

# UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Annual Report April 2018 - March 2019

## 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 across the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (UKOTs and CDs) – and is the only body devoted solely to this. 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. Its small team fulfils a wide variety of roles in support of the tireless work of conservation bodies in the UKOTs and CDs. As such, it seeks to identify new streams of income and further resources to ensure that this support continues.

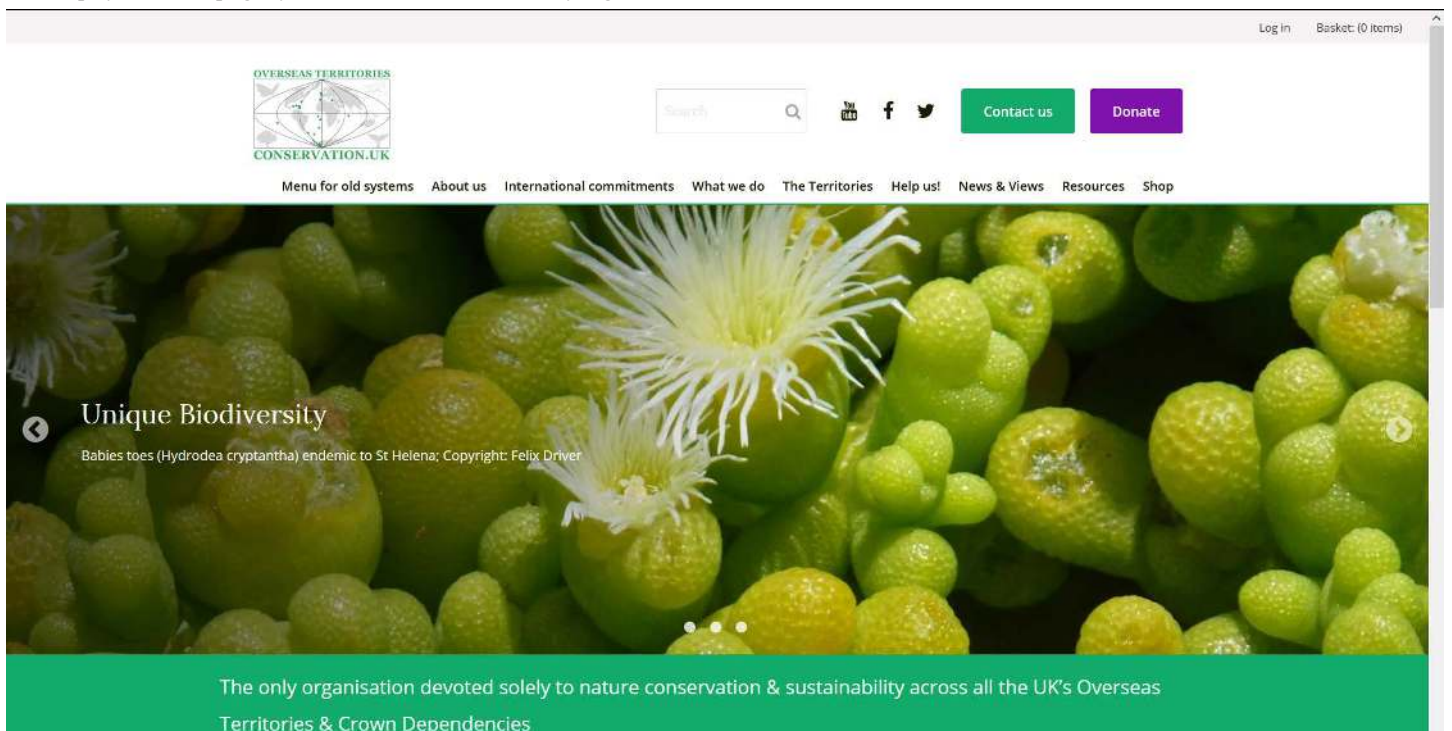
Our review of work to support the UKOTs and CDs throughout the year covers several areas. Project work is a central part of what we do. Whilst we do not run projects in every UKOT, those that we do are based on needs, as specifically requested by the territory's government and/or non-government bodies, and are subject to the resources available or which we can acquire. This close involvement on the ground with locally based partners in some territories ensures that we maintain an understanding of the issues facing the UKOTs and on what can be done to improve outcomes for biodiversity. Awareness raising and information management have also been a major component of our work this year. Some highlights from this year include:



*Dwayne Hixon, a member of our continuing Montserrat Adopt a Home for Wildlife initiative, stands on the historic quay that he has excavated, in front of one of the ponds that he has enabled to regenerate, providing almost the only coastal wetland remaining after infilling by volcanic materials or human action. Migrant shorebirds used these ponds as soon as they were recreated. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski*

**The Darwin-Plus-funded element of the project *Maximising long-term survival prospects of Montserrat's endemic species and ecosystem-services* ended in March 2018. Work has continued beyond the grant end-date, including liaising with other partners to complete or continue some aspects, complete the final report (for which a**

*Top of the home-page of our new website: [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)*





Above, circled, from left: gumbo limbo grown from broken branch (largely hidden by bush in front, but about the same height; self-seeded; and grown initially in a pot. These are part of the experimental work of Tim Orton, a member of our continuing Montserrat Adopt a Home for Wildlife initiative. He is restoring a fine example of tropical dry forest, one of the World's most threatened ecosystems. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

complex structure is required by the Darwin Initiative), compiling the final claim and securing an independent financial audit of the 2-year project funding. Work by UKOTCF and MNT has continued, without grant funding (which is still being sought), in the continuing programme *Save Our Special Nature of Montserrat*. This builds on the successes of the earlier phase, concentrating particularly on the successful empowerment of local persons and organisations to take the lead on conservation initiatives (see also the following section).

The new Forum website was launched in June 2018 after nearly a year of preparation, design and uploading material. The website uses modern methods to bring information on the UKOTs to our audiences, as well as providing opportunities for fundraising and highlighting the work of our partners. It will be augmented progressively, to ensure that it is a useful resource to all.

Progress has been made towards a complete first set of virtual tours of the UKOTs and CDs. Tours for the Cayman Islands, Falklands, and South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands were all made live this year. Others are in development, with a small remainder still to be drafted. It is hoped that these will be completed in the new financial year.

Other areas include: influencing policy (mainly UK), continuing to engage with UK government and agencies, coordinating with others – which are detailed throughout the report.

## Project work

As the externally funded first part of the *Maximising long-term survival prospects of Montserrat's endemic species and ecosystem-services* project

came to end at the start of the reported year, and as the final report was due in summer 2018, achievements were reviewed. As part of this, some facts and figures were calculated to quantify the impact of the project and the additional resources it was able to generate:

- €88,810 of additional funds were received via EU for the Montserrat National Trust (MNT) for a native-plant nursery;
- 23 native species were, by then, being cultivated for use in *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* (fewer than planned, due to seed-loss in the major 2017 hurricanes, but numbers of species would increase over the year during flowering seasons);
- 75 acres (30 ha) are being managed actively for conservation by residents;
- MNT started to give away native palms, reaching about 100 of them given away before the end of June 2018;
- MNT went on to open the (second) greenhouse at the same time as the biodiversity exhibition in June 2018, in an attempt to get more people interested in native species;
- the team were on target to give away a thousand plants as they got ready during the summer of 2018, and then about 3000 in November, when they added native species to the annual “Tree Planting Day” organised by the Department of Environment (and previously limited to orchard trees);
- over 300 children have taken part in education sessions learning about Montserrat’s biodiversity, including practical work on cultivation;
- over 13,000 specimen records have been entered in to the database

Governor H.E. Andy Pearce (speaking) is using UKOTCF visits to Montserrat to trigger informal meetings to encourage coordination between environment stake-holders addresses the meeting. Photo: Annesta Fergus, Governor's Office



on beetles which the project established;

- the most popular Facebook posts were seen by over 4000 people;
- two scientific papers were published on fly species new to science discovered during the project;
- in addition to this, partners, Montana State University, sent information on the portal created as part of the project, which had had some unforeseen delays out of their control (but the team there has secured extra funding from elsewhere to recover this).

Newsletters, as well as several new videos, are available on the website, outlining activities in more detail. Articles include continuing progress by *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* teams, in some cases in conjunction with new partners, including the Durrell-led work on potential recovery of the characteristic and endangered mountain chicken frogs, restricted to Montserrat and Dominica. The newsletters touch on other collaborations, including an initiative with H.E. the Governor, as well as responding to a request from Montserrat to explore help with conservation of the turtle population.

