail the event by cancelling the direct flight that morning, but this did not stop three attendees making the journey another way. Sadly, Alderney was more difficult to get away from.

During the year, it was agreed that the ETWG needs to tell people more about European UKOT and CD issues by producing an ETWG e-newsletter. Articles are being written and an issue is expected in the summer 2012.

Jersey

With involvement of Guernsey ecologist Charles David, who has been developing experience in this area, Jersey has undertaken a Phase-1 Habitat Survey to assist in understanding changes in habitat areas and particularly habitat losses. There has also been discussion about setting up a Biological Records system on Jersey, linked with the Guernsey Biological Records Centre.

Guernsey

The revision of the Guernsey Phase-1 Habitat Survey has been successfully completed and the States Government has accepted the cost as reasonable when divided by the years between surveys.

The report on the benthic survey of the Big Russell Channel is now completed. This channel runs between Herm and Sark. Some additional surveys were undertaken off St Martin’s Point, in the

south-east of Guernsey. The depth of water in this area is generally 40-50 metres. It has been identified as a possible location for tidal power.

France has plans to establish a Marine Natural Park in waters adjacent to those of the Channel Islands. The French have had meetings with key people in Guernsey and Jersey regarding the possibility, subject to everyone’s agreement, of extending the Park throughout the whole area, to include Guernsey and Jersey territorial waters. It is understood that this would not prejudice the installation of offshore wind farms or tidal energy technology, and the designation of the waters would potentially lead to quite a lot of studies on the environment and ecology of the area.

Guernsey has completed its Red Data Book.

Alderney

Alderney Wildlife Trust is celebrating its 10th anniversary in 2012. Progress has been made in planting a broadleaved community woodland of 17 hectares, with the aim of linking habitats, adding interest for visitors and improving the islands sustainability. Talks are continuing on the development of tidal power around Alderney.

Isle of Man

The Island continued to wait for the UK’s response to its request to have the Convention on Biological Diversity extended to it. This was requested in February 2011.

In May 2011, senior Government officers of the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture participated in a Biodiversity Strategy workshop, led by Bob Brown from Northern Ireland and organised by the ETWG Chairman. Bob led the biodiversity strategy process in Northern Ireland and provided a valuable perspective for the island.

The ETWG Chairman also went to the Non-native Species Stakeholder meeting in Edinburgh, which was an opportunity to learn from FERA about the latest non-native threats and strategies for handling them.

There were two “bioblitzes” on the Island, one terrestrial and one marine and coastal. This is a concept which is taking off in many places and involves the public in recording as many species as possible within an area in a day.

In September 2011, the marine nature reserve was designated



The Calf of Man, the nature reserve islet off the south of the Isle of Man, looking south to the Chicken Rock lighthouse. Photo: Liz Charter



Left: Gibraltar Minister of Health and Environment, Hon Dr John Cortés, while Acting Chief Minister. Photo: Dr Chris Tydeman
Right: Dr Cortés and some of his staff in the Gibraltar Ministry of Environment meet some of UKOTCF Council in Gibraltar House, London, early in 2012. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski



and by-laws passed for the zoned management of the seabed in Ramsey Bay.

The Marine Spatial Planning project continues with discussion about consenting legislation. Meanwhile, big wind power developments are progressing around the north and east of the island, just outside Manx waters.

Gibraltar

Long-standing General Secretary of the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) and Council Member of the UKOTCF, Dr John Cortés, was recently elected to Government in Gibraltar. John had never previously stood for election and this is his first experience in Parliament. He stood as a candidate for the Gibraltar Socialist Labour Party (GSLP), which forms part of the GSLP/Gibraltar Liberal Party Alliance government. He did extremely well in what was an incredibly close election, and received the second most votes out of the thirty candidates who stood for election, only seventy-five votes fewer than Gibraltar's new Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo. Following the election on 8 December 2011, Dr Cortés was appointed Minister for Health and the Environment by the Chief Minister, and now heads two important and interlinked ministries. The reaction from those in Gibraltar with biological interests and environmental concerns has, of course, been positive and there are strong expectations that John will address many of Gibraltar's environmental problems and conservation issues effectively.

