UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES
CONSERVATION FORUM
FORUM NEWS 29
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Tristan da Cunha celebrates 500 years and environmental progress with a new Conservation Ordinance and membership of the international Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels

Despite its tiny land area, the United Kingdom Overseas Territory of Tristan da Cunha supports a wealth of wildlife, much of it found nowhere else on earth. Tristan supports 10 endemic bird species (by comparison metropolitan UK supports just one). However, much of this extraordinary biodiversity is threatened by external factors. The albatrosses and larger petrels of Tristan and its outlying islands are falling victim to longline fishing. The baited hooks of these international fishing vessels are fatally attractive to these birds, which are drowned in their thousands. Meanwhile on land, rats and mice introduced from shipwrecks are preying on many of the birds, and on other less noticeable wildlife.

Presentation of new Conservation Ordinance, Prince Philip Hall Community Centre, Tristan on Thursday 9 February. Left to right: Mike Hentley, Administrator, Sarah Sanders, RSPB, Anne Green, Chief Islander, James Glass, Head of Natural Resources Department, Mike Clancy, Governor.

To address these threats, and as part of the Quincentenary Celebrations marking the passing of 500 years since Tristao d'Acunha discovered the island that bears his name a new Conservation Ordinance has been enacted by the Governor, Michael Clancey, to take the environmental protection of Tristan da Cunha and its outlying islands into the 21st century. The occasion was marked by a presentation ceremony on Tristan on 9 February 2006, during the Governor's visit on the quincentenary cruise of the RMS *St Helena* to the island group.

The new ordinance, entitled **Conservation of Native Organisms and Natural Habitats (Tristan da Cunha) Ordinance 2006**, replaces a previous conservation ordinance enacted in 1976. The earlier ordinance, drafted by Sir Martin Holdgate and Dr Nigel Wace, has served Tristan well for over a quarter of a century but has become increasingly inadequate as Tristan has moved to play a role in international instruments, such as the Convention on Biodiversity and the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels.

The new Conservation Ordinance takes a substantially new approach to the protection of fauna and flora in the islands. The 1976 ordinance, and its several subsequent amendments, listed those species of bird and mammal that were to be afforded protection. Among them were all the species of albatrosses and seals that breed on the islands. This approach left other species of birds, as well as invertebrates, marine life and plants, legally unprotected. The new ordinance takes the opposite approach and by what is known as "reverse listing" simply states that all organisms native to Tristan are fully protected unless listed otherwise. This means, for example, that all non-breeding seabirds that visit Tristan and Gough territorial waters are fully protected.

The eggs, chicks and guano of only two species of seabirds, the rockhopper penguin and great shearwater, may be taken without a permit, further restricting such take to the island of Nightingale, and to the Tristan Islanders themselves. The inhabitants of Tristan da Cunha will therefore be able to continue their traditional harvesting visits to Nightingale. In the case of marine species, the issue of fishing licenses enables those of commercial value to be taken. However, such licenses are subject to conditions and restrictions designed to preserve stocks and limit by-catch.

The new ordinance also states that all breeding colonies of rockhopper penguins on the main island of Tristan are nature reserves. It is planned that a management plan will be produced for the seven extant colonies, which will regulate entry and ensure that eco-tourism proceeds in a responsible and sustainable manner.

Tristan had not been included in the UK's 2004 ratification of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP; www.acap.aq) that aims to engender international actions to protect this most threatened group of birds because of doubts that the 1976 ordinance was not sufficiently "ACAP-friendly". This caused Tristan's current Administrator, Mike Hentley, to request one of Tristan's few honorary Conservation Officers, John Cooper of the University of Cape Town, South Africa, to draft the new ordinance that would extend full protection to all of Tristan's albatrosses and larger petrels that are listed within ACAP, including those non-breeding species that visit Tristan waters on migration.

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Forum's concerns on Ascension's future remain unanswered

In *Forum News 28*, UKOTCF expressed concern at the UK Government's ill-advised reversal of policy on Ascension Island, and its likely effect on environmental conservation by undermining the excellent work over the last 6 years by the Ascension Islanders. As indicated then, the Forum wrote to the Minister responsible, Lord Triesman. UKOTCF's letter of 17 January 2006 is reproduced below.

