



FORUM NEWS 27

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• www.ukotcf.org

Ascension Island's First Ever National Park

Green Mountain National Park, Ascension's first ever National Park has been opened. The National Protected Areas Ordinance was enacted in 2003. In March 2005 the Ascension Island Council agreed to designate Green Mountain as the first National Park under this National Protected Areas Ordinance.



*Shane Green's winning design for
The National Trust Logo*

Since April 2004, the Ascension Island Government has been working on an Overseas Territories Environment Programme Project entitled: Developing and initiating the implementation of Ascension's first National Park Management Plan. This year-long project culminated in the opening of the Park on the 25th and 26th June.

Over the past year lots of hard work has gone into developing and implementing the National Park Management Plan. Paths have been improved, greenhouses covered to create nurseries for the propagation of endemic plants, and areas have been cleared and fenced where these endemics will be reintroduced into the wild. Stedson Stroud has

been on training at Kew Gardens and in Cambridge and has

successfully propagated the critically endangered endemic fern *Pteris adscensionis*

Volunteers are being trained as tour guides, and various interpretive material is being produced to try to make the mountain more interesting for residents and visitors. School children have worked on planting grass in the picnic areas, have weeded and have given ideas for the mountain plan and Shane Green won the competition for designing the National Park logo.

The whole community was invited to the opening, a day that celebrated the beauty and value of the environment and a large proportion participated.

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Green Mountain Path renovation

**“Biodiversity That Matters”
a conference on conservation in
UK Overseas Territories
and other small island communities
Jersey 7th to 12th October 2006**



Organised by UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, with the support of the Overseas Territories Environment Programme, and hosted by the Jersey conservation bodies

Forum News 26 carried first details of the international environment conference from 7th to 12th October 2006 in Jersey, with a focus on UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small islands.

By the time that this *Forum News* is published or shortly afterwards, it is expected that more details of the programme and a booking form will be published on the Forum's web-site (www.ukotcf.org). Those wishing to attend are advised to book early, because the total number of places available is limited. The Forum organisers and their Jersey colleagues look forward to seeing many friends, old and new, at this useful gathering.

Spending figures indicate that the British Government values conservation of globally important biodiversity in UK Overseas Territories 5000 times less important than that in Great Britain

The Forum has long been concerned that the British Government's spending on conservation in the UK Overseas Territories is ridiculously low. We commend the on-going support from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and welcomed the joining with this two years ago by the Department for International Development to establish the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP). UKOTCF has highlighted and supported this fund, but all concerned recognise that only very small projects can be supported by it. The British Government's main budget for conservation is managed by the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Amazingly, none of this budget is committed regularly to UK Overseas Territories.

Figures from the British Government have recently become available that demonstrate just how serious the situation is. The British Government estimates that it spends at least £460 million per year on biodiversity conservation in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. It also makes a significant contribution to international conservation, by an estimated £40 million. However, its estimated spend on conservation on the UK Overseas Territories is about £1 million per year, divided between all sixteen Territories (and none on Crown Dependencies).

This lack of spend is serious because the Territories generally have limited capacity themselves to undertake vital conservation work. Despite this, many Territories are making major and commendable efforts in these regards. However, whatever the per capita income in a UK Overseas Territory, there are severe constraints because the human population sizes vary between fewer than 50 persons to 59,000, mainly about 2000 to 20000 – compared with about 59 million in UK mainland as a whole.

The British Government enters international commitments on behalf of both itself and UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. These include the international conventions on conservation (sometimes called multilateral environmental agreements). The British Government shares responsibility for this globally important biodiversity. The British Government is party to some fine words here, but there is little hard evidence of its commitments.

This is even more vital because most of the UK's globally important biodiversity is located in UK Overseas Territories and not in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Examples of this are well known and can be found on the Forum's web site (www.ukotcf.org). One very conservative estimate is that there are at least ten times as many endemic species in UK Overseas Territories as in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Using this as a factor to multiply the spending difference, it appears that UK Government values its responsibilities to global biodiversity in Great Britain and Northern Ireland about 5000 times more than it values its responsibilities to global biodiversity in its Overseas Territories. In fact, because of incomplete information in UK Overseas Territories (caused in part by the same shortage of resources), the difference is very much more.

We are not suggesting that the spending by UK on conservation in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, nor its international

contributions, should be significantly cut. However, the level of support for its responsibilities in UK Overseas Territories is derisory. The work over the past decade and more by UKOTCF (which struggles along with no core funding from UK Government despite undertaking much voluntary work for it) and the success of the small projects funded by OTEP, its FCO fore-runners and the NGOs have demonstrated what can be done with very limited funding. They have also exposed the scale of necessary work which needs funding. It would not take much to make a huge impact. A tiny proportion of the funds which UK spends on conservation in Great Britain and Northern Ireland would have a giant huge percentage change to the spending in UK Overseas Territories.

It is time to address some core issues. Surely Defra can find a way to provide significant funding. Surely the Department of Culture, Media and Sports has it in its power to make National Lottery funding available to UK Overseas Territories. There are all sorts of negative bureaucratic answers that can be made to these questions. But, if there is a will, a way can be found, even if legislation is required. Surely it is time that the UK Government started treating the UK Overseas Territories and their British citizens more like special parts of UK rather than odd and forgotten small foreign countries?