The final report on the Darwin Plus grant was submitted in June 2018. The independent review on the Darwin Plus project's final report was received. In summary: *"The project identifies both immediate and long-term strategic outcomes. The former has been to identify and agree priorities with key stakeholders as to the most sustainable approach to the ongoing recovery of Montserrat's ecology and economy. The latter is to establish capacity on island to enable this to happen. Both have been achieved which is a credit to the project and all those involved. As set out and described in the consultant report, there exist the legislative and political frameworks to enable appropriate governance decisions to be made on Montserrat and there is an ongoing political support for sustainable change to occur. Grade: A [outcome achieved]"*.

It was unfortunate that, no further funds being available following unsuccessful further bids to Darwin Plus, the Project Officer, supporting the Montserrat National Trust with a wide variety of work, could no longer be supported by project funds and left the island at the end of June 2018. As a consequence, UKOTCF and MNT are keeping the programme going at a maintenance level using just their own limited resources – because it is important to maintain the excellent momentum built up and support the committed and effective efforts of local partners. Efforts continue to find resources.

Other project work is included in the following sections.

## Awareness raising and information management

The new website [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk) was made live in June 2018. Getting this designed and populated, so that it can do no less than the original site (and increasingly much more), has been a major task for over a year. The original site will remain available but will not be updated, except for a couple of components, which cannot be carried on the new platform (which carries links through to them). Prominent links from the old site to the new one have been added, and a range of other techniques to draw attention to the new site, are now being used. Social media posts to publicise the new site have been issued. Work will continue to make the best use of the site's fundraising capabilities over the coming months.



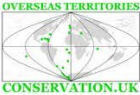

Throughout the year, work continues on driving traffic to the new website and improving its fundraising capabilities. New sections include Environmental Education, specifically a section on the *Wonderful Water* project, which now displays the education material developed as part of a project with Turks and Caicos partners, especially the Departments of Education and Environment & Coastal Resources – and earlier work was updated by UKOTCF from its own resources for this web edition. Local partners on TCI have been informed and encouraged to visit the site, noting that other material will be uploaded in due course. Enthusiastic responses have been received from the Director and Deputy Director of Education and from the Department of Environmental & Coastal Resources.

Working with several of our volunteers and personnel, efforts are being made to complete the full series of virtual tours in the new financial year, but the timing of this will depend on volunteer time of drafters and of personnel, as quite a large amount of checking/editing and sorting through images and information is required.

During the year several tours have been made live, including: Cayman Islands, Falkland Islands, and South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands. Others including Isle of Man [published after the end of the reported year], Anguilla, Bermuda, and Sark are in preparation.

This and other work were set back during the year by repeated failures at one of UKOTCF's contracted internet service providers (ISP), the worst of these resulting in loss of significant work – which had to be repeated – due to the ISP's failure to have a viable back-up copy more recent than 7

**Wonderful Water**  
An Environmental Education Programme  
Mangrove Ecosystems in TCI  
Overview and Field Trips, and  
1: Mangrove ecosystems in TCI and their importance  
Pupils' Text




1. Mangrove Ecosystems: Overview and Field Trips, and the importance of Mangroves - Pupils' Text


The mangrove forest acts as a buffer against strong wave action, high tides and storm surges. It reduces the power of the waves. So not only do they protect the coastline against storms and hurricanes, they protect inland areas as well. Mangroves are so efficient at protection against bad weather, that boats are regularly placed in mangrove lagoons when there is the threat of a hurricane.

**Mangroves stabilize and build land.**

The dense root systems trap sand and mud. Over time, as the mangrove forest grows bigger, more sand and mud are trapped, and more land is made.



**Mangroves provide habitat for many kinds of plants and animals.**



The photos show some of the animals which live in the mangrove ecosystem: snail, palm warbler, spider, tricoloured heron, upside down jellyfish in turtle grass, young shark.

© UKOTCF 2018

**UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES** **UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM**

**Virtual Tours: S Georgia, S Sandwich Islands**


**CONSERVATION FORUM**

The Full Tour  
 Map  
 Introduction  
 Features of Natural Interest  
 Features of Other Interest, including Cultural  
 Threats / Problems / Issues  
 Projects / Conservation Actions  
 Opportunities  
 Organisations and Links  
 Tour Selection

← previous enlarge next →

**Features of Natural Interest**

There are also two endemic subspecies, the South Georgia pintail *Anas georgica georgica* and the Antarctic tern *Sterna vittata georgiae*, and one subspecies, the South Georgia shag *Leucocarbo georgianus*, which outside of SGSSI is found only on the South Orkney Islands.



South Georgia shag studies visitors

© Dr Mike Pienkowski (Features of Natural Interest, 7 of 24 - Slide ref. 1165)

*Page from the Virtual Tour for South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands*

months old. UKOTCF has now moved the remaining modules of its internet functions to a different ISP.

*Forum News 48* and *49* were published and circulated in April and November 2018 respectively.

Social media accounts have continued to be important ways of getting information out and are showing good levels of engagement. Twitter has 1,474 followers and Facebook 697.

The EU's General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) came into force in May. Personnel had worked on ways to deal with the new regulation to ensure compliance. This included mail-outs to those currently on circulation lists and Friends of the UKOTs, for whom data on personal details are held. Letters were sent out to contacts without email. The new website includes updated Terms and Conditions, Privacy Policy and Cookie Policy, with relevant reference to GDPR, using templates suggested by RaisingIT, the platform host. Each person visiting the site is asked to accept these when they first visit. While some effort has been made to cover this, the Controller in the UK, the Information Commissioner's Office, has indicated that its main targets are huge organisations (fines for breaches can be 4% of turnover), and it would not be targeting small bodies which are taking steps to implement progressively.

Stewart McPherson, supported by Friends of the British Territories (FOTBOT) produced a publication, aimed at primary school children. Titled *Britain's Distant Lands*, it was a spin-off from the *Britain's Treasure Islands* project, which UKOTCF had been involved in throughout 2016-17. Although UKOTCF, and its professional educators had some reservations about the approach, officers provided information where they could for this initiative.

## Influencing policy

During the third meeting of Environment Ministers Council of the UKOTs and CDs, held in the Isle of Man, another potential host had warmly welcomed the possibility of hosting the next meeting in 2019. However, it had been anticipated that this would be held after the situation in relation to UK's departure or non-departure from the European Union had clarified well before March 2019, as any such departure would create great problems for many of the UKOTs and CDs. The possible departure is not going to the UK Government's schedule. For this and other reasons, dates and venue for the next meeting of the Council have not been

arranged. Personnel remain in close contact with Hon. Prof John Cortés, Gibraltar's environment minister, who has chaired or joint-chaired all meetings so far (Gibraltar 2015, Alderney 2017 and Isle of Man 2018). A short meeting about the next full meeting was arranged for immediately after the first Blue Islands Conference on the environment in July 2019, just before the Islands Games, which is being hosted by the Government of Gibraltar [but these meetings were later cancelled for reasons outside the control of UKOTCF and the Gibraltar Government]. The UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council has been recognised by UK and UKOT governments, via the Joint Ministerial Council communiqué, as an important opportunity to work together and develop ways to overcome shared challenges.

Several UK Parliamentary Select Committees have taken an interest in the UKOTs and CDs. Member and Associate organisations, as well as some others, were consulted and encouraged to provide points of detail to include in UKOTCF's submissions or responses in their own rights. At the start of 2018, a submission was made to the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry on *Sustainable Seas*. The report, now published, notes

several concerns, including "knowledge surrounding ocean acidification and its impacts is too limited." "Disappointed that the monitoring of ocean acidification is no longer being funded by the UK Government."

In September 2018, a submission was made to the Foreign Affairs Committee's inquiry on *The future of the UK Overseas Territories*. The inquiry considered "the resilience of the Overseas Territories, how effectively the Foreign and Commonwealth Office manages its responsibilities towards them, and how it envisages their future". UKOTCF provided both written and oral evidence to the Committee. Mike Pienkowski, together with Jonathan Hall (RSPB), gave oral evidence on 12 November. Oral sessions and written submissions can be found online. The direct link to oral evidence on the afternoon of 12 November can be found at: <https://goo.gl/WYZ6ppq>. The second session (environment) begins just after 16:00. The link to the enquiry overall is: <https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/foreign-affairs-committee/inquiries/parliament-2017/inquiry13/>.

