



UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Annual Report April 2017 - March 2018

Report of Council

Overview

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum promotes awareness of, 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. During the year, its small team has continued to fulfil a wide variety of roles in support of the tireless work of conservation bodies in the UKOTs. It seeks to identify new streams of income and further resources to ensure that this support continues.

While it continues to provide advice, information, help and background on a variety of matters relating to the UK Overseas Territories, this year most time has been spent on the delivery of three

projects; Montserrat's *Maximising long-term survival prospects of Montserrat's endemic species and ecosystem-services*; the second and third meetings of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council; and the website re-development.

The Montserrat project has made good progress throughout the year. Cabinet papers are under preparation in order to take forward recommendations of the *pro-bono* experts in integrating environment further into physical planning; a major target has been reached by wide stakeholder agreement, with ministerial support, on a vision for the future of the restricted-access, southern two-thirds of the island, centring on nature conservation; in just over its first year of operation, about 75 acres are being actively managed by removing rubbish, removing invasive species and planting native species through the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* initiative – this involves so far 11 teams, involving about 100 participants, with more teams discussing joining; 23 native species are being cultivated for use in these and other sites (reduced from a planned 30 species due to



One of the Adopt a Home for Wildlife sites. Above: The Cork Hill and MNT/UKOTCF teams view the area already cleared of invasives and discuss the challenge, as illustrated below: domestic gardens densely overgrown with invasive black berry, and a close-up of the the fruit – which is useful but only if the bushes are managed in gardens and not abandoned. Photos: (above) Catherine Wensink and (below) Dr Mike Pienkowski



Adopt a Home for Wildlife includes also effective coastal and marine conservation, with Montserrat Island Dive Centre pulling in many volunteers on the beach (above right) and under water (below right). Photos: Montserrat Island Dive Centre





Part of the view from the newly accessible vantage point in Tim Orton's Adopt a Home for Wildlife site at Garibaldi Hill, where it is ready for planting of native species from the MNT nursery.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

seed-loss in the severe hurricanes of September 2017, but the number will continue to increase progressively with the increased nursery capacity resulting from the programme); 330 school children are learning about propagation and other conservation matters in a continuing programme; 1 invertebrate species new to science has been described, important for its function in pest control, and several others are expected amongst the many newly found on Montserrat; one potentially invasive reptile has been identified which could have an impact on native species; a new database and portal have been constructed to make data on beetles, and potentially other taxa, widely available; 1 island-wide habitat map has been produced; at least 1% of the whole population has been educated about the importance of invertebrates to the ecosystem, with social media post reaching over 4000 (equivalent almost to total population); 5 extended Montserrat Radio broadcasts have been made; and many discussions held on importance of long-term funding mechanism for conservation on the island.

The second and third meetings of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council took place in April 2017 on Alderney and February 2018 in the Isle of Man. The Forum has provided secretariat support which brings several advantages, including that it ensures continuity between meetings, and as it has a clear understanding of some of the issues being discussed because of its on-going involvement with the UKOTs. Some very good coverage on the BBC Radio 4's Today programme was achieved following the Alderney meeting and the support for the meeting continues, as mentioned in the Joint Ministerial Communiqué in 2016 and 2017.

For the past year, UKOTCF personnel have been involved in the design and populating of a new website. This has been helped by a grant funding some of the work at the new platform, which will



Dr Justin Runyon working on his collections during his visit to Montserrat in the trip led by Dr Mike Ivie, Montana State University. Photos: Catherine Wensink



Young broom palms *Coccothrinax barbabensis* growing at MNT's native plant nursery. Photo: Catherine Wensink

be using, and by much advice from the existing long-standing web-designer. It aims to use all the information contained in the old site, while making use of new additional functions. It is designed for use by mobile smart phones and tablets (now the main media for web-access by many people), as well as by computers, and makes use of the Forum's extensive catalogue of images and other media. It is anticipated that this will be live early in the next financial year.

Projects and other in-territory help to our partners

During the last 30 years, the Forum has always tried to run on-the-ground projects jointly with its partners, in order to understand some of the key challenges of implementing projects in the UKOTs, but also to try and effect positive change directly, so as to protect biodiversity and fragile environments in the UKOTs. Whilst most of our work is carried out in inhabited UKOTs, we try to keep informed of as many of the on-going projects throughout the UKOTs as we can.

The joint project with the Montserrat National Trust, part-funded by the Darwin Initiative and titled: *Maximising long-term survival prospects of Montserrat's endemic species and ecosystem-services*, began its second year in April and the grant-support ended in March. The project involves several other partners: the Government of Montserrat, Montana State University and Treweek Environmental Consultants (working *pro bono*). The rationale of the project is to enhance the prospects of survival of Montserrat's endemic and other rare wildlife by the most ecologically sound method of maximising habitat range. It looks also to strengthen management capacity in conservation bodies. To do this, it has several more specific aims, including: to strengthen effective incorporation of environmental aspects into physical planning, and building local capacity on this; increase conservation efforts, especially by the local community; and enhancing the availability for local use of biological data already collected, as well as stimulating interest by residents and visitors in collecting more; and working with all stakeholders to examine the opportunities and challenges of making more use of the two-thirds of the island with access restrictions due to volcanic activity. Whilst there were many components to this project, it was designed taking into account the needs of the conservation bodies on island, as identified by them and to link earlier work by others to make more available for conservation. Coordination of all of these activities is something the Forum has long been used to. While not easy to do, UKOTCF rarely shies away from a challenge.

The first-year technical and financial reports on this project were completed and sent the Darwin Plus Secretariat in advance of the deadlines at the end of April and May. A report by a Darwin-Plus appointed reviewer of the Annual Report was received several months later. Whilst the project report was accepted, the review included a number of comments, which asked the Forum to address in the second half-year report. They included some changes to the logical frame-work and time-schedule to enable them better to evaluate the project. This was done in discussion with project partners. The half-year report, with this material, was sent to the Darwin Plus Secretariat in advance of the deadline at the end of October, and accepted.

The Project Officer, Nicolas Tirard, and his wife Ravo (also working for the Montserrat National Trust), visited the UK to meet with UKOTCF,



(From left:) Hon. Claude Hogan MLA, Dr Mike Pienkowski and Hon. Minister David Osborne at the workshop, with the Vision summary statement being finalised in the background

Royal Botanic Garden, Kew (RBGK) and RSPB in mid-May. This afforded Nicolas with an opportunity to meet with specialist in propagation at RBGK and seek advice which has been used back in the plant nursery on Montserrat.

The Forum team made three visits to the island in 2017-18. An extensive programme of work was carried out on each visit in coordination with the Montserrat National Trust's Nicolas Tirard, in addition to the great deal of work done remotely and coordinated by email and Skype.

The first visit took place between 15th June and 5th July. As ever, this was a packed trip. Activities included: a third workshop on the future of the south (informed by some satellite imagery and remote sensing work with a grant from the DigitalGlobe Foundation to Montana State University submitted by UKOTCF); a visit from the team partners from Montana State University to deliver a training course on the online portal in order to access invertebrate species data, a lecture on invertebrates, additional collections and some community outreach (radio etc.); UKOTCF visiting also some of the 'adopters' participating in the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* initiative; and UKOTCF and MNT meeting with the Government of Montserrat on implementing recommendations from the report by the *pro bono* consultants, Treweek Environmental Consultants, on effective integrating of environmental aspects into physical planning. The report on the last aspect has been published, following consultation with those contributing and the Government of Montserrat. Material to incorporate



Some of the participants in the 4th workshop on the future of the south of Montserrat, those facing (from the left) being: Mrs Carole Osborne, James 'Scriber' Daley and Roland Irish (Cork Hill Reunion Committee); those looking away: Mrs Rosetta West-Gerald (Tourism) and Sheldon Martin (Royal Montserrat Police Force). Photo: Catherine Wensink



School students and their MNT tutors at MNT's Botanic Gardens, December 2015. Photo: Montserrat National Trust

in cabinet papers has been prepared as requested.