Despite reminder letters on 13 February and 2 March, as well as reminders in person via FCO officials on numerous occasions up to 10 April, no reply was received. Former government officials noted that the only reason for a failure to reply – or even acknowledge – a letter of this nature was normally an embarrassing lack of a good reason to account for the Government's actions. Just as this issue was going to press in July, new personnel in the relevant FCO department kindly supplied a copy of a letter that the Minister had written to David Borrow MP, and indicated that this should be taken as a reply. Mr Borrow had received a copy of the Forum's letter as a member of the Overseas Territories All-Party Parliamentary Group and had asked about the Government's position. It seems odd that FCO chose not to reply to the original letter, especially given that it was sent from an organisation with which FCO had been in partnership on the issue in question. It seems even stranger that the letter which FCO now considers as its reply was not drawn to the Forum's attention in response to reminders even a month after the Minister's letter had been sent to Mr Borrow. However, confusion seems to have run throughout HMG's handling of this matter.

UKOTCF is nonetheless grateful for the copy of this letter, which is also reproduced below. It is disappointing that the Minister's letter does not address the points raised in the Forum's letter. It is regrettable too that the Minister, despite his personal record in human rights, has accepted misleading information supplied to him for his reply, and ignores the commitments which his government had given to Ascension Islanders in various public fora, including meetings with the Forum, only 6 years earlier.

The Forum has made clear to FCO officials that its questions have not been answered. It believes that the Government's position is not in the best long-term interests of protecting the environment and very special wildlife of Ascension – and could lead to huge additional costs to HMG if it is to fulfil its international environmental commitments. The Forum believes (and the evidence supports) that UK's environmental responsibilities for Ascension would be best met by empowering the residents to manage their island – as is normal in any democracy. The "company store" model is not appropriate to any UKOT in the 21st century; and was rejected by the FCO in 2000. The Forum hopes that the FCO and other departments involved will look again at the long-term benefits of a "Partnership for Progress" with those for whom Ascension is a home in which they take pride.

UKOTCF's letter of 17 January 2006 to Lord Triesman

Dear Minister

Proposed reversal of HMG policy for Ascension Island – environmental dangers

I write on behalf of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, which brings together the principal conservation and research organisations in UK and the UK Overseas Territories (see bottom of page [list of member organisations]). UKOTCF also acts as partner and advisor to your Department and DFID in respect of the UKOTs. We have also had a long-standing partnership with FCO and the Islanders in Ascension in initiating and achieving major environmental progress there. We were alarmed to hear recently of a proposed reversal in HMG policy to Ascension, which – if you accept that proposal – would have a profound negative effect on this environment of global importance. In view of our long partnership with your Department in relation to Ascension, we were extremely surprised not to have been consulted, nor even advised, of this fundamental issue until a very late stage (yesterday). Our concern is strengthened in that we are now aware that the huge environmental consequences were not taken into consideration by your advisers or their consultants. We urge you to take the time to secure full and qualified advice on this matter and to reject this ill-advised proposal.

For much of the last century Ascension was essentially a "company town". However, in the late 1990s, the companies indicated to HMG that, with changing needs, they would no longer run the island. HMG commissioned a study of options, leading to a widely commended report produced in March 2000 by the University of Portsmouth. The consultants identified two options for the future of Ascension. One model "modified status quo" would lead to further population decline and social decay, and would also give extra problems to St Helena. The other "public finance" option involved a move to a more normal system of government and economy, with an elected council, the introduction of property rights, right of abode (including for those born on Ascension, who were previously deported by HMG at age 18), opportunities for self-employment and investment in new business, and the opening of the airport to more civilian traffic. HMG accepted the report and, to widespread approval of their announcement in 2001, decided on the "public finance" option. A first Council was elected, and some businesses were sold to local inhabitants.

Whilst many in our network have strong views in relation to the human rights of Ascension Islanders, my remit here is to concentrate on the consequences for the internationally important environment, for which UK has treaty commitments. Prior to HMG's announcement of its implementation of the "public finance" package, it had proven impracticable to progress the major conservation initiatives needed to fulfil UK's conservation obligations. With the changes announced, public "ownership" of the issues on Ascension became strong. Ascension is now world renowned as benefiting from the largest, and possibly most successful, environmental project in the UK Overseas Territories. This was implemented jointly by Ascension personnel, HMG and the UKOTCF partners (led in this case by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds). Indeed, in the recent independent review of the ground-breaking joint FCO/DFID Overseas Territories Environment Programme, your officials recommended that the independent consultants take Ascension as the most positive example UKOT. This was based, for example, on:

- The seabird restoration programme noted above
- The establishment, by popular support after only 3 years of self-government, of Green Mountain National Park, and wide agreement on a suite of other proposed protected areas

- The establishment by Ascension Island Government of a Conservation Department and Centre and exemplary participation of local volunteers
- Effective conservation of one of the world's largest marine turtle nesting populations, and development of associated tourist facilities
- Several other projects on the species of plants and animals found nowhere else in the world.