The final report *Global Britain and the British Overseas Territories: Resetting the relationship* was published shortly afterwards. One of the recommendations relating to UKOTCF's evidence:

- *The Government must offer clarity on its long-term vision for the funding of the OTs, including replacing any lost EU funding, and continuing and expanding Blue Belt funding after 2020. Towards this end, the Government should explore options for a dedicated development and stimulus fund for the OTs, which would allow for the long-term, sustainable development of aid-dependent territories; help to stimulate the economies of those who need a stimulus but do not qualify for official development assistance; and help territories that are otherwise financially self-sufficient respond to crises such as hurricanes. This long-term vision must be based on a clear-eyed assessment of how the UK will balance the needs of individual OTs against value for money for UK taxpayers. There must be scope to ask hard questions about the long-term sustainability and viability of individual OTs without further significant levels of UK capital investment. If the Government does not think significant capital investment is possible, then it must be frank about what it will spend and towards what end.*

As with all Select Committee inquiries, evidence is published on their



*Dr Mike Pienkowski, Chairman UKOTCF, when asked at the start of Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee session to outline the biodiversity found in the UKOTs said: "In terms of biodiversity, the normal relationship is reversed. Britain is important, but it is a minor player compared with the Overseas Territories in world terms, and that is a point of some reflection. You were talking about Montserrat earlier and, as it happens, I have just come back from Montserrat, having been running some programmes there. To take that one example, which is tiny—it is 11 miles long—it has one unique bird species, another unique sub-species of bird, two unique reptile species, five unique sub-species of reptile, three unique plant species, and over 1,200 invertebrate species, of which 81 occur nowhere else in the world—they are endemics in our term—and that is just one of our territories. That richness is reflected in many others. ...It is worth adding that, for example, large sections of "Blue Planet II" and "Planet Earth" were filmed in our Overseas Territories, although I do not think they said so on the commentary. Photo: parliament.tv*

websites as well as the mandatory UK Government response.

In early March 2019, personnel were invited to 10 Downing Street, by Lord (John) Randall, Environment Advisor to the Prime Minister. This was an interesting meeting, including on aspects such as environmental education, funding and importance of protecting terrestrial environments as well as marine environments.

At the request of officials in the UK Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra), UKOTCF personnel prepared some feedback to the Darwin Initiative on Darwin Plus, the dedicated fund for UKOTs. At the request of Defra, an article featured in *Forum News 48*, which invited comments from others. Currently, feedback on applications is sent to applicants by LTS, the body contracted for administering the grants and processing applications, and letters state that the panel do not give further feedback. Applicants, despite the time and effort spent on their submissions, have no way of letting the decision-makers know if their rationale for selection of projects is based on misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the project application.

The Chancellor announced, in the Spring Statement, the intention to designate Ascension as 'non-commercial fishing' marine protected area. At the same time, there was also an announcement that HMG would conduct a Call for Evidence on how effectively to fund biodiversity in the UKOTs. The Forum has encouraged others to prepare for the Call and plans to make a submission once the Call is actually made (eventually in May 2019). It is unclear whether the Call relates to the feedback already provided to Darwin.

## Relations with UK Government and Government Agencies

Briefings with Governors continued to take place throughout the year. Personnel met with the Governor-Designate of Cayman, Anwar Choudhury, former Ambassador to Peru, in March. He requested some information on Cayman's biodiversity and some examples of how environment and development could be made to be compatible. It was pleasing to see that the Governor made some public references to the importance of Cayman's unique wildlife following the briefing. However, more recently, the Governor was recalled by Whitehall and a new Governor, Martyn Roper took office.

Several meetings have taken place with officials from the UK Department

for Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) in order to voice some of the concerns some partners in the UKOTs have in meeting their international commitments, and to suggest solutions.

The thirteenth meeting of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands Conference of the Parties took place in Dubai in October. In advance of the meeting, Defra invited NGOs (UK and UKOT) to a teleconference meeting to discuss the agenda. Some of the items on it were particularly relevant to the UK Overseas Territories (e.g. wetlands and turtles, World Wetlands Day), and UKOTCF participated. Following up after the meeting, a link was provided, by UKOTCF to Defra, to the 2011 report by IUCN-UK Peatland Programme on *Peatlands in the UKOTs*, to which UKOTCF had contributed, as this was another theme at the meeting. As UKOTCF has particular expertise in wetlands, it is looking at further ways in which to help Defra in the subject.

As usual, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee led the compilation of information for the seventh national report to the Convention on Biological Diversity from the United Kingdom, including on the UKOTs which have had CBD extended to them. UKOTCF provided information, particularly from its report on implementation of the Environment Charters and progress towards the Aichi Targets, published in 2016 and adopted by the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council in 2017, as well as more recent material. Amongst other things, this highlighted the support of NGOs in meeting the CBD's targets. The UK National Report has now been published on the UN CBD website, and includes much of material supplied by UKOTCF.

Meetings with JNCC's Overseas Territories officers are organised fairly regularly to discuss projects/activities and so to avoid duplication of efforts in support of the UKOTs.

Personnel participated in an environmental workshop held in the margins of the Joint Ministerial Council in December. There was a strong theme on funding, and particularly post-Brexit.

## Working for partners and responding to requests

UKOTCF receives many requests from researchers, institutions, local communities, decision-makers and many others on matters relating to the UKOTs. It tries to meet all such requests, within its resource constraints.

Information on the process for application for World Heritage Site (WHS) status on St Helena has been supplied to local Councillors and the Governor. Previously, personnel had been on the Minister's Expert Panel in 2011, when the UK's Tentative List of possible future WHSs was produced. Over several years, UKOTCF personnel have provided information to several UKOTs. In the case of St Helena, it was first to St Helena National Trust several years ago and then, some years later at and following the JMC in 2017, the St Helena Governor. UKOTCF has always indicated it would be happy to assist should it be requested. One of the island Councillors was in the UK for the JMC and other meetings and had requested to meet to discuss this; this was done.

In January, personnel attended a meeting organised by the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) at the Zoological Society of London; this aimed to bring together those with knowledge of new technologies in order to support marine protected area management in the UKOTs. This formed part of the UK Government-supported, *Blue Belt Programme*.

Nottingham Trent University (NTU) had requested a meeting to discuss the possibility of a project looking at *Human Dimensions of the Government's Blue Belt Programme*, and this happened. UKOTCF personnel had provided a lot of information, resulting in a visit by NTU to St Helena and a workshop planned for later in 2019.

## Our networks

Meetings of SOWG and WCWG were held in May and June, respectively. Then SOWG, WCWG and ETWG were held in November and February. Problems with Skype continue to impede some participants from joining discussions. Investigations into alternative, free software (e.g. GoToMeeting, Zoom) are on-going.

Each year, personnel have attended the Inter Island Environment Meeting. In 2018, it took place in September, hosted by Jersey. IEM has continued to be a good way to continue links and keep informed of activities across the Channel Islands. A presentation on the UKOTCF/ Montserrat work was given, and was welcomed as an interesting addition



A few of the many features that put St Helena on UK's Tentative List of World Heritage Sites. Above left: Wolf spider carries young, one of the huge number of invertebrates depending on the desert plain part of which was used for the airport construction. Above right: Spiky yellow woodlouse (as can be seen, less than a finger-width long), a rare and threatened endemic species. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

to the programme. A full report was published in *Forum News 49*.

The Global Species and Key Biodiversity Areas Programme recently published the latest *Guidelines for invasive species planning on islands*, based on the Pacific Guidelines, but updated and expanded. It was designed as a practical working document, rather than a set of standards. In order to use as a checklist in planning meetings, the team sent hard copies to as many islands as possible. Forum personnel were asked, and agreed, to help in providing contact details for conservation practitioners in the UKOTs/CDs so that the publication could be sent to them, as the team had a small, but time-limited, budget for postage. UKOTCF retained a number of copies of the publication for future use.

Whenever possible, UKOTCF tries to meet with bodies in the UKOTs, UK or elsewhere in order to keep up to date on, and help with, issues and initiatives in the UKOTs & CDs. For example, representatives attended the Pitcairn Environment Group in December. We continued to provide advice to the Waitt Institute which has linked with the Montserrat National Trust and set up a sustainable funding mechanism for ocean management, following their 4 years of involvement on island, initially facilitated by UKOTCF. In January, UKOTCF representatives met with the BVI Tourism Office in London.