Following John Cortés' resignation as a result of his move into politics, Charles Perez was elected as the new General Secretary

of GONHS. Charlie has long been involved in the study and conservation of Gibraltar's wildlife and has contributed numerous publications including *Upper Rock Nature Reserve. A Management and Action Plan* and *Gibraltar's Biodiversity Action Plan*. It was therefore no surprise that he was enthusiastically nominated and appointed General Secretary.

A management and action plan for the Upper Rock Nature Reserve that was written by Charles Perez and Keith Bensusan on behalf of GONHS was recently made available to the public, both as a hard copy and online. This had been prepared for the Government of Gibraltar in 2005, but the Government was slow to implement most of the recommendations and did not release the document into the public domain until a new Government was elected in December 2011. Although now seven years old, most of the management plan is still very relevant, and the Government has stated that it will study the document closely as it develops its own action plan for the nature reserve.

The report can be downloaded as a pdf from: <http://www.gonhs.org/documents/UpperRockNatureReserveManagementActionPlan.pdf>

Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas

The illegal trapping of migrating birds is an on-going concern. There has been correspondence between ETWG, Michael Gore (a past Council member of UKOTCF) and Lilian Hayball Clarke (until recently on Cayman), discussing how UKOTCF can further encourage the Ministry of Defence in the SBAs, to address this crime.

Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

The Wider Caribbean Working Group (WCWG) met four times during the year, including an extra meeting held during the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB) conference in the Bahamas in July. This gave an opportunity for partners and colleagues based in the Caribbean to take part in person. Skype continues to provide opportunities for wider participation, and two of the meetings were conducted entirely via Skype. Three issues of the WCWG eNewsletter were produced and circulated.

Throughout the year, WCWG worked with partners to raise public awareness about development issues. It is encouraging to report some positive outcomes in Bermuda and Cayman. The need for effective and clear environmental legislation has been seen in several instances, as shown by the decision that the fisheries protected area legislation in BVI was not legally binding.

The Bermuda Ombudsman's report, and the continuing confusion over the BVI Beef Island development, highlight the need for independent and open Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs)

at an early stage in the production of a development proposal. Having effective EIAs available then would give developers the information they need to build in environmental mitigation measures, and avoid later delays and objections.

In these challenging times, WCWG has supported and collaborated on funding applications with several partners, with some inevitable disappointments, some hopeful signs and some welcome successes. The last includes partnering with the Turks and Caicos National Museum finally to secure funding to implement the bird-watching trails on Grand Turk.

The part-EU funded *Management of Protected Areas to Support Sustainable Economies* (MPASSE) project, involving UKOTCF, Cayman, British Virgin Islands and Turks & Caicos, continues to throw up challenges for all partners, but some positive outcomes are starting to become apparent. For example, the Cayman Blue Iguana Recovery Programme was able to use the EU funds to purchase land to increase greatly the area available for released iguanas.



Joseph Smith Abbott, Executive Director of the National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, explains some of the issues and opportunities for protected sites in BVI, to other members of the Project Steering Committee of the EU-supported project on Management of Protected Areas to Support Sustainable Economies, in which UKOTCF partners with NPTVI and bodies in the Cayman Islands and Turks & Caicos Islands.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

UKOTCF's reception for UK Overseas Territories Government representatives held in January provided a welcome opportunity for informal discussions, and the chance to get to know new post-holders.

Anguilla

With invasive species being one of the major threats throughout the Caribbean, and eradication programmes very expensive, WCWG was delighted to receive updates throughout the year of the rat eradication programme on Dog Island. Latest news is that the eradication activities in March 2012 were successful, with over two weeks of immediate follow-up monitoring finding no sign of rat activity.

Despite high oil prices, and associated transport costs, many Caribbean UKOTs still rely solely on imported fossil fuels for electricity generation, and seem somewhat reluctant to move towards making more use of renewable energy. This is puzzling when the Caribbean has abundant sunshine, and benefits from the trade-winds. WCWG were pleased, therefore, to publicise the Anguilla Renewable Energy project, with its ambitious 10-year plan to make Anguilla energy independent. This project provides an interesting model for other Caribbean UKOTs.