Although the scale of the discrepancy has only now become clear, the basic message is not new. UKOTCF has been pointing this out, perhaps in too civilised a manner, to UK Governments for over a decade. It really is time for UK Government to act. Almost incredibly, species which occur in UK Territory and nowhere else in the world are still going extinct – most recently the St Helena Olive which went extinct in November 2003. Several other species are on the brink. This is a disgrace, and the lack of action by UK Government is a breach of its commitments under its own international commitments. As always the UKOTCF is keen to work with UK Government in any way possible to change this situation and ensure long-term survival of the UK's most precious biodiversity

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

New Years Honours 2005

Stedson Stroud was made a Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire for services to St Helena in the 2005 New Year Honours List.

This award recognises Stedson's outstanding contribution to nature conservation efforts on St Helena. His enthusiasm for St Helena's endemics is well known. He made a major contribution to the rediscovery and propagation of St. Helena's endemic flora, including the bastard gumwood and the boxwood. He also put into practice conservation principles as a private farmer, producing organic beef, honey and cosmetics. He has also assisted with training courses in conservation techniques.

Stedson was a founder member of the St. Helena Nature Conservation Group and Vice Chairman of the St. Helena National Trust, which was launched in May 2002. In 2002, he delivered presentations at two environmental conferences held in Gibraltar and Skye.

Stedson Stroud is currently continuing his conservation interests through highly regarded work on Ascension Island in support of the Conservation Officer there.

Trust makes tracks

The Alderney Wildlife Trust, an Associate member of the Forum, in conjunction with the Alderney Society and with the help of over 25 dedicated volunteers and their families, has embarked on an epic restoration project to reopen an ancient cart track in the Bonne Terre valley.

The track is believed to be hundreds of years old and was used by horse-drawn carts travelling to and from the watermill at the bottom of the valley. Since the Second World War it has been left mostly untended as the watermill fell into disuse, now being frequented only by walkers, who have to struggle through the undergrowth and on unstable ground in order to visit the popular and picturesque valley. In addition over 250 metres of track is now totally inaccessible.



Ortac Gannet Colony

The land adjacent to the track is Alderney's most important area of wet meadowland which has become almost inaccessible, but is home to the locally rare species Greater Tussock Sedge, Ragged Robin and Southern Marsh Orchid. This, added to the natural beauty of the area, has made the Bonne Terre one of the most popular walking areas for local residents for many years. However, due to the difficulties of access, numbers using the valley have declined.



Children Take part in activities

On 25th June 2005, the Trust held a family volunteer event open to all members of the community as well as visitors, including children over the age of five. Whilst the adults were involved in re-opening and restoring the trackway to a safe standard, which

included the creation of three flights of steps and the reconstruction of the existing footpaths, the children were entertained by the Trust's Watch leaders, learning about the valley's rich wildlife. This included stream dipping, insect hunts and plant cocktails.

Volunteers also helped erect a fence around some of the valley's richest grassland which will enable the Trust to include the site in the Alderney Grazing Animals Project (AGAP). This it is hoped will ensure the return of traditional wet meadowland management to the site.

At the end of the day more than 40 Trust members and their families gathered in the valley for a barbeque and drinks to celebrate a job well done.

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Falklands Wildlife in the Spotlight

Falklands Conservation and WILDGuides of Old Basing, Hampshire plan several publications in time for the next cruise ship and wildlife watching season, starting in November 2005. During the recent southern summer, about 47,000 visitors reached the Falklands by sea and several hundred more by air, via Punta Arenas or Ascension Island, often with specialist holiday groups. This total is expected to be at least equalled in 2005-06 and the demand grows for reliable information on the Falklands and on the birds, animals and plants to be seen.

A Visitor's Guide to the Falkland Islands, first published in 2001, is now being revised and expanded by the author Debbie Summers for Falklands Conservation, as more tourist destinations have become available. This very popular and beautifully illustrated guide has established itself as the most insightful and reliable source of local knowledge available. It will continue to offer valuable information to tourists so that they can make best use of their brief visits to East and West Falkland and some offshore islands.

Birds and Mammals of the Falkland Islands is a new production by Robin Woods, author of three bird guides in the past 30 years and joint author of the 1997 *Atlas of Breeding Birds of the Falkland Islands*. Produced using the latest digital graphics technology by the publishers, WILDGuides, it will enable quick identification of all resident species and many regular non-breeding species, including those that are likely to be seen at sea between Tierra del Fuego, the Antarctic Peninsula and the Falklands.

Important Bird Areas in the Falkland Islands contains the text provided through Falklands Conservation for BirdLife International's Directory of Important Bird Areas in the UK Overseas Territories. This material has been re-laid, photographs added and the format adapted to make a compact, authoritative source of information on the places in the Falklands that are especially important for birds. This Directory shows where more detailed recording and monitoring are needed and where Site Support Groups can become involved.

These books will all be of rucksack pocket size, designed to be carried when on shore or afloat. Separately or together they will greatly enhance the wildlife experiences of visitors to the Falklands.

This will be available in November from Falklands Conservation UK Office: 1 Princess Avenue, Finchley, London N3 2DA or from www.falklandsconservation.com



Successful Project Proposals 2005

OTEP is a joint programme of the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) to support the implementation of the Environment Charters and environmental management more generally in all the UK's Overseas Territories. The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum continues to provide a Communication Strategy for the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP). This is the third of a series of supplements to *Forum News* as part of this initiative. Although *Forum News* itself is under the editorial control of the Forum, the content of this supplement is as agreed by the Forum with FCO and DFID.