## Coordinating with Others

As an organisation, we do not have any political alliances and so will brief all political parties in the UK and elsewhere. As such, personnel attended a second meeting organised by Bright Blue, a Conservative Party think-tank looking at the ways in which conservation can be integrated into the Conservative Party manifesto. This followed meetings with representatives of other political parties, including Labour, Scottish Nationalist and Liberal Democrat, in previous years. There have been some articles in the press regarding several calls (relating to Bright Blue, with some large NGOs) to use ODA money for nature conservation to prevent loss of global biodiversity. The group mentioned the need to 'scale-up' the Darwin Initiative. To ensure that UKOTs were not overlooked during this, UKOTCF efforts have been made to follow this grouping.

Personnel attended Marine Parks Day organised by Blue Marine Foundation at Plymouth University. Blue has been very involved in many of the UKOTs, both alone and as part of the Great British Oceans collective, and has been very successful in raising money for the UKOTs, particularly as part of its annual London-to-Monaco cycle-ride.

Reports continue to be sent to the Executive Committee of IUCN's National Committee for UK (of which the Chairman is a co-opted member to link to UKOTs/CDs) for its usually quarterly meetings. With some additional voluntary capacity, it has been possible to pick up on some potential areas of work discussed during these meetings, highly relevant to UKOTCF's work. In 2016, discussions took place in this IUCN-NCUK ExCo meeting with the idea of compiling a list of endemic species across UKOTs and CDs. (This is, of course, something that UKOTCF has long been interested in, and has done some published work on a few taxa in the past.) This became embodied in early 2017 in the *IUCN UK National Committee – Rolling Work Programme, 2017-2020*. This included "Begin process of Red List assessment of island endemic species in the

UK Overseas Territories – develop as a new UK NC project to conclude with publication in 2019." It so happened that UKOTCF had not been able to attend the key meetings and, while recognising that UKOTCF would be a partner if this proceeded, RSPB and the IUCN Secretariat Cambridge Office took on the task of initiating liaison on this project, with the intention of bringing in UKOTCF and others. Unfortunately, as noted by the IUCN-NCUK Chairman at the ExCo meeting in July 2018, various competing challenges at these bodies had meant that it had not been possible to make progress. Accordingly, at that meeting, UKOTCF personnel undertook to investigate the possibilities to progress this within UKOTCF. Some initial work on this exercise by UKOTCF personnel and volunteers has started and a summary note was presented at the December ExCo meeting. This could potentially lead indirectly to some resourcing, although this is far from guaranteed. Work continues to a very high standard, but it is unclear when it could be finished as it is resulting from mainly volunteer work.

Following consultations between UKOTCF officers and Friends of the British Overseas Territories (FOTBOT), a presentation was given by UKOTCF on the Montserrat work at a FOTBOT reception in London in July 2018. This focused on the continuation of the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* initiative. Subsequently, FOTBOT raised funds of £1000 for work in Montserrat by UKOTCF's partner, Montserrat National Trust, to support this initiative.

Three visits to Montserrat took place during the year in relation to project work and, given good flight connections now via Antigua, they were combined (for time- and cost-efficiency) with visits to the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI) where a number of meetings and activities were held.

In TCI, initial meetings with on-island partners in March 2018 had included: Turks & Caicos National Museum; TC Reef Fund; local business Big Blue Unlimited; Department of Environment and Coastal Resources; Minister of Tourism, Environment, Culture, Heritage & Gaming, together with Permanent Secretary and Deputy Permanent Secretary, Tourism Risk Manager Brian Been; the Governor's Office; TC National Trust, and the Premier. Work was done also on bird counts on Salt Cay & Grand Turk; general survey; and an assessment of the post-hurricane state, in particular in respect of aspects for which UKOTCF might be able to help.

The Government of Turks and Caicos and UKOTCF combined resources to enable the distribution, to TCI schools and government offices, of the UKOTCF series of 5 nature guides covering all the islands of the territory. Therefore, in October 2018, another visit to deliver these was combined with some meetings with current and previous partners, governmental and non-governmental. While on island, some basic training was given to enthusiastic guides on Grand Turk and to survey damage to the trails produced with the Turks and Caicos National Museum. Following UKOTCF consultations with the Museum and the Governor's Office, a small bid was submitted to the Governor's Office for some repairs and improvements to the trails. This was successful, and another visit to help carry out some of the restorations and further developments was undertaken in March 2019, in collaboration with the TC National Museum.

While on Montserrat, UKOTCF personnel met with a range of community groups to maintain continuity of project work already started in our joint initiative with MNT, *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*. The new Governor, Andy Pearce, took the opportunity of hosting a dinner to bring together some of those working on environmental issues. There were chances also to discuss some future work. This was followed up in October, when the Governor again took the opportunity of UKOTCF's visit to host an informal environmental stakeholders' meeting over dinner, to try to enhance co-operation. The present Governor is very supportive of UKOTCF work and stressed that in a broadcast joint press briefing and subsequent social media posts. The Governor was also helpful on logistics, making his office available to help UKOTCF's schedule, thereby facilitating a meeting with the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry responsible for the environment and her relevant Heads of Departments.

Meetings were held with others, including Montserrat National Trust, participants in *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*, local businessmen, and the new Director of Tourism. Material was gathered for a new issue on *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat*, the project newsletter, which was published online and circulated. Further visits are planned to continue to support the Trust and conservation efforts on Montserrat, while in parallel the seeking of further funding, to build on this successful joint initiative, continues.

During the year, personnel have met with a range of interested parties and provided support to initiatives/campaigns. For example, in late 2018, the Great British Oceans initiative launched its Blue Belt Charter. It gathered support from a cross-party collective of 284 MPs and many organisations in the UK (including UKOTCF) and internationally, to sign-up to its Charter. This calls on UK Government to continue to support the UKOTs in declaring and managing large marine protected areas. It does this via the Blue Belt Programme, a 4-year exercise funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and implemented by two Defra agencies, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture (Cefas) and Marine Management Organisation (MMO). UKOTCF had some previous concerns that the earlier statements from the initiative group was too restricted to exclusively no-take marine protected areas, rather than treating these as one of a range of techniques to contribute to effective conservation and sustainable use. The latest Charter took more regard of this. In addition, those involved appeared to be striving much harder at recognising adequately the importance of working with local communities in the UKOTs. Accordingly, UKOTCF agreed to sign the Charter, and provided a quote for their press release. At every opportunity, UKOTCF tries to remind HMG and others that the more complex inhabited UKOTs, with artisanal fisheries and sea-borders with other countries, should not be forgotten. Also, the welcome extra support for marine conservation should not reduce the already very limited support for terrestrial conservation, where most endemics are situated – there being some worrying signs that this is the case.

In September 2018, Forum representatives attended the annual South Georgia & South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) stakeholders meeting at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It was a chance to meet with

a variety of stakeholders and learn a bit more about some of the issues/activities in SGSSI. The enthusiastic new Chief Executive Officer, Helen Havercroft, chaired the meeting. An article on the meeting was published in *Forum News* 49.

## Organisational development

In September 2018, some additional volunteers were welcomed to UKOTCF as Conservation Assistants. The quality of those who sent in CVs and letters was extremely high, so much so that several volunteers were asked to join the Forum's team. UKOTCF managers aim to ensure that the initiative is a two-way partnership and that the volunteers are provided with as many opportunities as possible. They have carried out a variety of tasks, including improvements to the new website [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk), drafting virtual tours of some territories, attending some meetings on behalf of UKOTCF, and some pilot work on collating information on the UKOTs. Profiles of volunteers are posted on the website. Several left at the end of March, having found gainful employment – something that we are keen to support them in finding. Several others joined then to continue some of this support work.

During the year, volunteers have added capacity to the Forum by doing the following: 4 virtual tours drafts; attended meetings at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; minute-taking at Council meetings and working-group meetings; assistance with WCWG round-up newsletter and articles for *Forum News*; over 30 hours of research conducted on the endemics project; and analysis of website content pages to increase traffic.