After returning to the UK, various articles were written as part of dissemination of project results. Seedball published an article on endemic invertebrate species online (seedball.co.uk). This is a UK company selling seed-balls to encourage growth of wildflowers for pollinators. The link to the blog was shared with their Twitter followers (over 30k). An article was submitted to the Darwin Plus newsletter, which was shared with their network and Twitter followers (over 4k).

The second trip took place in the first few weeks of November. Activities included a fourth workshop on the future of the south where a vision was agreed, with facilitation assistance by former environment Minister Claude Hogan (still a Member of Legislative Council), collaborating with new Minister for Environment, David Osborne (who had also attended the Ministers meeting in the Isle of Man). He had been very encouraging of the work done by UKOTCF and partners and welcomed the opportunity to put forward the cabinet paper (currently being prepared) on effective integrating of environmental aspects into physical planning (see below). Other activities in the November mission included: site visits to new 'adopters' participating in the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* initiative and reviewing progress of those already signed-up; reviewing some of the work done in the native plant nursery; an aerial tour of the south as an initial review of the area; meeting with local partners to review progress in implementing recommendations from the *pro bono* consultants on effective integrating of environmental aspects into physical planning; and advice to and involvement in mapping exercise currently being undertaken by Environment Systems, funded by JNCC and building on the project's work.

A further brief visit was made in late March, to facilitate actions by Government and others to implement project recommendations, and plan the best prospects for continuity for the momentum built up on conservation activities, despite the lack of UK Government funding in the immediate future.

During the year, the 4th, 5th and 6th newsletters of *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* outlining all the project activities in more detail were published online (<http://www.ukotcf.org/WGnewsletterlist/WGNewsletterslinks.pdf>). Positive feedback has been received from those who have received the newsletter, particularly those on island.

Sadly, a new proposal (to take work forward after the end of the current project) submitted to the Darwin Plus was unsuccessful. Partners have been informed about the decision and work continues to seek funds from elsewhere including the John Ellerman Trust. The project partners will strive to build on the progress achieved despite the lack of continuity in funding (see <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/appeal/supporting-vital-nature-conservation-on-montserrat-through-community-engagement>).

UKOTCF has facilitated additional conservation work for Montserrat, generally very complementary to the main project. This has included: support for MNT in raising EU funding for a native plant nursery to support *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*; assistance to JNCC contractors on ground-truthing satellite imagery; and securing funding for a badly needed replacement vehicle for MNT.

Another of the priority projects for this year has been the redesign of the website. As a show-window to the organisation, and given little modernisation (other than updating and extending contents) has been possible in the last decade, due to few resources, it was welcome news that the Transform Foundation were offering grants of £18k in-kind support to charities for website redevelopment. Transform's technology partner, RaisingIT, are retained to work with charities for the redesign process. In 2017, work began on a new design. Personnel attended a strategy seminar at RaisingIT in July. They then worked with a web-designer in August to complete the basic site design.

The next phase involves populating the content. Training on how to populate content was received and a plan of how the work was divided was developed. The new website will be made live when access to all the material available on the existing site has been organised, as well as some of the new information. The old site is being retained. This is because some modules will still be better on there (but they will be accessed by the new web-site, so that a user will not need to know the location) and to provide an archive. It is hoped the new site will be active early in the new financial year. At that time, links will appear on the old site.

Gratitude must be expressed to the designer and long-term manager of that site, John Wheeler (now essentially retired), for continuing to do this, on a partly voluntary basis, as well as encouraging and advising on the transfer.

Environment Charter and conservation concerns

Working group newsletters have proved a good way to monitor challenges and innovative ways of dealing with these. Some of these are highlighted here.

As reported in *Forum News* 47, in early September, Irma became the most powerful hurricane in the Caribbean region, since records began. Early predictions indicated hurricane-strength impacts as far south as Dominica, including Montserrat. In Montserrat, full hurricane battering down was implemented and telecommunications shut down to minimise damage. Fortunately, however, the storm turned slightly to the north, so that Montserrat suffered only tropical-storm strength winds from Irma, temporary communications loss and a few days spent on packing and unpacking houses and equipment. However, elsewhere, Irma caused widespread damage to infrastructure, homes, and businesses in the Caribbean, including several UKOTs: Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. At its peak, wind speeds reached 185mph. According to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), it maintained these speeds for a record 37 hours, which could explain why the impact was so severe. The wind speeds were even greater than the 167mph of Hurricane Ivan, which hit the Cayman Islands in 2004.

A state of emergency was declared in all of the UKOTs with worries about basic human needs and security. While the UKOTs prepare as best they can for the hurricane season, Hurricane Irma, a category 5 storm, has wiped out many coastal communities because of its sheer force. Many homes – even some built to the latest US hurricane specifications – throughout the islands were damaged and many were left without roofs, power or clean water. The cost of the clean-up – and time needed – will be significant, especially to those, which were already on low incomes.

Only a matter of days after Irma moved on, Hurricane Maria arrived from the Atlantic slightly further south in the Lesser Antilles, devastating Dominica and Guadeloupe, and then passing extremely closely along the west coast of Montserrat, causing major damage. It crossed the NE Caribbean to hit the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, before giving another pounding to the eastern Turks and Caicos Islands, especially Grand Turk and Salt Cay. In the aftermath of the hurricanes, UKOTCF took part in meetings with other UK bodies and sent a joint letter to HMG ministers to encourage them to support the efforts of local conservation bodies. *Forum News* 48 gave an update on restoration efforts on some of the islands six months after the disaster.

Some concerns were passed on to Members of Parliament in relation to Overseas Development Aid and the provisions for providing resources to UKOTs, which had been expressed some of the citizens and bodies in the UKOTs. There were some questions answered in Parliament. UK Government could provide support – and, indeed, is required to do so under domestic legislation on DFID's role. What it cannot do is double-count this for most UKOTs as a contribution towards its ODA (Overseas Development

Premier Sharlene Cartwright Robinson (left) visits the aid distribution team at a shelter in North Caicos, where Bryan Naqqi Manco (centre), leading local conservationist and Caicos Pine Recovery Programme Officer, was undertaking one of his volunteer shifts. Photo: Shaun Malcolm



Assistance) target of 0.7% of GDP. Catherine West MP, former shadow Foreign Minister, placed several questions: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-questions-answers/?page=1&max=20&questiontype=AllQuestions&house=commons%2clords&member=4523&dept=20>.

UK Government has been able to influence OECD, on the point that the rules do not suit well small entities, including UKOTs, because they take no account of their high sensitivity to risk. As well as this, HMG also tried to introduce the possibility of temporary ODA status after disasters. The latter was not successful.

Following the Cayman Islands Government decision to drop its funding to the National Conservation Council to buy land for protected areas, the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, in its 30th year, launched a drive, which will run throughout 2018, to raise funds as part of its Land Reserve Fund in order to purchase land to protect some of the islands' most fragile and unique habitats. The National Trust for the Cayman Islands Law allows it to acquire property for protection. By stepping in, it is trying to ensure that, as the island continues to develop, there are spaces for nature to flourish.

In the year that saw huge viewing figures for the BBC Natural History Unit's *Blue Planet 2*, there were reports from Bangor University as part of its work to monitor corals in the British Indian Ocean Territory that, although they have recovered from extreme sea-temperature warming in past, they have been less able to recover in recent warm years. In 1998, coral reefs in the Chagos Archipelago experienced 90% mortality in shallow waters in the severe warming event. Over 12 years, they recovered, with "rapid growth of branching and tabular corals". Sadly, warming events in 2015, 2016 and 2017 in shallow reef areas have been severe, and researchers believe it is less likely that the coral will be able to recover as rapidly as it did before – or at all if the frequency remains high. Several times throughout the year, the review of progress in meeting the Environment Charter commitments, Aichi Targets and relevant Sustainable Development Goals has proved useful in being able to feed into consultations and requests for information, making it a continually value resource.