In the second round, 28 applications from 11 Territories plus two cross-territory applications were received, of which 22 were approved. The programme is going from strength to strength and the standard of applications had been high. Over the two years, 45 projects had been approved from 14 Territories as well as some cross-territory projects. A review of the programme is to be made this year and FCO/DFID welcome comment from the Forum and the UKOTs to identify gaps in the programme.

Anguilla: A bird-watching guide to Anguilla

The project will produce a bird-watching guide for Anguilla to complement recent publications on reptiles and plants. The main aim of the guide will be to promote the island's bird life and a better understanding of the habitats they depend upon. It will be a full colour guide with photographs featuring birds and bird-watching sites on Anguilla including its Important Bird Areas, a section on bird identification and information on the Anguilla National Trust. The book will be aimed at visiting birdwatchers, Anguillians and Anguilla's schools, with proceeds going to the Anguilla National Trust.

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Ascension: Ascension Environment Information Operations Utility (AEIOU)

The project will synthesise existing information from land jurisdiction, environmental mapping and monitoring, geological and cultural data with new land cover data into a single manageable framework, and provide protocols for updating, managing and applying information. Portals will be available to the school and for public use as a learning and information resource. Resulting maps will provide

Ascension with the means to implement their plan for Green Mountain, home to many native and culturally important species, and other protected areas, and integrate environmental monitoring information with other island data for strategic and routine planning and management.



View of Green Mountain

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Bermuda: Somerset Long Bay Nature Reserve, restoration, enhancement and long-term management plan

The project will implement a restorative and enhancement management plan for the 2.86-acre property. The property includes a beachfront, freshwater pond, overgrazed pasture, and is bordered by mainly invasive vegetation. Existing perimeter fencing will be up-graded and gated for better security. The pond will be enlarged to create shallow water areas and mudflats. The pasture area will be reduced and managed to prevent overgrazing and to enhance habitat diversity. The beachfront and eastern side of the reserve will be re-planted as native woodland, and made accessible to the public via an interpretive nature trail.

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Bermuda: Development of species and habitat recovery plans, and capacity building for implementation

The project is designed to promote the protection and recovery of threatened species and habitats listed under Bermuda's Protected Species Act 2003 through:

- The dedication of one full time staff for the development of recovery plans and coordination of implementation framework
- Engagement of stakeholders and wider community
- Publication and distribution of comprehensive recovery plans.
- Audit of resources and needs assessment
- Identification of emergency measures
- Capacity building for implementation
- Launching of recovery plans

Currently, 50 terrestrial and marine species, and 24 cave species, are considered. The proposed work will not only provide cohesion to existing recovery efforts, but will provide the capacity building required for the recovery of all listed species.

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Bermuda: Saltus Island Project

The Saltus Island Project is a woodland management scheme and environmental education initiative, first established in 2002 in conjunction with the Bermuda National Trust. The flora of the 3.2-acre island in Hamilton Harbour was becoming dominated by fast growing introduced species. The project aims to manage the woodland on the island, controlling the invasive species and planting native and endemic plants. Senior 9 (age 13) students from Saltus Grammar School, visit the island twice per month. The students are taught the significance of the project, and also work to remove the invasive species, create paths, plant native/endemic species, compost, clear garbage etc.

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British Indian Ocean Territory: Conducting a census of the seabirds on Diego Garcia

At present no scientifically gathered, repeatable surveys of breeding seabirds have been conducted in the Chagos. The project will conduct a census of seabirds at Barton Point, Diego Garcia, a recently identified Important Bird Area (IBA) to provide conservation bodies a confirmed base line of population densities of breeding seabirds. This work is essential, as it will supply an accurate start point for the long term monitoring of seabirds, in particular the effect of cats and rats on the breeding sea birds.

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British Indian Ocean Territory: Ecological restoration through the eradication of introduced black rats *Rattus rattus* from Eagle Island, Chagos Archipelago

This project will eradicate black rats *Rattus rattus* from Eagle Island in the Chagos Archipelago. Black rats are likely to have had a considerable effect on the ecosystem of Eagle Island; their presence will probably have prevented seabirds from colonising the island in significant numbers because of the rats' predation of hatchlings, birds and eggs. Rats will also have suppressed regeneration of native plants, and predated hatchling marine turtles and many invertebrate species. Rats are one of the most widespread invasive species, and through their close association with humans have been introduced to over 80% of the world's major islands and island groups. The removal of rats from Eagle Island will benefit the ecosystem and will be a vital first step in restoring the island as a sanctuary for the region's seabirds and plant and other animal life.

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British Virgin Islands: BVI Environmental CD atlas and teaching resource

The BVI is comprised of over 60 islands and cays, yet the majority of the population resides on Tortola, with schools of varying sizes on three of the sister islands: Virgin Gorda, Anegada and Jost Van Dyke. School visits to the sister islands are not included within the curriculum, so many students never visit the other islands in the BVI and as a result have extremely limited knowledge of the BVI's natural environment. Additionally the teaching of geographic components of social sciences and environmental awareness in BVI schools has relied upon the use of regional and international atlases, which have minimal relevance to the BVI.