Contrary to the views expressed to us by your officials, conservation of such areas which have previously been impacted by human activity requires continued management and commitment at a local level; an empty island will not work except in a near pristine situation. Already, the news of your officials' recommendation to you is undermining that commitment. If your decision were to follow that advice, the huge and world recognised successes of HMG in Ascension will be reversed. Because of HMG's international commitments, the consequent direct cost to HMG of undertaking the remedial programmes would be extremely high – costs which were not taken into account in developing your officials' recommendation.

In addition to the cost implications for HMG in respect of Ascension, there would be an immense cost to UK's reputation across the world. Your officials are making great progress in many developing countries in facilitating democratic processes through environmental awareness and participation: so-called "environmental democracy". If you were to decide to return Ascension to a near-feudal state, this will be undermined.

As I noted, we are sure that the recommendation for a U-turn is ill-founded and wrong. The process by which it has been reached is also inadequate. It is clear that your own environmental staff were not aware of this process. The officials involved in the review do not have environmental expertise. They did not consult UKOTCF or its members, who have been FCO's partners and stake-holders in this area – nor any other external environmental bodies. We have had only a few hours to look at the consultants' report received by your officials over 3 months ago, but already we have detected factual errors in the report and misleading information in its terms of reference. We note also that the procedures adopted to bring forward the recommendation to you are in breach of at least 5 of the 11 Commitments in the Environment Charter between HMG and Ascension (as well as other UKOTs) prepared by FCO and signed for HMG by an FCO Minister.

As your officials are aware, UKOTCF prefers to work by quiet consultation with your Department. However, the failure to involve us, your partners, and the time-scale imposed upon us by your staff mean that we cannot follow this usual practice. I am copying this letter to Parliamentary bodies with an interest.

Yours sincerely

Dr Mike Pienkowski
Chairman, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

Lord Triesman's letter of 21 March 2006 to David Borrow MP

Dear Mr Borrow

Thank you for your letter of 7 February on behalf of Dr Pienkowski, Chairman of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, about Ascension Island.

The issues of right of abode and property rights give rise to some fundamental questions for the UK Government. There is no settled population or Ascension Island citizenship. All those who currently live there do so for a particular purpose, either because they are associated with the British or US military forces; or are involved in some way in communications; or work for the Ascension Government in supporting the organisations which use Ascension Island as a base of operations.

It follows that, in considering the future of Ascension Island, the UK Government had to take into account whether fundamental change, of the sort proposed, would impose new financial liabilities on UK taxpayers, or would introduce significant new risks.

In considering the questions of right of abode and property rights, the UK Government had to balance the hopes of those working and living on Ascension Island against the risk that it would not be possible to establish a self-sustaining economy. To establish such a community would expose the UK to large contingent liabilities, and possible extra financial commitments. After careful consideration, in light of evidence from a wide number of sources, including the Island Councillors and the employer organisations, I concluded that granting right of abode and the development of property rights would constitute a very fundamental change in the nature of the Territory, and would constitute an unacceptable level of risk to the UK. The UK Government concluded that the right of abode and the establishment of the right to purchase property would not be developed.

The UK Government remains strongly committed to the environment and rich bio-diversity of Ascension Island. Under the joint FCO/DFID, Overseas Territories Environment Programme, £169,310 has been committed to projects relating to environmental issues, specifically on Ascension Island. Ascension is also involved in 3 "cross-territory" projects. The FCO has also funded, with the RSPB, a seabird restoration project on Island. Anyone working and living on Ascension Island, for however long, has exactly the same responsibilities towards protecting the environment in which they live.

The UK Government remains committed to trying to ensure that the Territory continues to provide an appropriate environment for those who work, and therefore live, on Ascension. But this must be within the existing framework.