Awareness raising and information management

Forum News 47 was published in October 2017 and *Forum News* 48 in April 2018.

Newsletters for the working groups were produced as a way of providing information between meetings. These are also now available online.

There have been several additions to the virtual tours including: Alderney, British Indian Ocean Territory, Jersey and St Helena, with further tours under development. As ever, opportunity to add to material were taken. Thus, during the Isle of Man meeting, personnel collected some materials



Pair of brown boobies with nest material on Sombrero Island proposed Ramsar Site (designated in May 2018). Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

and were working with Liz Charter, based on the Isle of Man, to complete it. The tour of the island with Ministers also proved to be an opportunity to fill in gaps in information.

Sales of the guides to *Birding in Paradise* for Turks & Caicos and Montserrat continue, especially at the start of peak tourist season in the Caribbean.

Consultations

The Forum has, over many years, contributed to UK Parliamentary Committee inquiries and encouraged its members and associates to do so. Following the publication of UK Government's 25-Year Plan, the UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) launched an inquiry. Around the same time, the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council issued a Statement from their meeting in February. UKOTCF promptly used this as a basis for a submission, as the EAC was gathering written evidence. This evidence has now been published online here: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environmental-auditcommittee/25-year-environment-plan/written/79595.pdf>. At the time of writing, EAC is collecting oral evidence and will question the Secretary of State, Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP, in April.

Whilst there is much that the UK Government is doing in support of the UKOTs, we will continue to voice concerns raised via the Environment Audit Committee inquiries and other routes, particularly from non-government organisations – which play such an important role in conservation efforts and engaging with local communities – as well as from territory officers with whom we work closely.

In March 2018, JNCC finalised their consultation on the report to the Ramsar Convention Conference of the Parties, which takes place in Dubai later in 2018. UKOTCF were pleased to be able to contribute towards the report. It was clear that JNCC had consulted the UKOTs and CDs widely, which was very positive, but not all the joint work between governments and non-government organisations had been recognised. The response emphasised the importance of this.

Input was given to the UK National Environment Research Council (NERC) consultation on future research needs. The Call for Evidence, which was circulated to partners stated that “NERC are seeking input into their Call for Evidence for the Environmental Evidence for the Future Initiative to identify the key knowledge gaps and evidence needs pertaining to a set of future environmental policy and practice challenges. This initiative includes UK Overseas Territories and very much needs input from people with direct expertise in the UKOTs.” Input was needed in order to identify key knowledge gaps and evidence needs relating future environmental policy and practice challenges (some of which were identified during a workshop held earlier in the year – see below). Thoughts and ideas are going to be used to inform the scope of a proposal for a future “large-scale transformative research programme to address priority future research and needs to support future environmental policy development”.

Our networks

Meetings of the regional working groups took place throughout the year via Skype. The Wider Caribbean Working Group on the 11th April, 23rd May and the 14th December; the Southern Ocean Working Group on 24th May and 26th July and the 12th October; Europe Territories Working Group on the 10th April. Summary reports for each of the groups follow this general report.

Dr Nicola Weber, Conservation Officer, previously head of Ascension Island's Conservation Department, took over as secretary of SOWG in May. Catherine Wensink temporarily took over the ETWG, although the group has not met frequently this year. In between meetings, working group newsletters have been produced, circulated and made available on UKOTCF's website.

Regular meetings attended included: the IUCN-UK meeting in July, and the Inter-Island Environment Meeting on Sark at the end of September. The theme of the meeting was on protected areas. In July, personnel also attended the Island Invasive Species conference hosted by the University of Dundee, and organised by Prof Tony Martin who led the island restoration project on South Georgia for the South Georgia Heritage Trust. It was the first time the meeting has been held outside of New Zealand.

Influencing policy

The Environment Audit Committee report on Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) was published on 24th April. It makes several mentions of UKOTCF's written and oral evidence, particularly on funding for effective management of MPAs and the impact 'Brexit' will have on Gibraltar's MPAs. The full report and evidence is available on the EAC's website: <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/environmental-audit-committee>.

The UK Government published a response to the Environment Audit Committee report on *The Future of the Natural Environment after the EU Referendum and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)* can also be found on the EAC website.

UKOTCF was pleased to be asked to organise the second and third meeting of Environment Ministers together with the government departments (as outlined above). A statement from each was published shortly after with several press releases.

During the third meeting in the Isle of Man, it was pleasing that, on the second day, Mr Ben Merrick, the Director Overseas Territories in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, was able to attend, along with two Defra officials and two officials from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation (BEIS), which covers climate change matters. Minister for Environment, Dr Therese Coffey, attended via FaceTime on the second day for nearly an hour, and addressed some questions from the UKOT/CD Ministers. During her statement, Dr Coffey invited the UKOTs to be part of preparations for the forthcoming Commonwealth Heads of State meeting (CHOGM), in London, in April. In addition, UKOT representation has been invited at the next COP of the UN Framework on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

Plans are being developed for the 4th meeting.



Participants in the 3rd meeting of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council visit the historic site of Tynwald, the Isle of Man's Parliament and the oldest continuous parliament in the world. Photo: Isle of Man Government

Relations with UK Government and Government Agencies

UKOTCF personnel have ensured that UKOTs and CDs were not overlooked in other quarters, using a range of opportunities. For example, they continue to explore with several UK Government Department, such as the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the provision of presentations to desk officers and section heads on biodiversity in the UKOTs, the role of the UKOTCF network and related matters.

Forum personnel continue to meet, whenever possible, with Governors before they take up office to brief them on environment issues. They met with the British Virgin Islands Governor-Designate, Gus Jaspert, in August before he took up his post. Unfortunately, Tim Foy of Anguilla had to postpone due to rail failures on the day and it has not been possible to re-schedule. They met also with the Falklands Governor-Designate, Mr Nigel Phillips MBE, in November; Montserrat's Andrew Pearce CBE in December; and Cayman Governor-Designate, Anwar Choudhury, in March.

Personnel attended the annual reception for participants in the Joint Ministerial Council (of UKOT premiers, chief ministers or other ministers or equivalents, with UK ministers) in November. Again there was mention of the Environment Ministers meeting in the Joint Ministerial Communiqué.

Regular meetings have continued throughout the year with officials from Defra, the Department which leads on environmental matters, relating to their work with the UKOTs. Some positive actions from these meeting was the involvement of the UK Minister in the Environment Ministers meeting and the encouragement of officials to provide feedback to the Darwin Plus Panel when those who have submitted a project, feel that there have been some misunderstandings relating to proposals.

Personnel took part in a seminar on the clause, inserted into the Darwin terms and conditions, which means that all data obtained during a Darwin Plus project, has to be available to Defra agency, JNCC who have developed a meta-catalogue.

Coordinating with Others

The Forum aims, where possible, to link with organisations with potentially complementary remit to try to explore ways of collaborating. In doing so, it tries to attend as many of the receptions and events taking place throughout the year, which involve the UKOTs in some way. These are outlined here.

In April, personnel attended a Friends of the British Overseas Territories (FOTBOT) meeting in London to renew contacts with recently retired Governors of Bermuda, TCI and Gibraltar. A lecture and reception of the International National Trust Organisation (INTO) in Cambridge was attended. In May several personnel attended the Pew Trust presentation evening *Can Technology Save the Earth?*

A meeting the Pitcairn Environment Group was attended. This gave an additional opportunity to meet again with Michelle Christian, Department of Natural Resources before she returned to Pitcairn at the end of May (following an extended discussion while attending the 2nd Environment Ministers meeting in Alderney). The Forum is working with Pitcairn towards establishing Pitcairn's first Ramsar Sites, but this is subject to decisions by the Island Council.