With securing continuing funding remaining a major challenge, UKOTCF has to review its budget annually and regularly throughout each year. It reluctantly concluded that it could no longer afford the same modest level of Conservation Officers in the new financial year. Our outstanding Conservation Officers have been kept aware of the general situation and fully understand this. They were most helpful in working out the best way of minimising disruption to the Forum's work. UKOTCF is very grateful to Dr Wylie Horn and Dr Nicola Weber for their various contributions at this critical time. They were recruited initially for 6 months, and their colleagues were delighted to be able to find resources to extend this to 2 years. Wylie left at the end of the financial year in March 2019. By mutual agreement, Nicola reduced her weekly hours a few months earlier, so that the resources could allow some continuation into the new financial year, to which she is kindly donating some additional unpaid time. She continues as Secretary of the Southern Oceans Working Group, as well as, for example, social media and drafting virtual tours. The situation will be kept under review in relation to the resource situation.

## 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: Ashleigh Atkinson, Dr Keith Bensusan, Liz Charter, Ed Lim, Hon. Claude Hogan, Dr Jamie Males, Iain Orr, Caroline Prentice,

Katie Shaw, Dr Nicola Weber, and Lau & Catherine Wensink. Council would like to acknowledge the very large quantities donated by Mike and Ann Pienkowski, on which UKOTCF depends, and to Lady Dace Ground for continuing financial support to the Forum this year. 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 in cash or kind, from EVE\_NT, HM Government of Gibraltar, HM Government of the United Kingdom, and the Turks & Caicos Governor's Office, and those supporting through 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.



*The Executive Committee of IUCN-NCUK meets in December 2018, in an unusually elevated location, overlooking London: the lawyers of one of the member organisations kindly made their offices available for the meeting.*

## UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum: Summary Statement of Financial Activities (including Income and Expenditure Account) for the year ended 31 March 2019

	2019	2019	2019	2018
	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds	Total Funds
<b>Incoming Resources</b>				
Voluntary Income	217,931	39,600	257,531	279,190
Investment Income	90	-	90	18
<b>Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities</b>				
Project Income	839	4,989	5,828	124,217
<b>Total Incoming Resources</b>	<b>218,860</b>	<b>44,589</b>	<b>263,449</b>	<b>403,425</b>
<b>Resources Expended</b>				
Charitable Activities	230,849	50,912	281,761	382,392
Governance Costs and Other Resources Expended	6,847	-	6,847	6,251
<b>Total Resources Expended</b>	<b>237,696</b>	<b>50,912</b>	<b>288,608</b>	<b>388,643</b>
<b>Net incoming/outgoing resources</b>	<b>(18,836)</b>	<b>(6,323)</b>	<b>(25,159)</b>	<b>14,782</b>
Balance brought forward at 1st April 2018	72,596	9,318	81,914	67,132
Balance carried forward at 31st March 2019	53,760	2,995	56,755	81,914

Note: Incoming and outgoing resources include donated time and expenses of £215,684 (2018: £245,931).

## Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

During the reporting year April 2018 to March 2019, WCWG met via Skype on four occasions, and an *eBulletin* Round-up issue was produced in December.

The 2018 hurricane season in the Caribbean was fortunately much quieter than in 2017. Those Caribbean UKOTs affected badly by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, namely Anguilla, BVI and Turks and Caicos Islands, have made positive progress with recovery, although there is still a great deal to do.

WCWG continued to provide advice and make links between Wider Caribbean Group UKOT personnel, Defra and FCO officials, and others, when requested. This has included information and links on marine turtle conservation, coral reef restoration, the *Sargassum* influx, microplastics, and generating income for environmental work via tourist taxes.

A selection of topics relevant to specific WCWG UKOTs is given below. Much more information is available online at [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)



*Brown boobies nesting on Sombrero Island, Anguilla.*

*Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski*



*Interesting colours – but the layers of Sargassum being deposited on shores are giving rise to many ecological issues. The photo is of part of the shore of East Caicos, TCI.*

*Photo: Kathleen Wood*

### Anguilla

In May 2018, the island of Sombrero was designated as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. This designation recognises Sombrero's international significance, and should help attract resources for management and conservation initiatives. Sombrero was listed as a proposed Ramsar Site by UKOTCF's review for UK and UKOT governments and an Important Bird Area in 2005.

### Bermuda

Bermuda has achieved much success in species recovery programmes. These are some examples. The Cahow recovery goes from strength to strength, and CahowCam, supported by Cornell Lab of Ornithology, is live for the 2019 season. In August, a pair of roseate terns produced one chick on Bermuda, which fledged successfully, for the first time in 169 years. Governor Laffan's fern, thought to have been extinct for 100 years, is being re-introduced successfully from plants






Governor Laffan's fern *Diplazium laffanianum* is endemic to Bermuda and Critically Endangered. It is named after Governor Sir Robert Laffan, who sent to the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew a living plant, from which the species was first described. The large leaves reach up to 30cm (12 inches).


Photo: Bermuda Department of Environment & Natural Resources

grown *ex-situ*. The endemic land snail *Poecilozonites bermudensis* re-introduced population on Nonsuch Island is doing well.

In March 2019, the Bermuda National Trust hosted the successful meeting of the International National Trust Organisations (INTO), with 80 delegates attending.

**Recovery plan for the endemic land snails of Bermuda; *Poecilozonites bermudensis* and *Poecilozonites circumfirmatus***





Government of Bermuda  
Ministry of Home Affairs  
Department of Environment and Natural Resources

## British Virgin Islands

The National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands marked the one-year anniversary of the devastation caused by the 2017 hurricanes, with the re-opening of the J.R. O'Neal Botanic Garden at a special Arbor Day celebration. This was an important milestone in the recovery of the islands' capacity for plant conservation, and a start to re-establishing the tourist economy. Much recovery work had also been done on other National Parks. However, a great deal of recovery work is still needed. The Christmas Bird Count had revealed that bird numbers are still down after hurricane Irma.

Mike Pienkowski and Catherine Wensink met with representatives of the BVI Tourist Board in London to explore common interests, including further development of tourism centred on environmental features and conservation.



Re-opening of the J.R. O'Neal Botanic Garden at a special Arbor Day celebration: tree planting in honour of Hon. Ralph O'Neal by Abbi O'Neal and Vincent Wheatley.

Photo: National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands

## Cayman Islands

UKOTCF's virtual tour of the Cayman Islands was launched in January 2019, and can be viewed at [http://www.ukotcf.org/1\\_vTours/tour.cfm?locn=CAY&tourType=FULL](http://www.ukotcf.org/1_vTours/tour.cfm?locn=CAY&tourType=FULL)

The invasive green iguana has been an ever-increasing threat to Cayman's native biodiversity, but this year saw the granting of significant financial resources to launch a large culling programme. It is hoped that this will bring the numbers down from the estimated 1.5 million animals to a containable number.

The Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI) has completed a 20-year *Healthy Reef* report, which includes a survey across all three islands. Its *Reefs Go Live* programme, live-streaming directly to schools, is highlighting successfully the value of coral reefs, and the issues of concern.



From the Reefs Go Live website. Source: CCMI

## Montserrat

The UKOTCF and Montserrat National Trust *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project has continued with positive results, despite current lack of outside funding. Mike Pienkowski visited Montserrat in October 2018 and March 2019, using visits to the region for other reasons, and was able to see again how valuable this programme is. In addition, *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* is contributing to the mountain chicken frog recovery programme. Mike also held discussions with many stakeholders, including at environmental stakeholders' dinners. These were hosted, to coincide with these visits, by the Governor, who wishes to encourage more communication and collaboration in environmental matters. Much more news about UKOTCF's and other stakeholders work in Montserrat can be found on the UKOTCF website, including *Save Our Special Nature of Montserrat* newsletters (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/news/project-newsletter-1>), and videos (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/MontserratProject>).

UKOTCF has held discussion with the Montserrat Government on best practice in turtle conservation, and offered much advice. It is hoped that a funded project will develop out of these discussions.

## Turks and Caicos Islands

The school education course materials *Wonderful Water*, jointly produced by UKOTCF and TCI Department of Education, have been updated and made freely available to download from <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wonderful-water>. This further donation by UKOTCF was warmly welcomed by TCI's Director and Deputy Director of Education. These curriculum-linked materials, using examples from TCI, include many high-quality colour photographs, pupil texts and teachers' guides. They cover many diverse wetland ecosystems, including salt pans and mangroves. (see page 3)

Mike Pienkowski visited TCI in October and carried with him a large supply of the sets of 5 UKOTCF/Turks and Caicos National Museum guidebooks to nature and heritage across all the islands (*Birding in Paradise* – see <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/pages/shop/department/all>). This was at the request of the Minister for the Environment, so that every school and public office could have at least one set. UKOTCF shared the cost of this with TCI Government.