Bermuda

The controversial granting of a Special Development Order (SDO) for Tucker's Point, and subsequent campaigns to counter this, have been reported on the UKOTCF website and in WCWG eNewsletters, and discussed at WCWG meetings. The latest significant development, in February 2012, was the finding by the Ombudsman for Bermuda that Government had acted unlawfully by failing to require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) prior to sending the draft Tucker's Point SDO to the legislature. The Ombudsman's report focussed on the obligation to conduct EIAs for development proposals that are "major" or "likely to have significant adverse effect on the environment". This obligation was established by Bermuda's signature in 2001 to the Environment Charter with UK Government, Privy Council decisions (binding on Bermuda) and international conventions. The finding potentially has consequences for all UKOTs.

Several other positive environment and conservation reports from

Bermuda include the passing of the Protected Species Amendment Act 2011 in January 2012. This safeguards many plants and animals, including turtle grass, mangroves, cave shrimps and diamond-back terrapins. Under the Act, it is a criminal offence punishable by imprisonment to interfere, disturb, damage or destroy any of the 82 species listed in the legislation. Another is the great news that the number of nesting pairs of the endemic cahow has reached 101. Previously thought to be extinct, 18 pairs were discovered in 1951, since when an intensive recovery programme has been undertaken. The amazing recovery demonstrates what can be achieved through well-planned long-term programmes carried out by dedicated people.

British Virgin Islands

In May 2011, the third Project Steering Committee meeting of the part-EU funded MPASSE project was held in BVI. Important elements of this meeting were visits to sites involved in the project, namely Copper Mine, Gorda Peak and the Baths on Virgin Gorda, and Sage Mountain on Tortola, so that issues and challenges could be seen at first hand, and subsequent discussions made much more meaningful. A visit by Chris Tydeman and Mike Pienkowski in January 2012 enabled follow-up discussions and further site visits, including one to Anegada, the other MPASSE site. This was Chris's first visit to BVI, and useful meetings were held with other stakeholders, including the Governor and personnel from the Conservation and Fisheries Department.

The National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands celebrated its 50th Anniversary in November 2011. Events included Arbour Day, celebrated by the Trust since it was established in 1961, under the leadership of its first Chairman Mr Joseph R. O'Neal.

In May 2011, Mike Pienkowski and Ann Pienkowski (Honorary Environmental Education Co-ordinator and WCWG Secretary) visited Jost Van Dyke for site visits and discussions with Jost Van Dykes Preservation Society (JVDPS - an associate of UKOTCF). JVDPS and NPTVI share a board member and face many similar challenges, so it was valuable to discuss work being undertaken by partners in the MPASSE project which could inform JVDPS, and vice-versa. Both bodies are concerned to undertake developments which take account of environmental issues and with minimal impact on the environment. Sharing experiences in this way makes a valuable contribution to the development of best-practice guidelines being undertaken as part of the MPASSE project.

The proposed development of Beef Island, which had been stopped by a court judgement, was put back on the agenda when the Court of Appeal ruled that legislation for protected areas under the Fisheries legislation (rather than the National Parks legislation) was not legally binding. This aptly demonstrates the need for clear legislation. Since this appeal decision, the developer has apparently revised the master plan to postpone the construction of a golf course to future phases and to eliminate golf from around or near to Hans Creek. The revised master plan also includes greater buffers between residential developments and Hans Creek.

Cayman Islands

The MPASSE project, previously mentioned, has enabled the National Trust for the Cayman Islands to purchase privately-owned land within the existing Salina Reserve. This acquisition increases the habitat available for the blue iguanas.

The Wider Caribbean Working Group, at the request of a local community group (Protect South Sound), assisted with raising public awareness about a development proposal, one part of which would impact on the designated marine replenishment area of South Sound, and likely increase flood risk. It is good to report

that, to date, this aspect of the development has been halted.

It is 25 years since the Cayman Islands established their marine protected areas (MPAs). The three-year Darwin Initiative project (developed after discussions at the UKOTCF-organised *Making the Right Connections* conference in Cayman in 2009), reviewing the MPAs and conducting scientific surveys, has one more year to go. A key element is public involvement and community and stakeholder feedback.

There is, unfortunately, still no news about progress on passing the proposed Conservation Law, despite overwhelming public support for this.

Montserrat

The continuing development of the Montserrat National Trust's Botanic Garden has been a major undertaking over many years. Water management has been an ongoing issue, and UKOTCF is pleased to have secured some funds to enable the Trust to do more work on water management in the Garden.