A meeting of Bright Blue, a Conservative Party think-tank, was held in February 2018, entitled *Global Britain and conservation: how DFID and FCO policies can deliver better conservation outcomes*, part of Bright Blue's multi-year *Conservative manifesto for conservation* project, which personnel attended. Speakers included Rory Stewart OBE MP, Minister of State for Justice, and former Minister for Africa (Minister of State jointly in DfID and the FCO; and before that a junior Defra Minister responsible for biodiversity) and Sir Graham Wynne, Senior Adviser, Prince of Wales' International Sustainability Unit. Personnel have been added to the circulation list to attend future meetings in order to ensure matters relating to the UKOTs are voiced.

On the following day, there was a FCO-organised meeting on their *Blue-Belt* programme. This is jointly implemented by two UK Government agencies, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas) and Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

A presentation was given at the Marine Ecology and Conservation

Network Meeting *Ocean Optimism* at Exeter University. The presentation included many of the marine initiatives UKOTCF has been involved in over the years.

In September, personnel were invited to participate in a strategic workshop to look forward 25 years to explore the environmental policy challenges and opportunities the UK may face outside the European Union. It was issued on behalf of the UK National Environment Research Council's Environmental Evidence for the Future Initiative (EFFI) and mainly concerns scientific research. It was very interesting to attend this, given the technical experts from across the United Kingdom participated. They showed a willingness to include the UKOTs, given the biodiversity they hold; this was very encouraging. All reports can be accessed on the NERC website at the following link: <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/partnerships/crosscouncil/eef/>. As follow-up to this, a consultation on research needs was initiated. A response was submitted, based on information gathered as part of the Environment Charter review, but it was also circulated to members of Forum networks (see section above).

Organisational development

Martin Spray CBE resigned from Council in March. While he remains supportive of the Forum, his commitments as Chief Executive of the UK-based Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (WWT) meant that he could not attend as many of Council meetings as he would have liked. His contributions to the Forum were insightful and very valuable, and we are very thankful to him.

Victor Brownlees joined Council in June 2017. He worked in both the public and private sectors in the UK over almost 30 years. After initially training as a Chartered Public Finance Accountant with the National Audit Office and then with PwC in London, he held a number of senior roles in local government. For a number of years, he owned and managed his own consulting firm, working as advisor to a range of private sector companies supplying services to the public sector. From September 2014 to May 2017 Victor served as Chief Executive and Head of the Civil Service for the government of the island of Alderney. He now lives in the USA.

Dr Nicola Weber joined UKOTCF around the start of the financial year as part-time Conservation Officer. At the end of May, she took over from Sarah Barnsley as Secretary of the Southern Oceans Working Group. Nicola holds a BSc in Marine and Environmental Biology from the University of St Andrews and an MSc in Biodiversity and Conservation from the University of Exeter. In 2011, she completed her PhD, which examined social interactions of the European badger and their implications for the transmission of bovine tuberculosis. Immediately following this, she moved to Ascension Island with her husband to study the green sea turtle population there, with Ascension being the second largest green turtle nesting rookery in the South Atlantic. They stayed there for 5 years; taking over the running of the Ascension Island Conservation Department in 2013. During this time, they implemented a number of changes, including the first Biodiversity Action Plan for the Island, Protected Areas and Wildlife Protection legislation, and a vibrant marine conservation and research programme. They left at the start of 2017 to raise their young family in the UK for a while, but are still actively involved in work on Ascension Island through Darwin Plus and BEST grants.

At the same time, Dr Wylie Horn was appointed as part-time Conservation and Information Officer for UKOTCF. After graduating with a BSc in Ecological Science from Edinburgh University, Wylie worked as an RSPB warden for several years in Strathspey, Shetland and the Somerset Levels. Following that, he worked on the *Seabirds and Sandeels* project for the Applied Ornithology Unit at Glasgow University, studying the breeding failure of surface-feeding seabirds in the Shetland Islands. This led to him to studying for a PhD, looking at the feeding behaviour of breeding arctic and common terns on Coquet Island, Northumberland, UK. He worked as a film library researcher for Oxford Scientific Films in the mid-nineties, and then in a variety of IT roles at the University of Oxford for 19 years, supporting a very wide range of IT services for the collegiate University. In 2013 he formed his own IT consultancy.

Several Conservation Assistants continue to manage various other part-time work and studies and so fit in assignments when they are able. One enthusiastic volunteer, and newest recruit, is Eric Boyd. Eric holds a BSc (Hons.) in Environmental Science from the University of Dundee, and an MSc in Anthropology, Environment and Development from University

College London (UCL). Eric's research interests are currently focused on the role of the extractives industry on the social production of resources, and the role that the mutual effects of human/non-human interaction has on the shaping of resources as viable or non-viable methods of energy production. Eric has undertaken research in field sites as diverse as the Andes in the Central Highlands of Ecuador and the depths of Europe's largest closed mining pit in Kiruna, Swedish Lapland.

Avishka Sendanayake returned to her home in Sri Lanka following the successful completion of her MSc in Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change. She continues to work remotely when possible. El Comley and Susie Phillips have both found full time work. El continues to support the Wider Caribbean Working Group meetings. Both have contributed drafts for the virtual tours as well as other administrative support, for which the Forum is most grateful.

Some time has been spent on implementing changes as part of the EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) which comes in to force in May 2018. In the UK, GDPR will replace the Data Protection Act 1998, which was brought into law as a way to implement the 1995 EU Data Protection Directive. GDPR aims to give more control over how organisations use an individual's data. During the website re-design and by working with RaisingIT, an attempted to address the incoming changes to data protection has been made.

Acknowledgements

UKOTCF 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. These included: Sarah Barnsley, Keith Bensusan, Faye Burfoot, Eleanor Comley, Maya Doolub, Felix Driver, Duncan Hutt, Katie Metcalfe, Susie Phillips, Caroline Prentice, Avishka Sendanayake. Although all Council members donate time to UKOTCF, Council would like to acknowledge the very large quantities donated by Mike and Ann Pienkowski, on which UKOTCF depends. The Forum would also like to thank existing *Friends of the UK Overseas Territories*, and encourage those who have an interest in the UKOTs/CDs to join. The Forum is very grateful for financial assistance as project grants and donations, from the States of Alderney, the Isle of Man Government, HM Government of the United Kingdom, the Transform Foundation, Lady Ground and Anthony Leask, and those supporting through EVE_NT and EasyFundRaising, as well as anonymous donors. The Forum is grateful also to member organisations and others for allowing meetings to take place at their offices during the year, particularly HM Government of Gibraltar, and to John Wheeler for continued web-site advice and support.

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Summary Statement of Financial Activities (including Income and Expenditure Account) for the year ended 31 March 2018

	2018 Unrestricted Funds	2018 Restricted Funds	2018 Total Funds	2017 Total Funds
Incoming Resources				
Voluntary Income	161,236	117,954	279,190	334,098
Investment Income	18	-	18	28
Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities				
Project Income	708	123,509	124,217	85,426
Total Incoming Resources	161,962	241,463	403,425	419,552
Resources Expended				
Charitable Activities	146,988	235,404	382,392	403,467
Governance Costs and Other Resources Expended	6,251	-	6,251	6,594
Total Resources Expended	153,239	235,404	388,643	410,061
Net incoming/outgoing resources	8,723	6,059	14,782	(9,491)
Balance brought forward at 1st April 2016	63,873	3,259	67,132	57,641
Balance carried forward at 31st March 2017	72,596	9,318	81,914	67,132

Note: Incoming and outgoing resources include donated time and expenses of £245,931 (2017: £292,918).

Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

During the reporting year April 2017 to end of March 2018, WCWG met via Skype on 4 occasions, and four *eBulletins* were produced. There was good participation in meetings, either in person, or via previously supplied reports and updates. Ann Pienkowski continued in the role of Secretary, assisted by El Comley.