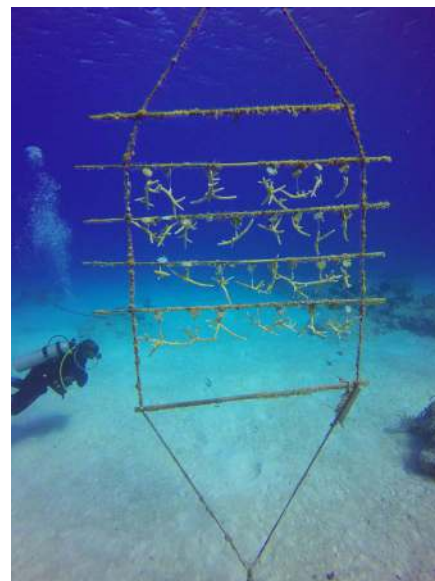
UKOTCF has continued to work with the Turks and Caicos Reef Fund, and the Turks and Caicos National Museum, as well as the Departments of Environment and Coastal Resources, the Ministry of Tourism, Environment, Heritage, Culture & Gaming, the Premier's Office, and the Governor's Office.

Discussions with the Director of the TC National Museum included plans

to renovate the UKOTCF/TCNM Grand Turk Bird Watching Trails, which had been damaged in Hurricanes Irma and Maria, as well as by some careless truck driving. As a result of a proposal put together by UKOTCF, a small grant had been given to the Museum by the Governor's office to help start this work.

The Turks and Caicos Reef Fund has continued to lead the way in TCI in coral reef restoration and protection, under an MOU with TCI Government.

Mike Pienkowski visited the archaeological dig at Long Bay, Providenciales, which is investigating pre-Columbian Lucayan presence (see *Forum News 49*, page 3). The dig is prior to a real estate development. The TC Reef Fund and TC National Museum Foundation were key organisers of this dig.



*One of the coral nursery structures for coral restoration. Photo: Turks & Caicos Reef Fund*

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## Report of the UKOTCF Southern Oceans Working Group

During this reporting year, three Southern Oceans Working Group (SOWG) meetings have been held via Skype: in May 2018, November 2018 and February 2019. The SOWG meetings were interspersed with 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 points of information/interest to be circulated amongst group members. If you would like to contribute to this group please contact the Secretary: [nweber@ukotcf.org](mailto:nweber@ukotcf.org)

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 Great British Oceans Coalition, and local government departments, including Ascension Island Government and Falkland Islands Government, making regular contributions. We have welcomed also contributions from researchers and others working in the field, 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.

A selection of topics relevant to specific SOWG UKOTs is given below, and more information is available from the recently redesigned and updated UKOTCF website, including the recently published Virtual Tours of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands and the Falkland Islands (with the British Antarctic Territory Virtual Tour to follow shortly). These topics include work as part of the Government's *Blue Belt* initiative, now in its second year, which continues to facilitate marine research to inform the designation, management and enforcement of large protected areas of ocean around 7 of the 16 UKOTs (all of the Southern Ocean territories with the exception of the Falkland Islands – but who are also carrying out marine spatial planning exercises). UKOTCF added their support to the Blue Belt Charter in December 2018; this comprised a number of requests to ensure and enhance the delivery of the Government's *Blue Belt* programme. Focus also should not be diverted from the terrestrial conservation efforts that continue, notably the continued development and implementation of biosecurity strategies in a number of the territories.

## Cross-Territory Projects

Throughout the year, we have heard updates on the South Atlantic

Environment Research Institute (SAERI)/ Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)-led Natural Capital Project that culminated in a final conference (*Nature's Benefits: Natural Capital in the South Atlantic*) being held on St Helena Island in March 2019, to bring together participants representing all of the South Atlantic UKOTs and overseas partners to consolidate the final outputs of the project and to give presentations relating to natural-capital assessments in these islands. St Helena Governor, Lisa Honan, noted in her opening remarks "I feel that the Natural Capital approach, which we are introducing to St Helena through this project funded by the UK government, will give us another instrument in our tool-box which will help to manage and preserve the parts of nature which we value." The conference streamed continuously live audio across the internet, with more than 100 people listening from overseas. More on the outputs of this project can be found on the SAERI website.

## Ascension Island

Ascension Island Government Conservation Department worked with partners to prepare an Evidence and Options paper for a Marine Protected Area (MPA) around the Island which was made public at the end of 2018. Ascension Island Council subsequently gave its recommendations based on the options presented to them. Blue Marine Foundation put together a video released on their social media in which the Councillors had spoken and featured in, indicating their desires for a potential 100% MPA around Ascension Island. In March 2019, the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer pledged in his Spring Statement "to help protect critical habitats, the government will support the call from the Ascension Island Council to designate 443,000 square kilometres of its waters as a Marine Protected Area, with no fishing allowed."

The Evidence and Options paper has been informed by the Darwin Initiative-funded Ascension Island Ocean Sanctuary project, which is due to be completed in September 2019. As an output of this, a symposium will be held with the aim of addressing common challenges surrounding the designation and management of large-scale pelagic MPAs that have either been established or are planned for territories already engaged with the Blue Belt programme. The invitation has been extended also to the Caribbean UKOTs. This is being led by Ascension Island Government (AIG), with a steering committee comprising representatives from relevant Government and NGOs, with the aim of sharing UKOT

experience. The workshop will take place the last week of July/ first of August 2019 at the University of Exeter, Cornwall Campus. For more details: [www.bluebeltsymposium.org.uk](http://www.bluebeltsymposium.org.uk)

## British Antarctic Territory

No specific points relating to this territory have been raised/ discussed during this reporting year for the SOWG. As noted above, UKOTCF is working on a virtual tour for its website.

## British Indian Ocean Territory

A paper published in July 2018 in the journal *Nature*, relating the presence of rats on islands of the Chagos Archipelago to the quality of their surrounding coral reefs, received wide publicity (during the International Year of the Reef). The researchers found that rats drastically reduce seabird populations, in turn drastically reducing the volume of bird guano – a natural reef fertiliser. Rat eradication is a priority identified in the recently developed BIOT Conservation Management Plan (although unfortunately a proposal to look into the feasibility of this put into Darwin Plus Round 7 was not successful in that funding call).

The Bertarelli Programme's first Marine Science Symposium was held in September 2018 at the Royal Geographical Society, which a number of SOWG members attended. The Bertarelli Foundation is funding a large-scale, 5-year science programme in the Chagos Archipelago; this was the first opportunity for those who are not directly involved in the projects (as well as those that are involved) to hear about the research being conducted through this. The presentations were highly informative and can be viewed online on the Bertarelli Foundation YouTube page.



Cover of *Nature*, featuring paper on Chagos. Copyright: *Nature*

## Falkland Islands

SAERI continues to facilitate a range of environment research programmes both within the Falkland Islands themselves and also the South Atlantic territories more generally. The group received interesting updates on these projects throughout the year that promoted further discussion among group members, including the recently completed *Dolphins of the Kelp* project and the current Darwin Initiative-funded soil and coastal habitats mapping projects which will result in the creation of fine-scale habitat maps. More details on these can be found on the SAERI website.

## Pitcairn

As part of the UK Government's *Blue Belt* programme, Dr Emily Hardman from the Marine Management Organisation made a visit to Pitcairn in September 2018 to work with the local community, hearing their thoughts and ideas and discussing strategies for delivering the *Blue Belt* programme in the waters around the island. Other specific topics covered included a proposed whale-watching code of conduct, the island's capability to respond to a marine pollution incident, and issues associated with detecting and dealing with illegal fishing.

The Pitcairn Environment Group (PEG) met in December 2018, with Pitcairn representation from the Deputy Governor present and also Michele Christian from the on-island Environment Department joining the discussions from Pitcairn via phone. The meeting was facilitated by the Pew Trusts and several members of SOWG also attended. Informative discussions were held relating to on-going projects such as the *Blue Belt* MPA designation and management strategy, potential designation of Ramsar Sites and the continued importance of tourism to the Territory.



Humpbacks at Pitcairn. Photo: Tony Probst

## St Helena

Governor Lisa Honan departed St Helena at the start of May, at the end of her 3-year term in office. Governor Honan's office noted that, during her time on the island, she had aimed to bring government closer to the people, to be a visible Governor, wanting more Saints to take up roles currently being filled by people from abroad, and to make tourism work for the benefit of all Saints. She is succeeded by Dr Philip Rushbrook, who took up his role as the Territory's 69th Governor (and the first to arrive by air) on 11 May 2019.