Developed as a locally implemented initiative, an informational CD Atlas has been created by the National Geographical Information Systems Technical Steering Committee as a resource for schools and the general public to engender a comprehensive understanding of the environments of the BVI and we are now seeking funding to publish and launch this product. By using an interactive atlas, a series of maps, charts, diagrams, tables, photographs, text and internet links, a dynamic web based CD allows students to explore the real world distribution of the environments of the BVI

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Falkland Islands: Completion of the New Island South reserve management plan and initiation of implementation

New Island is an Important Bird Area (IBA), hosting the largest seabird colony in the Falkland Islands, and significant populations of several globally threatened species. Through this project, New Island South Conservation Trust will complete a Management Plan for the reserve and start its implementation. Important activities will include (1) completion of a biodiversity inventory and continued monitoring of globally-threatened species, (2) the assessment of the impact of four species of alien mammals on bird populations and experimental control of mammals, (3) control of introduced plants, (4) the assessment of the impact of the current tourist activities and implementation of regulations, (5) dismantling of old fences and other hazardous structures, (6) regulation and prioritisation of research activities, (7) implementation of a monitoring and evaluation plan, (8) construction of a visitors' centre. The visitors' centre will be built by reconstructing one of the most important historical buildings in the Falkland Islands, the Barnard's Building (the origins of which go back to Captain Charles Barnard, who was marooned on New Island in 1812-1813).

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Falkland Islands: Falkland Islands key sites

The project will progress protection of important bird sites in the Falkland Islands. At sites already identified as potentially significant, surveys will collect data on bird populations to enable qualification as Important Bird Areas. Publication of a *Directory of Important Bird Areas for the Falkland Islands* will provide a vital tool for decision makers, landowners and others so that effective conservation measures can be implemented where and when appropriate. By setting up site support groups, wildlife protection at three key areas in the Falklands will be improved, data collection on key species will be increased and the chances of voluntary involvement for the population will be increased

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Montserrat: Pipers Pond rehabilitation project

The wetland at Pipers Pond is the largest remaining wetland habitat on Montserrat. It has potential as an educational resource. Its rehabilitation can serve to raise public awareness on conservation issues, and develop appreciation of wetlands as a significant component of the environment on Montserrat. The project aims to rehabilitate the Pond (which has been designated as a wildlife reserve), and to implement conservation practices and management controls in a buffer zone (designated as a conservation area), in order to limit sedimentation, pollution or erosion that might affect Pipers Pond.

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Montserrat: Establishing a botanical garden for relaxation and education

The project seeks to establish a botanical garden, where public knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the Montserrat environment can be enhanced through a variety of interesting and educational experiences. It will add to the number of interesting places on island and will therefore be a potential tourist attraction. Training will be provided to enhance the skills of Montserratians in environmental conservation and beautification, and data collection about plants to maintain the collection of plants in the grounds and to support science and research. Persons will also be trained to conduct guided tours and deliver educational programmes.

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South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands: South Georgia Giant Petrel and White-chinned Petrel conservation programme

The project aims to assist the GSGSSI in achieving and maintaining favourable conservation status for Southern Giant Petrels (Vulnerable), Northern Giant Petrels (Near-threatened) and White-chinned Petrels (Vulnerable) as outlined in the Agreement for the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, thereby enabling compliance with the Agreement. Project activities are directed at completing censuses to determine each species' conservation status, identifying key breeding sites, establishing a baseline for future long-term demographic studies, establishing research priorities for effective conservation of each species, management planning for breeding areas and raising awareness of the conservation aims and efforts by Government to protect seabirds.

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Southern Giant Petrel

St Helena: Developing and integrating cross sector management of nature trails and tours both terrestrial and marine

The series of post box walks established by the Nature Conservation Group of the National Trust in 2002 are becoming an increasingly popular way for locals and visitors to explore the Island. The Tourism Office has been promoting the walks along with sea-based activities (diving, snorkelling, dolphin watching) as activities available to visitors. With increasing interest in these activities this project addresses the need to establish best practises for providing services and improving

the quality of the trails and tours to ensure enjoyable and safe experiences for all.

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St Helena: Monitoring and raising awareness of grouper at St Helena using Ascension Island as a control

The project will gather baseline data on an important inshore fish species, grouper *Epinephelus adscensionis*. This will then enable the formulation of a management strategy that will develop the resource in a sustainable manner. Public awareness is another element of this project that will build on the current programme, and create greater awareness of the marine environment.

This project brings together many stakeholders who will benefit from a greater understanding of the biological processes of the grouper.

Data collected will contribute to local, regional and global knowledge along with contributing to the fulfilment of MEAs extended to St Helena.

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Tristan da Cunha: Eradication of the alien plant, Procumbent Pearlwort *Sagina procumbens* at Gough Island

The alien plant, Procumbent Pearlwort *Sagina procumbens*, was first observed at Gough Island in the immediate vicinity of the South African meteorological station in September 1998. Since discovery, volunteer efforts by South African meteorologists, acting under the guidance of the Gough Island Nature Reserve Advisory Committee (GINRAC) and an expert botanist in oceanic islands and invasive species (Dr Niek Gremmen) and utilizing both chemical and physical methods, have restricted the plant's spread to a small (<1-ha) area. The project aims to eradicate *Sagina* at Gough Island by way of a dedicated two-person team with the necessary skills and experience who will be stationed at the island for extended periods of time over a two-year period.