In the first half of the year, there were many positive actions and developments to report and discuss. These included the success of the Bermuda Cahow Recovery Programme, the positive achievements of the Montserrat project on *Maximising long-term survival prospects of Montserrat's endemic species and ecosystem services*, run by UKOTCF with Montserrat and international partners

WCWG members have continued to report the value of the conference held in Gibraltar in 2015. For example, having seen examples of artificial reef construction in Gibraltar, including sinking cleaned old boats, BVI have been considering also using old boats and vehicles for artificial reef creation, and have conducted a pilot programme on Cooper Island. Unfortunately, hurricane impacts have stopped initiatives like this at present.

With the economies of the Caribbean UKOTs being highly dependent on their environments, WCWG embarked on compiling a table of developments, both sustainable and less positive, which could have an impact on environment and economy. This ongoing compilation was circulated to WCWG members, noting that it was a work in progress, and additional comments and inclusions remain welcome.

WCWG continued to provide advice and make links between UKOT personnel and others, when requested. Examples include making joint applications for funding, writing supporting letters for other funding applications, making partners aware of funding opportunities and other potential resources, including information and advice. For example, information was provided to the Government of Turks and Caicos Islands on their Conservation Fund (abolished by UK Government when TCI was under direct rule) and to Montserrat Government on how a similar funding mechanism could be established in Montserrat, to fund environmental and conservation protection actions.

Several Caribbean UKOTs had changes of government, just before or during this reporting period. WCWG Secretary, and other UKOTCF



UKOT/CD Ministers Council meeting with UK Government representatives, Isle of Man, February 2018. Caribbean Ministers present are: Hon. David Osborne MLA, Minister of Agriculture, Trade, Lands, Housing & Environment, Montserrat (4th from left, speaking); Hon. Walton Brown, JP, MP Minister of Home Affairs, Bermuda (4th from right at table); and Hon Ralph Higgs MLA, Minister of Tourism, Environment, Heritage, Culture & Gaming (2nd from right at table). Photo: UKOTCF

Officers, were able to have useful and informative discussions with some of these new personnel, as well as some of longer standing, at the Joint Ministerial Council reception in London in November. These included with the Premier of the Turks and Caicos Islands, Hon. Mrs Sharlene Cartwright Robinson, and the Premier of Montserrat, Hon. Donaldson Romeo, as well as other elected and appointed officers. UKOTCF personnel were able to extend this by meetings with new ministers from Bermuda, Turks & Caicos Islands and Montserrat at the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council meeting in the Isle of Man in February, which UKOTCF was asked to organise with Isle of Man hosts. UKOTCF's Chairman was able to follow up with meetings with ministers and officials in TCI and Montserrat in March, while in the region for project work.

Changing personnel both in Territories and in UK Government often result in WCWG being asked to provide information and briefings. UKOTCF Chairman and Executive Director met with Governors-Designate of Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Cayman, Montserrat, to inform on environmental and conservation issues and partners in territory.

WCWG responded to requests from two Caribbean UKOTs (Cayman and TCI) for information on the Environment Charters and the findings of the Bermuda Ombudsman, Arlene Brock, who determined (and whose findings were upheld by the Bermuda Supreme Court) that the Environment Charters were legally binding agreements between UKOTs and UK Government.

However, the devastating effects of Hurricanes Irma and Maria on Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, and to some extent on Montserrat, as well as terrible infrastructure and social impacts, has set back environmental and conservation work, by months if not years in some cases. It needs to be clearly stated, however, that local personnel in the Territories affected, through hard work and incredible resourcefulness, have made enormous steps in recovery and taking conservation work forward. The devastation caused by the Hurricanes was reported in *Forum News* 47 and in *WCWG eBulletin* 23. WCWG meetings were cancelled just after the Hurricanes, but at the December meeting a very useful discussion was held on building resilience to hurricanes and other severe weather events.

UKOTCF provided the Secretariat for the Environment Ministers Council meeting, which was held in the Isle of Man in February 2018. Ministers and Officers from Bermuda, Montserrat and Turks and Caicos Islands attended. The Minister from British Virgin Islands had hoped to attend, but post-hurricane issues prevented this. Expressions of interest and apologies were received from Anguilla and Cayman. WCWG Secretary was part of the UKOTCF team, and has produced a short video about the meeting, available from www.ukotcf.org.uk (https://www.youtube.com/attribution_link?a=gLZGnVdx1D_uqIB_&u=/watch%3Fv%3DMJdaLtCnCsU%26feature%3Dem-share_video_user).

A selection of topics relevant to specific WCWG UKOTs is given below. Much more information about the work of WCWG is available in the *eNewsletters* and *eBulletins*, available online at www.ukotcf.org.uk.

Anguilla

Anguilla was severely hit by Hurricane Irma, with substantial infrastructure damage and loss of vital services and communications. Fortunately, there was no loss of life. The Anguilla National Trust offices were not damaged and, within a few days of the passing of the Hurricane, despite all the difficulties, National Trust Staff undertook environmental assessments and surveys. Since then, ANT has continued monthly bird counts, and has visited Dog Island, Prickly Pear Cays and Sombrero. Its surveys show that the land birds, initially badly hit, are returning, and the frigatebird colony on Dog Island is healthy.

Bermuda

Government re-organisation has created a new Department for Environment and Natural Resources. The National Parks Act 1986 has been amended, to allow the Parks Department to charge fees for services, and new protected areas added to the system.

Bermuda also has been experiencing unusual weather events. A series of higher than normal high tides since September led to flooding in a lot of inland wetlands, as well as coastal areas. There was an influx of over 1000 killdeer plovers, escaping from Storm Grayson on the US East Coast. The large numbers of these very noisy birds generated public interest.

A new airport terminal for Bermuda is under construction (using the existing runway) and, encouragingly, the environmental consultants from Ecuador have a good track record in species re-location.

The cahow recovery programme continued its successful trend of increasing numbers of successful nests.

British Virgin Islands

The British Virgin Islands were severely hit by Hurricane Irma, with over 90% infrastructure damage, and loss of vital services and communications.



Sooty terns above their colony at Dog Island, Anguilla. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski



The National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands supplied photos and a comment that Hurricane Irma caused much damage to several of their National Parks. Above is the Joseph Reynold O'Neal Botanic Gardens National Park, named after the first Chairman of the National Parks of the Virgin Islands. The ever-resilient NPTVI add: "But today, instead of destruction, we see new beginnings and great opportunities."

Tortola and Jost Van Dyke were both at the heart of the destruction. The National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands offices were totally destroyed, and communications were very difficult for a long time. A temporary office was established, some staff worked remotely from the US to coordinate recovery efforts, and officers on the ground worked tirelessly on recovery efforts. The Jost Van Dykes Preservation Society enlisted help and support effectively from a wide variety of NGOs, individuals and businesses in their relief efforts for the island. Information on these efforts are available on NPTVI and JVDPS Facebook pages.

Cayman Islands

The Cayman Department of Environment has had several initiatives to control alien invasive species. A culling programme for the invasive green iguana (a threat to native rock iguanas and birds) was established, but has not yet been as successful as hoped. A proposed cull of feral cats was halted by a court injunction brought by local animal welfare societies, and a new way forward is being discussed.

The Central Caribbean Marine Institute were successful in obtaining BEST and Darwin Plus funding to continue their work on lionfish control and baseline fish surveys, including an education and outreach element.

The proposed Grand Cayman Cruise Centre, and road development through sensitive areas, continued to produce much discussion on benefits



Dwayne Hixon, Nicolas Tirard (MNT) and Mike Pienkowski (behind camera; UKOTCF) discuss the plan under the Adopt a Home for Wildlife scheme while looking, from near the planned building, over the wetland area to the golf course.

and environmental impacts. There was also much discussion on the new Government's thoughts about certain elements of the Conservation Law, and the concern of conservationists about the Government's approach.