Ground-breaking for the National Museum in the new capital at Little Bay marked a new home for artefacts which have been in storage since volcanic activity caused the abandonment of the old museum. The new Museum was opened officially by the Earl and Countess of Wessex in March 2012. The National Trust, the managers, have already installed several displays, including one about the cotton era on Montserrat. UKOTCF is assisting with consultations about permanent exhibits.

Chris Tydeman and Mike Pienkowski visited Montserrat in early February 2012. Useful meetings and discussions were held with a number of key stakeholders, including the Governor and Deputy Governor, Environment Minister, Director of Environment, and the Council and staff of the National Trust. It was very pleasing to learn that projects to address two major environmental issues in Montserrat, the recovery of the mountain chicken and the control of feral livestock, were going well.

Turks and Caicos Islands

This has been another challenging year for the Turks and Caicos Islands, with implementation of budget cuts, and major re-organisation of government and departments. Despite this, partners in TCI have been able to make significant progress on a number of conservation and environmental projects. Mike Pienkowski and

The bird trails at Grand Turk developed by UKOTCF and the Turks & Caicos National Museum were opened in 2011, and have already helped lead to increased protection for some of the salt-pans

internationally important for birds. From left: Neil Saxton fixes one of the trail markers, built from recycled power poles destroyed by Hurricane Ike. High school students test the walking trail. A view from the trails, including great and snowy egrets, tricolored herons, black-necked stilts and sandpipers. Normally shy water-birds are very approachable here, but the flamingos may need to learn about traffic. Visitors and residents try out the driven trail. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski



NW Montserrat. There are local concerns that the redevelopment originally planned for Little Bay (middle ground) will now spread to destroy important heritage sites in Carr's Bay (foreground). Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski



Environmental Education Co-ordinator Ann Pienkowski visited TCI three times during the year, and had positive meetings and discussions with partners and stakeholders, including the Turks and Caicos National Museum, Turks and Caicos Reef Fund, Department of Environment and Coastal Resources, Department of Education, eco-tour businesses Big Blue Unlimited and Salt Cay Divers, TCInvest, the Governor, Chief Executive, Permanent Secretaries Finance and Environment, and the Financial and Administrative Assistant for the MPASSE project. The visits were used also to develop project ideas and project proposals with partners and stakeholders.

In May 2011 UKOTCF, supported by Big Blue Unlimited and Salt Cay Divers, repeated its survey of the important seabird breeding areas on the outer cays, the previous survey having been conducted nine years before. Initial findings are that the numbers of breeding seabirds are broadly similar.

The part-OTEP funded *Wonderful Water* environmental education curriculum development project, managed by UKOTCF in partnership with the Department of Education, reached the end of Phase One, with successful workshops for teachers in February 2012.

The Bird Watching Trails on Grand Turk, developed by UKOTCF and implemented with UKOTCF Associate the Turks and Caicos National Museum, were opened officially in July 2011.

UKOTCF Associate the Turks and Caicos Reef Fund completed the restoration of a snorkel trail in December 2011, and held a very successful fund-raising event in February 2012.



Report of UKOTCF Southern Oceans Working Group

The group met three times during the year. In one of these meetings, arrangements were made to link up with three representatives from Tristan da Cunha, to enable them to participate by telephone and contribute to discussions. Chris Bates, UK Representative, Sean Burns, Administrator, and Trevor Glass, Conservation Officer, gave updates on matters relating to conservation on Tristan and were very interested to hear about activities in the other territories as well as other matters such as funding. As this worked very well, the group hopes to link up with other territory representatives in future meetings.

British Antarctic Territory

New associate member, UK Antarctic Heritage Trust, provides UKOTCF with a member active in British Antarctic Territory. Contributions from them are being welcomed for forthcoming meetings.

BAT is one of the only UK territories for which all native vascular plants (in this case admittedly only two species, Antarctic hair grass and Antarctic pearlwort) are held in the Millennium Seed Bank at member organisation Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. There is scope for investigating the lower plant species, which is being explored. BAT is one of the UKOTs where climate change is already having an impact in the form of habitat changes.

South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands

The South Georgia Heritage Trust team completed the first stage of their rodent eradication project in 2011. Given that the impact of climate change is likely to open up new areas to rodents (and increase the size of the unglaciated “islands”) as the glacial natural barriers retreat, this project faces a race against time. The team returned in the 2011-2 season to undertake monitoring work and review their techniques, before completing the eradication in the following years. The South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands Government have taken the welcome decision to remove the introduced reindeer population. The method and timing of this are still being explored.