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Tristan da Cunha: Tristan da Cunha conservation office

The project will construct a purpose-built conservation office, attached to the existing Natural Resources Department. This will provide office space for a Tristan Conservation Officer, whose main duties will be to manage conservation projects, and will also provide desk and laboratory space for visiting scientists. The equipment, including desktop computer, purchased during the current Darwin Initiative project on Tristan will be housed there.

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Tristan da Cunha: An assessment of the potential for rodent eradication in the Tristan da Cunha

Tristan da Cunha is a most important UKOT for biodiversity conservation holding the highest numbers of endemic and globally threatened species. However, introduced rodents on the two largest islands have had, and continue to have, a devastating impact on biodiversity. Acting on a request from Tristan, the project will evaluate the potential conservation management options for reducing or removing rodent impacts and restoring the two islands. The available options will be presented and discussed at stakeholder meetings in Tristan, the UK and South Africa, and a detailed plan of action for the preferred option will be produced.

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Cross-Territory: OT Graduate Research Studentships: building capacity for conservation

Three OTEP Research Fellowships will be offered to citizens of the UKOTs to study for an MSc in Conservation and Biodiversity at the Centre for Ecology and Conservation at the University of Exeter in Cornwall (UEC). Individuals will be selected by a steering committee of invited experts who specialise in aspects of conservation in the UKOTs. Fellows will study in Cornwall from October 05 - March 06, conduct a research project in their home nation and return to the UK to analyse data, write their thesis, and attend the UKOTCF conference. They will return to the UK to graduate in February 2007. Individuals should be employed by a relevant government department or NGO in their home nation, or guaranteed a position once qualified. This programme will increase the capacity of locally based government departments and NGOs to address the commitments of the Environment Charter and the MEAs. Individuals will also have the opportunity to build upon existing and forge new relationships with UK based OT experts to facilitate future environmental programmes

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Cross-Territory: Community environmental awareness

The project will raise environmental awareness in two Overseas Territories in the South Atlantic. Its key elements are inter-linked to provide a cohesive approach within the Falkland and Ascension Islands' communities. It will produce environmental resources for schools focusing on island issues and native wildlife. It will launch initiatives for hands-on involvement in conservation activities. It will provide the means for volunteers to take part in wildlife surveys and monitoring. It will facilitate long-term repeatable voluntary data collection. The outputs will create long-term legacies, and, in particular, be incorporated into the education delivery system in both islands.

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OTEP Project reports

Applications to OTEP have been of a high quality with good variation in the second round and the cross-territory projects have shown particular cooperation. Good results are beginning to be seen with some encouraging outcomes. In order for the programme to continue it is imperative that publicity be given to the success of projects; *Forum News* has selected a number of reports from the Territories to illustrate this point below and over leaf. Articles on four other OTEP-supported projects can be found on pages 1, 10 and 11 of the main section of the *Forum News*.

Red List Assessment of Cayman Islands' Native Flora for legislation and conservation planning

Grand Cayman was subject to severe impact from Hurricane Ivan on 12 September 2004, causing significant disruption to the three project partners – The Department of the Environment, the National Trust for the Cayman Islands and consultant, Fred Burton. While little progress has been made with this project during the intervening period, thankfully a significant amount of work was completed prior to the storm, and these data survived intact.

Following completion of a *Botanical Checklist*, the *Red List* status of local endemics was evaluated as a priority. Thus, assessments had already been completed for all species / subspecies of greatest local conservation significance, before the storm. While some delays to field work have also arisen, investigation of Cayman Brac has confirmed that the localised population of endemic *Verbesina caymanensis*, confined to a small area of the north east cliff, survived the hurricane.

While Cayman's (draft) National Conservation Law remains at green bill stage, the Department of the Environment has since been successful as a project partner in this year's round of *Darwin Initiative* applications. A component of this will be the development of a *Biodiversity Action Plan for the Cayman Islands* – representing a mechanism for the transfer of *Red List* data into a practical conservation framework.

Dr Mat Cottam, Cayman Islands Department of Environment.



EarthDay 2005. Over 600 Red Mangroves were planted as part of this well-attended DoE-organised event. A heightened awareness of the value of native flora has been evident in the wake of the storm.



Southern Giant Petrel census for the Falkland Islands

The first census of the Southern Giant-petrel in the Falkland Islands has just been completed. This census was undertaken as part of a two-year Albatross and Petrel Programme supported by the UK Overseas Territories Environment Programme and the Falkland Islands Government.

The census revealed a total of 19,810 breeding pairs of Southern Giant Petrels here, a much greater number than the previous estimation of between 5,000-10,000. The world population of around 31,000 must now be re-evaluated and the significance of the Falkland Islands, holding a possible 45% of global numbers, be re-assessed as well as its importance as a stronghold for this species recognised.

Two main concentrations were recorded: one on the west of West Falkland with 26% of the population, and the second, and most important, to the south of Falkland Sound with 72% of the population.

All known and suspected colonies of breeding Giant-petrels were surveyed between November 2004 and March 2005 – a total of 47 sites. At four sites, where they were known to have bred in the past, no breeding adult birds were found this season. A further seven sites had no chicks, but may originally have had breeding adults. The remaining 38 sites held between one and 10,986 breeding pairs of Southern Giant Petrels.

In November and December all nests with breeding adults incubating were counted at each individual colony. In January, February and March all chicks and their present parents were counted.