Montserrat

The Darwin Plus project *Maximising long-term survival prospects of Montserrat's endemic species and ecosystem-services* successfully completed its second and final year, with project visits to Montserrat by UKOTCF taking place in June 2017, November 2017 and March 2018. The actions and outcomes from the project are been published in the project newsletters, available to download at <http://www.ukotcf.org/WGnewsletterlist/WGNewsletterslinks.pdf>.

This project has facilitated a successful application for BEST funding to establish a complementary native plant nursery, and also enabled to project officer to be available for fieldwork for JNCC's Territory to Territory GIS initiative.

Unfortunately, an application to Darwin Plus for further funding to build on this to save and conserve Montserrat's special nature was unsuccessful. UKOTCF continues to seek funding from other sources to take this forward.

Although Montserrat escaped a direct hit from Hurricane Irma, Hurricane Maria passed very close and a lot of damage was done to vegetation, including trees and power-lines, and many hiking trails were blocked. Additionally, the frequent stormy weather which has affected Montserrat over the winter has caused problems with the ferry being unable to dock, as over 20 years since the volcanic eruption, the dock at Little Bay still has no breakwater.

Turks and Caicos Islands

The Turks and Caicos Reef Fund were successful in obtaining BEST funding for environmental survey work on East Caicos, including turtles. Their work on coral reef restoration and the boat moorings project was also continuing. Their active and persistent campaign to prevent a dolphinarium being developed in Turks and Caicos looks to be having an effect, as the developer was now talking about St Lucia as a location.

Amongst many major effects of Hurricanes Irma and Maria was the destruction of the Caicos Pine Recovery Programme nursery on North Caicos. Due to foresighted actions by the project officers, the pine saplings were saved. Funds are currently being sought to rebuild the nursery.



Meeting at Turks and Caicos Ministry of Tourism, Environment, Heritage, Culture & Gaming, Grand Turk: fom left (front) Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF Chairman; Hon Minister Ralph Higgs; (back) Michelle Fulford Gardiner, Deputy Permanent Secretary; Brian Been, Tourism Risk Manager. Photo: TCI Government

Report of the UKOTCF Southern Oceans Working Group

In May 2017, Sarah Barnsley left the Forum to start a PhD and handed over her role as Secretary of the SOWG to Dr Nicola Weber, who also assumed the position of Conservation Officer for the UKOTCF.

During this reporting year, three Southern Oceans Working Group (SOWG) meetings have been held via Skype: in July 2017, October 2017 and February 2018. The SOWG meetings were interspersed with 2 Newsletters and 2 email updates along with circulation of the meetings' minutes. Thanks go to everybody who participated in the meetings, or who provided reports and updates if unable to attend. Thanks go also to everybody who supplied articles, or information generally for the Newsletters or to be circulated amongst group members.

There has generally been good participation in the group with representatives from both NGOs including the South Atlantic Environment Research Institute (SAERI), Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) and The Pew Trusts, and local government departments including Ascension Island Government and Falkland Islands Government, making regular contributions. We have also welcomed contributions from researchers and others working in the field, including Greenpeace, when these have been available. SOWG has continued to make links between UKOT personnel and others, when requested, and facilitated the exchange of information and reports between group members on topics discussed in the meetings.

UKOTCF provided the Secretariat for the Environment Ministers Council meeting, which was held in the Isle of Man in February 2018. Ministers and Officers from 12 UKOTs/ CDs participated in person or remotely, including SOWG members Mr James Glass, Councillor and Director of Fisheries, Tristan da Cunha, Mr Jim Kerr, Deputy UK Representative, Tristan da Cunha (in person), Mrs Michele Christian, Councillor and Divisional Manager Environmental Conservation & Natural Resources, Pitcairn (remotely), and island representatives, Mr Russell Yon, Chairman of the Environment & Natural Resources Committee, St Helena and MLA Teslyn Barkman, Portfolio Holder for the Environment, Falkland Islands (remotely). The meeting statement and a short video about the meeting is available from www.ukotcf.org.uk.

A selection of topics relevant to specific SOWG UKOTs is given below, and more information is available from the UKOTCF website. With the Government's *Blue Belt* Initiative making waves for marine conservation by establishing a series of large protected areas of ocean around 7 of the 14 UKOTs (all of the Southern Ocean territories with the exception of the Falkland Islands – who it should be noted are also carrying out marine spatial planning exercises) in the coming years, there has been a marked increase in marine research projects this year. However, focus shouldn't be detracted from the terrestrial conservation efforts that continue, notably the development and implementation of biosecurity strategies in a number of the territories.

Ascension Island

The Ascension Island Ocean Sanctuary (ASIOS) Darwin Initiative part-funded project began in 2017. This two-and-a-half year project led by the Ascension Island Government Conservation & Fisheries Department (AIGCD) and the University of Exeter (and supported by a multitude of partner organisations) aims to provide the scientific and technical data to inform the impending designation of the largest fully-no-take marine



A shark being released by the ASIOS team after fitting a tracking device.
Photo: British Antarctic Survey

protected area in the Atlantic Ocean, in Ascension's EEZ. The ASIOS project has already compiled electronic tracking data for 15 species of shark, fish, birds and turtles. This has begun to provide insights into how marine megafauna use Ascension's EEZ and how they may benefit from different scales of marine protection. The project's online tracking map can be viewed here: <http://asios.cles.ex.ac.uk/>.

In May 2017 the ASIOS project team joined forces with National Geographic Pristine Seas and the British Antarctic Survey on an EU BEST-funded expedition to survey the biodiversity of three previously unstudied seamounts lying 260-320 km to the south and west of Ascension. Arriving amidst a flotilla of silky and Galapagos sharks, the team weren't left in any doubt that these were special places, worthy of protection.

On land, AIGCD received equipment at the start of 2018, funded by BLUE Marine that will enable them to set up a fully equipped in-vitro biology lab, taking their endemic plant propagation and restoration work to the next level. Marcella Corcoran, RBG Kew UKOTs Programme Officer will be visiting the island in June to help set up the new lab equipment and to carry out propagation training. With the current limited air access to Ascension, the self-dependency has come at a good time as AIGCD is unable to receive agar and other materials from Kew as they have done in the past.

British Antarctic Territory

2017 saw an exhibition at the Scott Polar Research Institute, University of Cambridge entitled 'The Year That Made Antarctica'. This recognised the creation of the International Geophysical Year in 1950 that laid foundations for the Antarctic Treaty which has preserved the continent for science and peaceful activity, including a wealth of environmental research, for almost sixty years.

The largest remaining ice shelf on the Antarctic Peninsula, the Larsen C ice shelf, lost 10% of its surface when one of the largest icebergs ever observed (about a quarter the size of Wales, or four times as big as London) detached from it in July 2017. Researchers reported in a study published in *Nature Climate Change* that the 'calving' event itself might not be the result of changes in environmental conditions, but that the changes might bring about major alterations to the environment themselves, including contributing to global sea-level rise.



Photos from the sei whale photo-identification catalogue comprising 87 individuals that can be identified from unique left-side scar patterns and dorsal fin nicks. Photo: Falklands Conservation

British Indian Ocean Territory

CCT developed and launched the Chagos Information Portal (ChIP) in 2017 which can be accessed online <http://chagosinformationportal.org> and is designed to provide various scientific resources, datasets and information on the Chagos archipelago. Funded by the John Ellerman Foundation, ChIP includes compilations for the Birds of Chagos and for the Corals of Chagos. An interactive map allows visitors to use the platform to discover the different islands of BIOT.

In 2017, the Bertarelli Foundation announced its new programme for marine science in BIOT, coordinated on behalf of the foundation by ZSL and comprising a team of 50 researchers from 14 institutions across the world. The programme builds on a series of expeditions, workshops and strategic plans to create a vision for the BIOT marine reserve as a global exemplar of science and conservation activities working to support effective management. The BIOT Administration held a workshop in March 2018, facilitated by the Blue Belt programme,

for key stakeholders to begin the process of developing a new, strategic Conservation Management Plan for the territory. News on the latest novel, innovative and informative work being carried out can be found on the @BIOTscience Twitter page.