A recent study conducted by a team of scientists from the British Antarctic Survey discovered extremely biodiversity rich waters around South Georgia (see *Forum News* 38: 17).

Falkland Islands

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBGK) project with Falklands Conservation and local business, Stanley Growers and Nurseries,



Antarctic Peninsula: Gentoo penguins display and nest in colonies around the historic Port Lockroy Station, now managed by UKOTCF new Associate, UK Antarctic Heritage Trust. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

is now selling plants grown from the native plant nursery. The Millennium Seed Bank provided seeds for production and more for restoration work. Seeds collected in the Falklands have been used to create a native plants display at Kew after being cultivated by the team. There is now a good collection of UKOT plants on display, providing an opportunity to raise awareness of UKOTs generally.

During a recent trip to the Falklands, UKOTCF officers met Falkland Islands Government Environment Officer, Nick Rendell (as well as with Falklands Conservation, the Government of SGSSI, and the Governor). The Falklands Government is moving towards a revision of its biodiversity strategy and action planning, and a workshop was being planned for March 2012.

British Indian Ocean Territory

Several meetings and discussions took place during the year on the scientific discoveries in, and management of, the marine protected area (MPA) created in 2010, including: a one-day conference on the future of Chagos, held at the Royal Geographic Society, London, in May, and a meeting focusing on scientific research over the last decade in the Chagos at the Linnean Society in November.

UKOTCF associate organisation, the Chagos Conservation Trust, is a member of the Chagos Environment Network (CEN). Towards the end of the year, CEN met with Henry Bellingham, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at FCO, to discuss several issues relating to the Chagos MPA.

Some Chagossians were able to return to assist with some management of the environment, particularly at Barton Point, Diego Garcia, to clear vegetation and maintain the cemetery. This was supported by FCO and was complementary to the monitoring carried out on Diego Garcia by Major Peter Carr, a member of the CCT executive committee.

Tristan da Cunha

Continuing to address the impacts on the local economy and wildlife of the bulk carrier, containing soya beans, which ran aground in 2011 (*Annual Report* 2010-11: p. 11), has been a priority for the Tristan Conservation Department. The Tristan Administration remains in discussions with the ship's insurers. The insurers say that they are committed to providing equipment for detailed surveys of the site and expert advice. It has been reported that the marine environment around the island is in a good condition but the sustainability of Tristan's economy is of great concern. Understanding the impact on juvenile lobster and recruitment may not be apparent for many years. The Tristan da Cunha Association website provided a diary of the cleanup operation and continues to posts updates.

Links between the Scottish Government and the Tristan islanders are being fostered through the working group; particularly through Chairman, Rob Thomas of Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, based in Edinburgh.

Ascension

Conservation Quarterly, the regular newsletter from Ascension's Conservation Department, continues to provide an excellent account of project activities, programmes and organisational developments. It has been circulated to working group members throughout the year.

The rediscovered parsley fern plants are growing well at RBGK. The team that brought the plants to the UK had collected specimens from their precarious position on the hillside on Ascension and transported them to Kew's team within 24 hours, a remarkable achievement. Several healthy individuals are now growing in the Prince of Wales conservatory. The team had made some interesting discoveries about the fern's biology, and hopes to publish findings in a paper later in 2012.

St Helena

An Environmental Impact Assessment Report, Environmental Management Plan and Conservation Management Plan were produced prior to signing of the contracts on the new airport. These were made widely available to the public and a consultation was undertaken. The contractor, Basil Read, was awarded the contract. Many local people have been employed but more labourers are needed from outside. Local residents had been supportive of all the measures put in place to consider the environment. However, unregulated development associated with the air access is of concern. Regulation of this would need to ensure that private sector developers submit Environment Impact Assessments (EIAs).

The Environmental Management Directorate (EMD) has been formed within the St Helena Government (SHG), to bring together and enhance all environmental functions. There are three divisions within the EMD: the Environmental Advocacy and Assessment Division (EAAD), promoting sustainable environmental management through policy, regulation, education, participation and planning; the Nature Conservation Division (NCD), for the conservation and sustainable management of terrestrial, marine and freshwater biodiversity; and a third division focussing on Environmental Risk Management.