Each colony was either surveyed by land, where direct counts were made, or by air, where aerial photographs were taken and breeding pairs were subsequently counted. Thirteen colonies were counted both during incubation and chick-rearing periods. These were used to estimate an average breeding success. These data were then used to estimate the original number of breeding pairs in colonies where only chicks were counted in the second half of the season. Variations in the number of birds counted and in breeding success were used to give an estimate of the error inherent to such a census.

Further work remains to be done. A comprehensive report of the census will now be produced with a detailed account of methods, results, background information and conservation issues. It will put these census results into context both locally and in terms of the worldwide population. A framework for future monitoring of the Southern Giant Petrel in the Falklands will be developed, including how best to monitor trends in the size of the Islands' population, describing any significant lack of knowledge about its ecology, threats it may be facing, and how best to remedy them.

*A Report by Nic Huin and Tim Reid April 2005.
Further details from Falklands Conservation UK Office,
1 Princess Avenue, Finchley, London N3 2DA, or
www.falklandsconservation.com*

Completion of initial implementation stage of plan for biodiversity management and sustainable development around TCI Ramsar site

Despite two hurricanes/tropical storms impacting TCI during 2004, the project has progressed remarkably well, with Turks & Caicos National Trust (TCNT) personnel undertaking additional work to repair the damage that occurred to some nature trails. Fortunately, the new ecocentre building (a former school) on Middle Caicos survived despite the storms occurring during roof restoration. Structural work (funded locally) is complete and design work on the interpretative displays is progressing rapidly.

Another highlight had been two weeks of fieldwork in January, with a multidisciplinary team of volunteer scientists working with local colleagues, including personnel from both



Scientists and local students study caves on East Caicos

the Turks & Caicos National Trust and the Department of Environment. The specialist team included Mike & Ann Pienkowski (ornithology, coordination of field-road [nature trail] development, filming), Oliver Cheesman (butterflies), Tim McCarthy from the Carnegie Museum and Tony Hutson (bats), Ben Pollard and Martin Hamilton from RBG Kew and Jimi Sadle from Florida (botany), Jim Hart from Pennsylvania (caves), and Bryan Naqqi Manco (Senior Conservation Officer, TCNT). The team was particularly fortunate to secure four days on East Caicos, thought to be the largest uninhabited island in the Caribbean and last visited by a range of scientists in 1930, bad weather having prevented access on several landing attempts in recent years. The team had to cut through dense vegetation, surveying biodiversity, and exploring the local caves. Important work was also completed in developing further field roads on Middle Caicos.

Three student groups, including all the science sixth-formers in TCI, were able to join the team for a few days of fieldwork. Video footage of the various activities undertaken by the team had been obtained both as a record and for future interpretative work. Some of this was integrated into several programmes which occupied a high proportion of material broadcast in the period by national television.

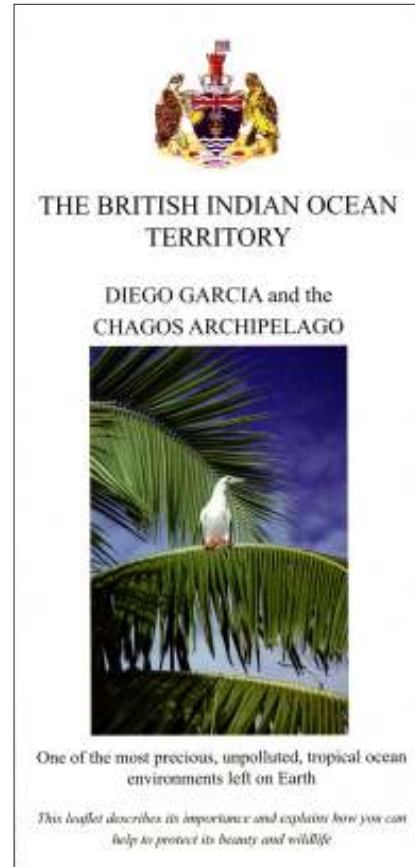
Other important elements of the work over the period have included recruitment and training of a local officer to develop the on-island presence, work-experience vacation employment of young people to interest them in careers in conservation, and the development and implementation of

a local guide-training programme as one of the measures linking biodiversity and local employment opportunities.

The integrated programme of work is continuing on schedule into the second year of this project.

BIOT's "Treasure Nature" leaflet

A new leaflet aims to raise awareness of the importance of the natural environment of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT). It is aimed primarily at yacht crews visiting the Chagos archipelago and civilians and military working in, or visiting, Diego Garcia. Production was by the Chagos Conservation Trust, part-funded by the Overseas Territories Environment Programme. Dr Mark Spalding contributed much to the content and design.



Apart from friendly advice on such practical issues as anchoring, fishing, snorkelling, sewage and trash, the leaflet highlights why the local environment is so deserving of protection. The Chagos provides habitats and breeding grounds for dolphins, turtles, sharks, whales, corals, a thousand species of fish and many other animals and plants. Reference is made to national and international protection which is legally binding.

The leaflets are given to all new arrivals in Diego Garcia. The British Representative considers them an excellent introduction to the pristine environment in the Territory and a helpful element in the strategy for keeping it that way. Other Territories, organisations and individuals are welcome to have copies of the leaflet which are available from the CCT Secretary: simonhughes@hughes-mccormack.co.uk.



St Helena Airport

The long awaited announcement about an airport has been made, giving rise to a great deal of excitement in St Helena.