Falkland Islands

The Falkland Islands are one of the few places where sei whales occur quite close to land, and this last year has seen a lot of work carried out by Falklands Conservation and partners to fill in knowledge gaps for this species and better inform their conservation and management. This has included collecting data on their distribution and behaviour, diet, photo-identification of individuals, and genetic information through biopsy sampling, in a number of candidate Key Biodiversity Areas including Berkeley Sound, Queen Charlotte Bay and King George Bay. Alongside this, SAERI are implementing a project entitled *Dolphins of the Kelp* that is collecting baseline data on the abundance, distribution, natural history and genetic diversity of the Falklands inshore cetacean populations to provide a scientific basis for conservation and ecosystem-based marine management initiatives. At the start of 2018, the project ran two cetacean photo-identification courses for 20 members of the public to learn about dolphins and methods to study them to support the project's photo-identification work.

The UK Government, through the FCO managed Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, is supporting a suite of natural capital projects across the UK's South Atlantic and Caribbean Overseas Territories. In the South Atlantic, the natural capital project work is being undertaken by SAERI and as part of this work a survey has recently been circulated amongst the islands' residents entitled *Our Natural Environment*. The aim of this survey is to collect quantitative and qualitative data to reveal the complex interactions between Islanders and their environment. Participatory mapping will be used to reveal patterns of value, and the values of different age classes, ethnicities and populations will be explored.

Pitcairn

In May 2017, UKOTCF representatives, other SOWG members and stakeholders participated in the 9th meeting of the Pitcairn Environment Group at The Pew Charitable Trust's office in London, with Michele Christian, Divisional Manager, Environmental, Conservation & Natural Resources, of the Government of Pitcairn, present in person. Updates included the monitoring of illegal fishing activity by Pew, the development of a long-term monitoring plan for Pitcairn's marine reserve, and options for enhancing Pitcairn's tourism opportunities.

UKOTCF continues to work with the Government of Pitcairn on potential designation of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention relating to the atolls Ducie and Oeno, as well as Henderson. A study by researchers at the University of Tasmania published in 2017 caught the world's attention with its photos and description of an estimated 37 million pieces of plastic debris that had accumulated on the uninhabited Henderson Island, a World Heritage Site.

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI)

The 2017 Government of SGSSI Annual Report has been published and



Pair of Kermadec petrels preen each other at their nest-site on Ducie Island, one of the proposed Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention discussed in meetings between UKOTCF and Michele Christian while she was in Alderney for the Environment Ministers Council. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

can be downloaded from the website (www.gov.gs). Highlights include the initiation of a trial biosecurity detector dog programme undertaken by US-based Working Dogs for Conservation. During the trial period, two dogs have been based in the Falkland Islands to check vessels for signs of rodents before they sail to South Georgia. The project is an integral part of the enhanced biosecurity provision planned by GSGSSI following the work to eradicate invasive rodents and complements a range of other pre- and post-border biosecurity measures already in place. The South Georgia Heritage Trust jointly hosted the Island Invasives Conference in July 2017 with the University of Dundee, which proved to be a productive meeting with around 300 people in attendance.

GSGSSI launched a 5-year review of their sustainable use Marine Protected Area to identify opportunities to enhance its approach to fisheries management and to underpin its operation of what have been considered to be some of the best-managed fisheries in the world. The Great British Oceans coalition (<https://greatbritishoceans.org/>) has been running a campaign to fully protect the marine zone around the South Sandwich Islands since September 2017 and report that conversations are ongoing within the FCO.

St Helena

October 2017 saw the successful commencement of weekly flights to St Helena's newly built airport, anticipated to boost tourist numbers



Rodent detector dogs Samurai and Colonel, and their handlers Megan and Erin. Photo: Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

significantly. The improved access to the island also allowed St Helena to host its first international conference in January – February 2018. The conference, organised by SAERI, took a multi-disciplinary view of diverse island environments with a focus on St Helena as a key case-study. Talks covered a range of topics from the 'impact of connectivity on island spaces' and 'transnational villagers' to 'oceanic floras' and 'marine plastics'. The conference was also used as a platform for local researchers and students who shared the outcomes of the research that they are doing on island. Sessions were recorded and broadcast by local radio station, SAMS.



Opening ceremony of the St Helena conference. Left to right: Helena Bennett (St Helena Director of Tourism), H.E. Lisa Philips (Governor St Helena), Tara Pelembe (SAERI), Dr Alastair Dove (Georgia Aquarium).

In 2017, St Helena declared its 200 nautical mile maritime zone a category VI Marine Protected Area and developed a Marine Management Plan focused on sustainability and protection. The St Helena marine environment supports commercial and recreational fishing activities, marine wildlife tours, SCUBA diving, snorkelling and pleasure cruises, as well as providing a stopover for passing yachts. St Helena Government Environment Division, with input from overseas experts and experienced local boat operators, are carrying out a suite of research, partly funded by the Darwin Initiative, to gain a better understanding of their marine environment and how best to balance all of the various activities in a sustainable manner to conserve St Helena's marine habitats. This is also being supported by the recent creation of a Marine Team within the St Helena National Trust, supported by Blue Marine.

Tristan da Cunha

Work is progressing as part of the Blue Belt Initiative to carry out the necessary research to inform a marine protection strategy for the sustainable management of the 750,000 km² EEZ around the Tristan da Cunha islands. This has seen overseas experts from Cefas and MMO spending time on Tristan to discuss progress and priority actions with the on-island Conservation and Fisheries teams and the island residents. They also joined the longline vessel *Edinburgh* in January 2018 to monitor the operation and catch during a commercial fishing trip. Biological data were also collected for a biomass assessment of the bluenose warehou, a whitefish caught around the seamounts of Tristan's EEZ and highly valued in fish markets from the US to Australia.

Following a successful Darwin Initiative funded project carried out by the RSPB, Tristan Conservation Department and others, a Species

Action Plan has recently been developed for the conservation of Northern Rockhopper penguins to ensure populations in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans can thrive into the future. As approximately 85% of the world's Northern Rockhopper penguins are found in the Tristan archipelago, this UKOT has a big responsibility to protect the global population of this species.

The Gough Island restoration programme, a collaboration between RSPB and Tristan Conservation Department, with input from overseas specialists is well underway with a lot of preparation work having been carried out this year in readiness for the mouse eradication work to begin later in 2018. If successful, this programme will restore Gough Island to a more natural state, keeping it as one of the world's most important seabird nesting sites and preventing the extinction of the Tristan albatross and Gough bunting, severely threatened by introduced invasive species.



Rockhopper Penguins, Gough Island, Tristan da Cunha. Photo: Jaimie Cleeland

Report of UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group



In April 2017, UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council at Alderney April 2017 had a reception and dinner at Nunnery on Alderney (where the new Bird Observatory is based). The building is a historically important structure, with fortifications from Roman (being inspected by participants, left), Tudor, Victorian and World War2 periods. Later, Ministers more used to warmer locations made good use of the braziers and blankets provided by the Alderney Wildlife Trust and the States of Alderney: from left: Hon. Sylvan Richards MP, then Minister of Environment, Bermuda; Hon. Claude Hogan MLA, then Minister of Agriculture, Trade, Lands, Housing & Environment, Montserrat; Alexander, son of host Mr Victor Brownlees, then Chief Executive, States of Alderney; Hon. Dr John Cortés MP, Minister for Education, Heritage, Environment, Energy & Climate Change, Gibraltar

Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

An unexpected vacancy in the role of Secretary to the Europe Territories Working Group arose early in the year. The ETWG held a meeting in April via Skype, and we are grateful to Sarah Barnsley (just ending her term as Secretary to Southern Oceans WG and as Conservation Officer) for standing in to organise and minute that. Subsequently, Catherine Wensink has covered the role while we seek a longer-term replacement. Personnel attended the Inter-Island Environment Meeting, which this year was held in Sark during September. The focus of the meeting this year was protected areas. It was an opportunity to visit the Ramsar Site at Gouliot Caves and Headland, as well as other features on the island.