The previously mentioned 2nd Natural Capital Conference held on St Helena in March 2019 brought together partners and stakeholders working on biodiversity conservation in the South Atlantic. It was also an opportunity for St Helena Government and St Helena National Trust to showcase their island and their current research and conservation programmes. This includes the expanding whale shark research, their developing marine management plan following the designation of the Marine Protected Area in 2016, and their terrestrial work spanning plant, invertebrate, seabird (and wirebird) monitoring and conservation and invasive species control. In relation to the first mentioned, two members of the St Helena National Trust recently returned from attending the 5th International Whale Shark conference in Ningaloo, Australia,

## South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI)

South Georgia was declared officially rat-free in May 2018, following the largest-ever successful eradication attempt, led by South Georgia Heritage Trust. The news has been well covered by the media. The 2017-



South Georgia rat-sniffer dog. Photo: South Georgia Heritage Trust

18 survey of all of the baited areas, carried out 2 years after the last eradication attempt, and which included 3 trained sniffer dogs, found no evidence to suggest that any rats remained.

Following the 5-yearly Marine Protected Area review, the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) announced in December 2018 a range of additional measures, including that it will extend the current MPA legislation across its entire 1.24m km<sup>2</sup>, and that the no-take zones, closed to all commercial fishing activity, will be expanded to cover 23% of the MPA. While acknowledging that this is a positive step, Great British Oceans Coalition expressed disappointment that the Governments did not introduce full (100% no take) protection around the South Sandwich Islands and their campaign for this continues. Not all conservation bodies concur.

The Government of SGSSI held its annual stakeholder meeting at FCO in London in September 2018. It was an interesting meeting, well attended by stakeholders and with a number of informative presentations and updates, spanning fisheries enforcement, licensing, compliance and the successful rodent eradication project. See article in *Forum News 49* (available on the UKOTCF website: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/news/forum-newsvers2>).

## Tristan da Cunha

Work continues on Tristan da Cunha to develop and implement a marine strategy as part of the UK Government's *Blue Belt* programme expeditions. This has included surveys of Tristan's waters from the *RRS Discovery* in March/ April 2019. These included its seamounts, of which very little is known. The expedition facilitated representatives from UK agencies Cefas and Marine Management Organisation (MMO), and Tristan Government's UK-based Environment and Conservation Policy Officer to spend time on the island, while a number of islanders from the Conservation and Fisheries Departments boarded the *RRS Discovery* to participate in the research and analysis. The cruise to Tristan by *Discovery* was also featured in a live audience event at the Natural History Museum in London, with an ambitious live video link-up with researchers on board the ship in Tristan waters.

Tristan da Cunha has been working closely with the RSPB on plans to restore Gough Island by eradicating the invasive non-native mice. This is an incredibly complex operation and, with the ultimate goal of saving species firmly in minds, the RSPB, with support from Tristan da Cunha Government, made the difficult decision to delay the operation (originally planned to be carried out in June-August 2019) until 2020. This additional year of preparation is an opportunity to ensure planning will deliver the best possible outcomes for Gough and its wildlife.

The Tristan community have joined Twitter – follow accounts @KellyGr70879780 and @NatureTristan for insights from the island.



RRS Discovery at Tristan. Photo: Tristan Government

## Report of UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group

### Cross-territory

Over several years, there has been a significant amount of work carried out by the GB non-native species secretariat (GBNNS). It has resulted in the production of several tool-kits and recently conducted horizon-scanning exercises for UKOTs at workshops 2018-2019. Priority invasive non-native species were identified by consensus for each territory in terms of threats to biodiversity, economy and human-health.

The Inter Island Environmental Meeting (IEM) took place in September, hosted by Jersey. The theme of the meetings was partnerships.

### Alderney

The Alderney Bird Observatory received its official certification. An integral part of observatory work is bird ringing, undertaken within the national British scheme, coordinated by the British Trust for Ornithology. This provides data for guiding conservation policies and action in the

*Catherine Wensink at IEM. Some of the presentations were outlined on the meeting's website: [http://www.nationaltrust.je/iem-2018-proceedings/?fbclid=IwAR117hrcnplh9-NpLg1Wz9Ly7L61fSVaj7qi4EiGo6\\_dOyz1b8dk7Yb3wHA](http://www.nationaltrust.je/iem-2018-proceedings/?fbclid=IwAR117hrcnplh9-NpLg1Wz9Ly7L61fSVaj7qi4EiGo6_dOyz1b8dk7Yb3wHA). The first day had included a session on what an Environment Charter for the Channel Islands might look like. The idea was to encourage more sharing of ideas and cooperation between the Channel Islands. A detailed article was published in Forum News 49.*

UK. The ABO had met the requirements of the Bird Observatories Council (see <http://www.birdobsCouncil.org.uk>). To add to this work, the Alderney Wildlife Trust are creating a new bird hide on the island, with disabled access to enable everyone to enjoy nature. Their work on island



has included seabird conservation and linking with other Channel Islands to share experiences and expertise.

Puffin cameras have been re-installed with some new functionality. The addition of pan-tilt-zoom cameras has meant that puffin monitoring methodology has to be altered to utilise the new camera for remote surveys. This will ultimately reduce the chances of disturbing breeding birds on Burhou due to human presence. Following success in 2018, a voluntary puffin-friendly zone has been created together with a code of conduct which would be re-advertised again in the coming year.

As part of AWT's continuing monitoring of the gannet colony on Les Etacs and Ortac, a new paper has been accepted for the next *Seabird Journal*, entitled "Alderney's Northern Gannet *Morus bassanus* population; Counts on Les Etacs and Ortac".

AWT are working with the other Channel Islands to develop a Channel Islands Ramsar Site general code of conduct, which will be hosted on a joint website.

## Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas

The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology received further funding from Darwin Plus to continue their project in the SBAs. The project is concerned with water tables and systems in Lake Akrotiri <https://www.ceh.ac.uk/news-and-media/news/study-will-support-species-and-environment-key-international-wetland-site-cyprus>.

The SBAs had taken part in the horizon-scanning workshops with the GB non-native species secretariat (GBNNS) to identify consensus priority species (see above). There were 4 marine and 16 terrestrial species which were thought to have a significant impact on the biodiversity of the area.



Page from new website: [akrotirienvironment.com](http://akrotirienvironment.com)

## Gibraltar

The UK's possible departure from the European Union is the main issue for Gibraltar. UK officials from several departments, including Defra, have visited on fact-finding visits. The idea is there will be a series of Memoranda signed by UK and Gibraltar and Spain on cooperation over various issues, and environment is one of them.

This year in January, as part of the GB non-native species secretariat (GBNNS) work (see above), a horizon-scanning workshop was held for Gibraltar, coordinated by Gibraltar's Department of the Environment, Heritage and Climate Change, and the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens. Professor Helen Roy, from the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, led the workshop, which included taxonomic experts from Spain, Italy, Portugal, Belgium, Austria and the UK, working with local experts from the Department and the Botanic Gardens. As part of this, two orientation field trips were organised, one for terrestrial specialists in the Gibraltar Nature Reserve and one for the marine team in coastal waters. Following this, a two-day workshop was then held to identify the priority species not present in Gibraltar and with a high likelihood of arrival within the next 10 years. Overall, a total of 58 species were identified: 14 marine species, 17 plants, 16 invertebrates, and 11 vertebrates.

One serious invasive is the Asian tiger mosquito *Aedes albopictus*, now found in Gibraltar. This species breeds in wet urban areas, and bites



Horizon scanning for Gibraltar. Photo: GB Non-native species secretariat

mainly during the day-time. There were no health concerns until recently, when 3 cases of Dengue were seen in Spain. They are also known to carry *Zika* virus and West Nile virus *Chikungunya*.

The Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS) is exploring the possibility of a project with the University of Malaga on control of black rats, by looking at population densities across nature reserves and their impact on native species. This study is unique among the UKOTs & CDs, because Gibraltar is not an island, but faces similar challenges.

## Guernsey

Over the last 12 months, there has been a lot of progress in implementing Guernsey's Biodiversity Strategy.

With the addition of a Biodiversity Education Officer, the following has been achieved: 726 children taught, 30 media interviews given, two campaigns launched, 30,056 people engaged through the Biodiversity Partnership Facebook page (65 Facebook posts which have reached a total of 125,199 people) and recruitment of over 1,177 volunteer hours to support a range of projects, in particular the removal of Hottentot figs *Carpobrotus*.