The Governor hosted a press conference to announce that an airport will be built on St Helena. The timing of bringing into operation will coincide with the decommissioning of the RMS in 2010. The long-haul runway option of 2500 m was announced - a surprise perhaps to some, but perhaps not all, that this was the preferred option.

The picture shows the Governor, Michael Clancy making the announcement - which is the single largest development on St Helena – and which all are hoping will be a turning point in the lives and fortunes of Saints and St Helena.



Protected Area Planning for the Central Peaks

Alien plant control at High Peak and Casons

A primary output for the first year of this OTEP-supported project was to carry out weed control in accessible areas at High Peak (and associated Peaks), through a combination of contract and volunteer programmes, to reduce the threat of loss of native plant species and establish a publicly visual impression of project progress and improved amenity.

A tiny fragment of tree ferns and cabbage trees cling to the steep southern slope below the peak of High Peak. However, the relentless spread of flax from the abandoned flax plantations below is succeeding in destroying what little remains. With the area cleared of invasives, the ebonies, rebonies, gumwoods and Large Jellico are clearly visible and now have room to grow, whilst ferns are colonising open ground. A small number of the critically endangered Large Bellflowers were found after flax was removed from the base of High Peak cliff face. This is a really exciting discovery and gives hope that more individuals will be found when work starts to control flax on the cliff face. Effort now needs to be focused on the sheer slope above and on finding ways of sustaining conservation effort in the area

Work is well underway surveying the vegetation along the central ridge. The survey will confirm the status of the native plants, and give information on under-recorded endemics. It will track changes in the different plants growing in the Peaks and their range over time. This is useful because it will give hard evidence

of the level of success of alien plant control programmes and whether populations of endangered species are increasing or decreasing.



Volunteers clearing weeds from around Small Bellflower plants High Peak

Advice and experience sharing has been exchanged with other OTEP project managers, Tara Pelembe on Ascension Island regarding digital mapping and data basing and Peter Ryan in South Africa regarding Tristan da Cunha flax control on Inaccessible. Through Tara we have had contact with Ian Fisher, who visited Ascension last year for the RSPB and Alan Mills, who will be visiting Ascension later this year to support their mapping and database project. In addition other colleagues here and abroad, in particular Mike Pienkowski, Chair UKOTCF, and Adrian Mallia, from Adi Associates Environmental Consultants who carried out a consultancy on the Island last year, have been consulted on aspects of project development. The support given is much appreciated because the collective advice, which it should be noted is given free, helps to build our confidence that we are ‘on-track’ and gives us a broader outlook.

For further information about the OTEP Protected Area Planning Project for the central Peaks contact Rebecca Cairns-Wicks on tel. +290 4419 or email Mount.Pleasant@helanta.sh

Strategy for Action to implement the Environment Charter, St Helena

The Environment Charters set out an agreed policy framework between the UK Government and individual Overseas Territories.

The Environment Charter was signed in 2001 on behalf of the people of St Helena by Councillor Eric George. Progress has been made towards implementation, but only as possible within normal day-to-day work within various government departments and by NGO's. There was no comprehensive island-wide strategy for action for implementing the Charter, and this was much needed.

To achieve this, a project “Facilitation of the Development of a Strategy for Action to Implement the Environment Charter” (the Environment Charter Project) was drawn up and funding sought and approved from the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) in 2004.

With the experience gained from the pilot study in the Turks and Caicos Islands, to achieve the first completed strategy for action to implement the Environment Charter, Dr Mike Pienkowski was the most likely person to facilitate this project for St Helena.

After two visits to the island, countless workshops, meetings, interviews, emails, etc, Dr Pienkowski, and his wife Ann, have now produced the final version of St Helena's first Strategy for Action document, based on the input from many local stakeholders. Legislative Council commended the document for adoption, and it is ready to be presented to Executive Council for the final endorsement.

Environmental Co-ordinator, St Helena



Jason Thomas, Environmental Health Officer, leads part of the discussion between Councillors, Heads of Department, other governmental personnel and NGOs in a workshop chaired by Isabel Peters and Mike Pienkowski

South Atlantic Working Group

SAWG is looking for a voluntary secretary to take minutes and see to the secretarial side of the Group. If you have experience of, or an interest in, the South Atlantic Territories and can attend meetings in London four times a year please contact Frances Marks, fmmarks@ukotcf.org

Recovery Programme for *Abutilon pitcairnense*, one of the World's Rarest Plants

A consequence of recent events on Pitcairn led to the detention facility on the Island being enlarged. This expansion necessitated a relocation of the plant nursery. The value of the nursery was dramatically illustrated by the case of *Abutilon pitcairnense*, a colourful species related to the hibiscus that was only re-discovered and then propagated by Carol & Jay Warren in 2003. The single re-discovered plant was destroyed in 2004 by a landslide at Tedside. Thus it is thanks to propagation in the nursery and at Trinity College, Dublin, that the species now survives at all. An eight-step recovery programme for this critically endangered species has been devised:

- Secure existing genepool by vegetative propagation - **done**
- Search for more wild individuals - **on-going**
- Pollinate and raise seedlings - **done, but try more**
- Determine genetic diversity of progeny using AFLP - **started, complete 2005**

- Cross pollinate most genetically distinct progeny - **start 2006?**
- Check inbreeding/outbreeding depression - **2008/9?**
- Maintain an ex situ population - **started (Pitcairn, Trinity College), needs further distribution compliant with CBD**
- Establish more plants in wild - started, **on-going**

A similar approach might be taken for all critically threatened native plants, such as a small tree Myrsinaceae rediscovered on Pitcairn in 2003.