As reported elsewhere, two meetings of the Environment Ministers were convened, in Alderney and Isle of Man. To coincide with these, a virtual tour was launched for Alderney and one is now in preparation for the Isle of Man. We report here of some updates throughout the year.

There has been a big push across the European Territories to get to grips with the plastic epidemic which blights our oceans. The *Big Channel Islands Beach Clean* is an initiative championed by the Alderney Wildlife

Trust. It continues to grow and now, in its second year, volunteers from Guernsey, Jersey, Alderney, and Herm took part. Sadly, Sark was hit by flu, so organised a clean-up later in the year.

Across the Channel Islands, 571 volunteers participated in this event, collecting 140 bags of litter, including 383 plastic bottles. It is hoped that this can be replicated elsewhere in future years. The Isle of Man has its *Beach Buddies* volunteer group and, in Gibraltar, there are all kinds of initiatives taking places as well as the Government taking a stand and bringing in new legislation to combat emerging issues such as micro-beads in cosmetics.

Alderney

Alderney Wildlife Trust opened its Bird Observatory in 2016 and, in February 2018, received official accreditation from the UK governing body as the 20th accredited Bird Observatory in the British Isles. The Bird Observatory is based at the island's Nunnery, which is currently undergoing a renovation, which will see the roof replaced and creation of three flats,



Left: One of the entrances to Gouliot Cave in Sark's Ramsar Site, with its low-intertidal and sub-tidal invertebrates, many of which were first described there, before diving equipment was generally available. Right: The harbour at Sark where all arrive and depart. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski.



towards protecting Guernsey's biodiversity by providing food and habitats for pollinators.

La Société is now the second largest landowner in the Island, after the States of Guernsey, as it continues to purchase land that will form the basis of a new wildlife reserve including a small wetland site. Eventually, with additional land purchase, this could be joined up with States land near the Chateau du Marais and form a large wetland wildlife reserve.

Following the States approval of the Environment Department's *Biodiversity Strategy* and the vote of £80,000 towards the costs of implementation, there have been a series of meetings to agree a consensus of priorities and an implementation plan for future biodiversity work, including habitat survey and several baseline studies.

which will be available to guests from April 2018 (<https://alderneybirdobservatory.org>). The Nunnery is a historic building going back, through many changes, to Roman times – and was the venue of the outdoor social dinner for the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council meeting in April 2017.

Guernsey

The first known sighting of an Asian hornet *Vespa velutina* in Guernsey was in March 2017. They have spread through Europe. It is believed that they arrived in Southern France in a consignment of pottery in 2004. The States of Guernsey believe that the Asian hornet is a major threat to their biodiversity, pollinator insects, and beekeeping activities. Agriculture, Countryside and Land Management Services (ACLMS) are mapping nest sites.

La Société Guernesiaise has launched a project (<https://thepollinatorproject.wordpress.com>) to raise awareness of the contribution society can make



The UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council experiences the Isle of Man on one of the coldest days of the winter following its indoor sessions (above left), with a view over the moorlands and Irish Sea, eastward to Cumbria, England (below left); further north, (above right) there was a good view over the important marine management area of Ramsey Bay (on the right) and (on left beyond Ramsey) the lowland marshes, farmland and dunes of the Ayres where, amongst other features, flocks of whooper swans and geese were seen (below right). Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Sark

In September, the Inter-Island Environment Meeting took place at the Island Hall on Sark. It was a celebration of 10 years of Sark's Ramsar Site designation, with a focus on habitat management. Overall, 65 delegates attended from across the Channel Islands, UK and beyond.

There were led walks to Eperquie Landing, Gouliot Headland and a 'wet valley' walk at Creux Belet. Adventure Sark, one of the sponsors, led a wonderful visit to the Ramsar Site, Gouliot Caves and Headland. The caves contain many multi-coloured anemones, sponges, and sea-squirrels.

Next year, the meeting will take place in Jersey.

Isle of Man

Marine developments include new regulations for seismic surveys, which



offer new protection for cetaceans and the ability to protect herring grounds. Work continues on Conservation Zones. There are increasing numbers of Marine Conservation Zones (50% of the inshore waters are now MCZs) and additional protection measures were to be completed by 2017, along with increased marine biosecurity efforts. Collaborators are working on finalising a marine plan.

Jersey

The States of Jersey produced several reports throughout the year including: a coastal conditions climate review to provide information to inform policy decisions and identify further areas of study; a review and analysis of all available data and information relating to Jersey's non-native species and the marine environment; and a report to support the development of *Future Jersey*. It provides analysis of the risks that climate change poses (see www.gov.je).

Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas

In May, an event was organized to celebrate the completion of the Darwin Plus-funded project and to highlight the results: <http://www.akrotirimarsh.org>.

Another Darwin project began in 2017, which is looking at invasive species in the SBAs. Partners include the Centre for Ecology and

Hydrology, the Joint Services Health Unit at Akrotiri, and the University of Cyprus. In April 2017, a Horizon Scanning workshop took place at the Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre, with scientists with expertise on IAS from Cyprus and across Europe. The workshop generated a list of species predicted to be of threat to the SBA and Cyprus. These species were prioritised based on their potential future impacts on biodiversity and human health (<http://www.ris-ky.eu/home>).

Gibraltar

GONHS has launched a new website with a facility to take online payments. Together with the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens, GONHS also launched an online *Flora of Gibraltar* project in December.

The Government of Gibraltar is starting to see benefits of their work to reduce emissions, including switch to LEDs on all Government properties, campaigns to encourage the population to use less and increase energy efficiency, and, recently, the installation of the first electric-car charging station.

The Government is aiming to reduce plastic use, including an end to single-use plastic bags. Legislation has been passed to ban the importation of products which contain micro-beads. Government is also working with NGOs and businesses encouraging the plastics to paper movement.

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Membership

UKOTCF's current Member and Associate organisations linked to a particular UK Overseas Territory or Crown Dependency: 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; Chagos Conservation Trust; National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, BVI; Jost van Dykes Preservation Society, BVI; National Trust for the Cayman Islands; Central Caribbean Marine Institute; Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre, Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas; BirdLife Cyprus; Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society; La Société Guernesaise; 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; National Trust of the Turks & Caicos Islands; Turks & Caicos National Museum; Turks & Caicos Reef Fund. UKOTCF's current Member and Associate organisations not linked to a single Territory: Amphibian & Reptile Conservation; Army Ornithological Society; Royal Air Force Ornithological Society and Royal Naval Birdwatching Society.

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You can also subscribe online at www.ukotcf.org.uk

Four good reasons to become a Friend:

1. You know how valuable and vulnerable are the environmental treasures held in the UK Overseas Territories.
2. You understand that the only way to guarantee their protection is to build local institutions and create environmental awareness in the countries where they are found.
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2. Standing Order form: To: The Manager, Bank Name: Branch Sort-code

Bank address: Bank postcode:

Please pay: UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum at NatWest Bank, 9 Bank Court, Hemel Hempstead HP1 1FB Sort-code: 60-10-33

Account number 48226858 the sum of £..... now and a similar sum thereafter on this date annually.

My account number: Name

Address: Postcode:

Signature: Date:

3. Standing Order instructions sent: I confirm that I have sent instructions directly to my bank for a standing order as per option 2 above.

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American Express, Delta, JCB, MasterCard, Solo, Switch/Maestro, Visa Expiry date: / (month/year)

Card number: Security number (3 digits, or 4 for Amex)

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Send this form to UKOTCF, Icknield Court, Back Street, Wendover, Bucks. HP22 6EB, UK

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