Fieldwork has been completed for the *Phase 1 Habitat Survey* of the whole of Guernsey.

Through the Ramsar Management Group, over 20 individual stakeholders of the Herm Ramsar Site have engaged in the Ramsar Management Plan and there are a number of data collection projects underway, the results of which will inform the future management of the site.

Environment Guernsey Ltd has partnered formally with Imperial College London, so that Masters project opportunities can be advertised and post-graduate students encouraged to undertake research in Guernsey. This summer, two students spent 8 weeks researching the small mammals of Guernsey and have made significant findings, particularly that the voles of Guernsey are much larger than other European voles.

The Pollinator Project aims to raise awareness of the contribution everyone can each make to enhance Guernsey's biodiversity by providing food and habitats for pollinators, and encourages the community to make their gardens, allotments, window boxes and balconies pollinator friendly. The volunteer project coordinators work with schools, businesses, community groups and large-scale land-owners and managers of public spaces, to establish pollinator patches and create nesting habitats throughout the

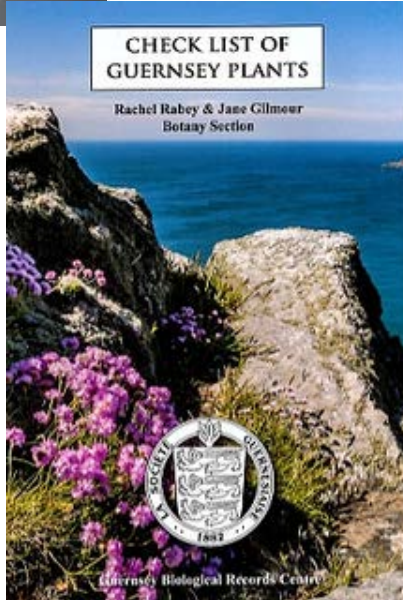


*Small mammal surveying: Imperial College graduate students visited Guernsey during May & June and their surveying revealed that voles there are, on average, 10% larger than their European cousins. The largest vole measured was 13.6 cm (5.4 in) in length. That is 2 mm larger than the previous record and is thought to be the largest European common vole ever recorded! Why are Guernsey voles so big? We do not yet know, but may be related to the Island-Rule Hypothesis. Photos: Imperial College London*



Above: Asian hornet. Photo: John de Carteret

Right: Check list of Guernsey plants. La Société Guernesiaise



qualified and experienced divers from the UK to visit Guernsey for eight nights each year, as well as building capacity locally by training local divers. The areas to be surveyed each year will be developed with the States and the SeaSearch team to align with other related work-streams (e.g. Ramsar).

A Project Coordinator and Field Support Officer have been recruited to deal with the invasive Asian hornet. They will implement a Bailiwick-wide control Strategy to be kick-started with an Island-wide queen trapping in early spring.

The Guernsey Biological Records published a revised and updated Check List of Guernsey Plants: see <http://www.societe.org.gg>. They had also started Project Ormer, a long-term project to research the island's precious ormer population. (Ormers are marine gastropod molluscs.) It aims to discover aspects of ormer biology, ecology, and behaviour, as well gain information about the size of Guernsey's ormer population.

## Isle of Man

The IoM has now designated an additional 9 new marine nature reserves, which means that 10.4% of the Island's territorial sea and 50.4% of the inshore waters are protected.

An additional Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) has been created. It is a wet grassland area, which adds to the number of terrestrial designated sites.

The Biosphere Stakeholder Partnership is producing a Strategy for the Biosphere with a number of workshops being held to enable this. This year, there was also a visit from UNESCO.

The first phase of the island plastics strategy had been rolled out; this aims to end single-use plastic-use in the Government. The next stage will be to work with the community.

A former 10-mile railway line running between Peel and Douglas, known as the Heritage Trail, is being upgraded from a footpath to a public bridleway and cycle path. The track runs through the Central Valley Curragh, a wetland area of high conservation value. The upgrade includes tree removal, ditch works, widening the path and surfacing with recycled materials.

Over the next three years, Peel Marina will be dredged and sediment will be removed. The project will also look at the passage of migrant salmonid, eel and lamprey, breeding black guillemot, and address pollutants drifting out to sea.

DEFA are currently writing management plans for 14 plantation complexes to enable certification to the Woodland Assurance Standard and Forest Stewardship Council. The ecology of the plantations has been included within the management plans, and revenue raised through the sale of FSC timber will contribute towards biodiversity enhancement

island. This year, it won 'Best Conservation Project' at the islands award ceremony.

SeaSearch (Marine Conservation Society) has been invited to carry out marine research from 2018-2023 in Guernsey waters. The government has allocated funding to enable eight

schemes in the plantations. It has also been agreed that some forestry compartments will be removed from the hills and the land will revert back to heathland. Ecological sections in the management plans for 20 glens are in draft.

An agri-environment scheme is being developed, and will be rolled out over the next couple of years.

Nature Conservation Forum meetings, chaired by a political member and attended by NGOs, continue. Recent topics have included management of hedgerows, farming and wildlife, water abstraction and wildlife sites.

Funding has been secured for a volunteer group to undertake control of Japanese knotweed and Himalayan balsam in the Neb catchment.

A recently formed charity, called 'The Irish Sea Centre', aims to cover all aspects of the Irish Sea, including fisheries, off-shore developments, nature conservation and shipping.

Crogga, the Isle of Man-based hydrocarbon exploration company, has recently been awarded an oil and gas exploration licence for part of the Isle of Man's seabed.

A prosecution case is being pursued after joyriders damaged the turf on the Ayres NNR.

## Jersey

A public consultation on the new Wildlife Law has taken place, with a view to it being passed in mid-2019.

Spatial analysis of species distribution data has created a map of 'biodiversity hotspots'. The next step is to identify opportunities for best-fit habitat corridors, in order to develop links between areas rich in biodiversity. The data will be used also to prioritise the selection of habitats for protection under Sites of Special Interest legislation.

Asian hornets have continued to cause problems in Jersey. In 2018, 57 nests, on both buildings and trees, were destroyed. The first Asian hornets were found in 2016, although no nests were found that year. A British-Irish Council meeting was held in Jersey in August 2018 to discuss Asian hornet issues.

The Department of Environment continues to develop the use of the conservation site-management system CMSi for site management planning.

Two groups of service-providers and service-users have been created to coordinate the development of the infrastructure needed to implement the Countryside Access Strategy, in order to improve access to the Island's countryside.

An event inviting public feedback on the new code of practice for managing Ramsar Sites was recently organized as part of World Wetlands Day in February.

Jersey Bats continue to research resident species with greater and lesser horseshoe bats found in Jersey this year.

Seascope completed surveys on the marine environment at the end of the year. Data are sent via the Marine Conservation Society (MCS), with a copy available at Jersey Biodiversity Centre.



Above: Jon Parkes lead a group to Sorel Point, Jersey. Photo: Annyctalusecology

Jersey is increasing opportunities for the public to find out about conservation, through schemes such as *Wild Jersey* and the *Butterfield Marine Watch* team.

## Sark

In addition to the exploration done elsewhere in the Channel Islands, there have been some important discoveries and developments in the underwater environment around Sark.

Underwater surveys took place in summer 2018 and found that the crawfish, which was thought to be locally extinct as a result of overfishing, is making a come-back in Sark's waters.

Crawfish or European spiny lobster *Palinurus elephas* are a highly valuable commercially fished crustacean. They are native to the south and west coasts of the British Isles, south to the Azores, the western Mediterranean, Adriatic and Aegean Seas.

After discussions with local fishermen, the Sark's Sea Fisheries Committee proposed to protect crawfish within the island's three-mile territorial limit. The proposal was supported by the island's government, Chief Pleas, in January, and the amendment to Sark's fishing law was enacted in spring 2019. Additional legislation to protect the rich wrasse fish populations is also being considered.

Annual beach cleans continue with many volunteers taking part in the



*Sark volunteers removing gorse to make way for heather.*

*Photo: Sue Daley*

Channel Island Big Beach clean in January at Dixcart Bay.

In February, volunteers were also clearing patches of gorse from the Eperquerie that has over-crowded heather, an important plant species for the silver-studded blue *Plebejus argus*, one of Sark's butterfly species.

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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.

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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.

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Address: ..... Postcode: .....

Signature: ..... Date: .....

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