Steve Waldren & Noeleen Smyth, Trinity College, Dublin email: swalderen@tcd.ie



New Scientific Publication from GONHS

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) has just issued a new publication, *Iberis: the scientific journal of the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society*.

Iberis takes the name of the Gibraltar Candytuft *Iberis gibraltarica* which in Europe is found only in Gibraltar, but is also found in north Morocco. *Iberis* will be publishing scientific papers on the biology of the Strait of Gibraltar, which adds to the suitability of the journal's title.

Published in full colour, the first issue carries articles on birds and invertebrates. One of the articles, by Charles Perez, records the first ever record in Europe of the Mountain Chiffchaff, a bird from the Himalayas, ringed at the GONHS station at Jews' Gate. Other articles are on invertebrates, including a review of Gibraltar's land molluscs by Alex Menez, of isopods (woodlice and their allies) by Jason Easter, of beetles by Charles Perez and Keith Bensusan, and another on dragonflies by several authors including Paul Acolina. Another article confirms the presence in Gibraltar of the Scorpion.

The new journal is edited by an editorial board which includes GONHS members and university professors from three continents, Prof Mohamed Mouna of Rabat University Mohamed V-Agdal, Prof Agustin Fuentes of Notre Dame University, Indiana, USA, and Prof Antonio Galán de Mera from San Pablo University in Madrid. Co-ordinating the publication is Corresponding Editor Dr John Cortes of GONHS.

Iberis will be distributed to learned Societies and Universities around the world. Copies of *Iberis* are available free to GONHS members and are on sale to the public for £2.50 at The Nature Shop in Casemates.

For more details contact Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society, Jews Gate, Upper Rock Nature Reserve, P O Box 843, Gibraltar, +350 72639

Royal Zoological Society of Scotland

The Forum is pleased to welcome, as its newest member organisation, the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland (RZSS). Rob Thomas, RZSS Conservation and Research Manager and representative to UKOTCF, has provided this outline about the Society.

RZSS is a registered conservation and education charity founded in March 1909. The Society owns and manages Edinburgh Zoo (opened in July 1913) and the Highland Wildlife Park at Kincaid near Aviemore that was acquired in 1986. Edinburgh Zoo is one of Europe's leading centres of conservation, education and research. Our mission is **"to inspire and excite our visitors with the wonder of living animals, and so to promote the conservation of threatened species and habitats."**

We work collectively with many other zoos and conservation agencies in the UK, Europe and around the world in co-ordinated conservation programmes, to help ensure the survival of many threatened animal species. Our extensive education programme aims to raise awareness and understanding of the fragility of life on this planet, and our responsibility to help care for it. We also support a range of targeted research projects which are designed to enhance our understanding of animals' behavioural and physiological needs, with subsequent applications for conservation work in the field.

In 2003 RZSS launched its first, three-year Conservation Strategy. The Strategy provided a clearer direction in which the Society's conservation activities would develop and build on the 20-year Masterplan for Edinburgh Zoo. The Masterplan will highlight the importance of the world's biomes from tropical forest and grasslands to coastal/marine, illustrating specific conservation, biodiversity and sustainability issues that reside within each area.

In 2004 RZSS signed a Memorandum of Understanding with seven leading Scottish Universities to engage actively in joint research programmes and to share resources. This agreement increases substantially the resources that can be brought to conservation and research projects. The MoU has already facilitated the securing of significant grants for research and development. The implementation of the Conservation Strategy over the past 2 years has established strong, long-term initiatives in several parts of the world, particularly in Africa but no less significantly a partnership with Falklands Conservation. Financial assistance, educational resources and warden and veterinary staff placements to the Falkland Islands have all reinforced our contribution to conservation in a region that is of great historical and contemporary importance to the Society.

In accordance with the Strategy, RZSS is keen to work through its new UKOTCF membership with other partner organisations in UK Overseas Territories, particularly oceanic islands in response to the often high levels of endemism and consequent conservation status. Island biogeography, a priority issue for the conservation world, is both a concept that RZSS can interpret and disseminate to a wide audience, and an agenda for responsible action emanating from Scotland ahead of the Society's centenary in 2009 and the 2010 World Summit target for biodiversity.

Rob Thomas, Conservation and Research Manager, The Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, Edinburgh Zoo, Edinburgh EH12 6TS, UK. Tel: +44 131 314 0345; fax: +44 131 314 0376; rthomas@rzs.org.uk; www.edinburghzoo.org.uk

Royal Bank of Scotland Group

The Royal Bank of Scotland Group has once again provided valuable support to the Forum through provision of a grant in recognition of the involvement of the Treasurer. This is part of its Community Action Grant scheme, which aims to support charities within which members of its staff are involved, as an officer, fundraiser or active worker.

It is particularly relevant that The Royal Bank of Scotland Group has offshore financial operations in a number of the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, which adds further to its interest in supporting the work of the Forum.

We are most grateful to The Royal Bank of Scotland Group for their continued support.

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Photographs courtesy of: Alderney Wildlife Trust, Ascension Island Government - Tara Pelembe, Rebecca Cairns-Wicks, Cayman Island Department of Environment - Mat Cottam, Mike Pienkowski, Peter Ryan, St Helena Government, Steve Waldren

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