The JNCC Blue Turtle Award for 2011 was presented to the Millennium Forest project (managed by St Helena National Trust, St Helena Nature Conservation Group and the Conservation Section of the Government's Agriculture and Natural Resources Department). A reception was held at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association rooms in Westminster Hall, hosted and funded by the St Helena Government. The event was attended by Bob Russell MP, Chair of the St Helena All Party Parliamentary Group and a strong supporter of the project, and Andrew Rosindell MP, Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Overseas Territories.

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Membership

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

Amphibian & Reptile Conservation; 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 Archaeological & Historical Society; Anguilla National Trust; Ascension Conservation Centre; Ascension Heritage Society; Bermuda Audubon Society; Bermuda National Trust; UK Antarctic Heritage Trust; National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, BVI; Jost van Dykes Preservation Society, BVI; 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 Guernesiaise; Société Jersiaise, National Trust for Jersey; Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture; Montserrat National Trust; Pitcairn Natural Resources Division; St Helena National Trust; La Société Sercquaise; South Georgia Association; National Trust of the Turks & Caicos Islands; Turks & Caicos National Museum; Turks & Caicos Reef Fund.

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St Helena's ground-breaking Millennium Forest is re-establishing the previously threatened gumwood tree, one of the many species found only on St Helena. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Pitcairn

In association with UKOTCF associate organisation, the Pitcairn Natural Resources Division, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) formed a partnership with several island restoration projects to share equipment and expertise in several Pacific islands. In May 2011, the *MV Aquila*, was loaded with two helicopters in Seattle, USA, before embarking on a 27,000 km mission to rid islands of rodents. Calling at Palmyra Atoll (USA), the Phoenix Islands Protected Area (PIPA, Kiribati) and then Henderson Island (Pitcairn group). The team aimed to restore seabird habitat by removing the introduced rats, which predate endangered seabird chicks. An aviculturalist from UKOTCF member organisation, Royal Zoological Society Scotland, joined the team to manage a captive population of the flightless Henderson rails. Monitoring will take place in subsequent years to determine the long-term success of the project.

The Pew Environment Group is investigating the possibility of a

Amongst the areas which are proposed Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention are Ducie, Oeno and Henderson Islands in the Pitcairn Group. Ducie Island (pictured) is a very remote low atoll, three days sail east from Pitcairn itself, and further from Easter Island more to the east. The islands are extremely important for marine life, several species of ground-nesting petrel (bottom right), other breeding seabirds such as species of boobies and noddies (top right), and migratory shorebirds, such as bristle-thighed curlews (top left), which breed in Alaska and make some of the world's longest continuous migratory flights.

Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski



marine protected area around Pitcairn as part of its Global Legacy Programme. At present, Henderson is the only internationally designated protected area in the Pitcairn islands, as a World Heritage Site. A report by UKOTCF in 2005 recommended that Ducie and Oeno should be designated as Ramsar sites. Since UKOTCF visited Pitcairn at the start of 2010, the Natural Resources Department (a UKOTCF associate organisation) had requested information and advice on the potential for designating the atolls Ducie and Oeno (and Henderson) as Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance. Further information has been collected by UKOTCF and sent to them and it is hoped that that designation can soon be progressed.

As part of a Darwin Challenge Fund project (which UKOTCF supported), *Developing a community-led marine management action plan for the Pitcairn Islands* led by Professor Terry Dawson, Dundee University, a visit to Pitcairn Island in September discovered a new freshwater species on the island – a prawn, which was unusual given that the freshwater sources on the island are limited and often temporary. Dr Daisy Wowor, researcher and curator from Puslit Biologi (Research Centre of Biology), LIPI, Indonesia identified the new species, with assistance from Dr Paul Clark of the Natural History Museum of London. The full Darwin project had proposed to set up a lobster hatchery and establish a qualified scuba diving facility on Pitcairn Island; unfortunately, this bid was unsuccessful.

Cross-Territory activities/projects

A preliminary assessment of the impact of non-native invertebrates and plants on each of the South Atlantic UKOTs has been undertaken as part of the DEFRA-funded CABI project on *Understanding and addressing the impact of invasive non-native species in the UK Overseas Territories in the South Atlantic: A review of the potential for biocontrol*. A stakeholder questionnaire has been completed and project managers visited the Falklands at the beginning of April 2012 to assess priorities for (and attitudes to) biocontrol, and to meet with relevant stakeholders.