I hope this is helpful.

Yours truly

David Triesman
The Lord Triesman of Tottenham

Conservation in FCO: A Decade of Institutional Change

In 1996 UKOTCF's main government contact was with the FCO's Environment, Science and Energy Department (ESED), both on policy issues and to secure funding for projects in the Dependent Territories (as they were then called) from the Assistant Under-Secretary's Programme Budget (AUSPB). All the Forum's Whitehall institutional contacts have changed since then, usually two or more times.

The biggest change was in HMG's policy. ESED negotiated within Whitehall the text of the environment chapter in the White Paper *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity – Britain and the Overseas Territories* (Cm 4264, 17 March 1999). From that flowed new FCO priorities and funding and, in September 2001, Environment Charters were signed between HMG and the Overseas Territories. FCO also went through a series of reorganizations. In 2000, ESED became Environment Policy Department (EPD). Within EPD, the Biodiversity team became the Forum's main contact, but there were also close contacts in Overseas Territories Department (OTD), especially the Head of Department and General Issues section. Since 1999 there had been new funding, ring-fenced in FCO's Environment Fund for the Overseas Territories (EFOT)

Late in 2004, further restructuring, splitting EPD, meant UKOTCF dealt with Natural Resources and Governance team within the Sustainable Development and Commonwealth Group (SDCG) as well as OTD. Early in 2006, several environmental positions in FCO were terminated and SDCG became Sustainable Development and Business Group; environmental issues in the UKOTs, primarily OTEP (see below) and the desk handling this, were transferred to OTD.

Meanwhile, funding changed in two important ways. First, in 2002 FCO merged separate project funds into a new Global Opportunities Fund (GOF). Its current criteria rule out biodiversity-related projects, unless directly related to climate change. Many UK overseas posts regret this exclusion, since some of the best opportunities to support local NGOs in improving governance are through small biodiversity projects. In what seems to have been an oversight at senior levels, the ring-fenced EFOT budget was lost, causing much concern – partly because EFOT had been specifically mentioned in the Environment Charters signed just a few months earlier. However, after a year of unsatisfactory arrangements, the ring-fenced funding for environmental work in the UKOTs was reinstated, once DFID funding (originally promised in the 1999 White Paper) came on-line in 2004, as the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP), jointly managed by OTD in DFID and EPD (and now OTD) in FCO.

Some consequences of these changes deserve comment. First, while the UKOTs environmental funding framework is more secure, it is still wildly unbalanced in terms of the global importance of threatened species and habitats in the UKOTs and in metropolitan UK (GB & NI). Second, there appears to have been a significant reduction in the FCO's interest in the key target of reducing the rate of loss of biodiversity by 2010. The view seems to be that this can be left to Defra (since DFID has also sharply reduced its biodiversity-related skills and funding). As far as the UKOTs are concerned, the Forum welcomes assurances from FCO of maintained interest in, and shared responsibility for, environmental matters, and would welcome greater engagement from Defra on both policy and funding. Third, over the decade the Forum is uncomfortably aware of loss of collective memory in Whitehall. This is partly a consequence of rapid institutional change (as well as the usual rapid staff turnover, especially in FCO departments). However, the Forum welcomes the cooperative spirit of the regular meetings with government departments, jointly chaired by FCO and UKOTCF. The Forum hopes government participation in these meetings will expand: the human and natural diversity of the UKOTs deserve to be seen less as bureaucratic anomalies and problems, more as a source of much in which the UK can take great pride.

UKOTCF

Biological control of *Prosopis* on Ascension Island

Situated in the mid-Atlantic, 1200 km from its nearest neighbour, Ascension Island is one of the smallest and most remote of the UK's Overseas Territories. Extending to less than 100 km^2, its barren basalt lava fields and cinder cones reflect its volcanic origins and relatively recent formation, approximately one million years ago. The southern Green Mountain hills rise to 860 m above sea level, and once supported the island's only dense vegetation, dominated by indigenous ferns. This simple but unique plant community has now been replaced by a woodland of introduced species, most of which show little tendency to spread beyond the relatively cool, moist hills. One introduced species, however, is creeping across the naturally barren, arid, low-lying plains below.

Prosopis (probably *P. juliflora*) appears to have been accidentally introduced on to Ascension Island in the 1970s or 1980s. Dense thickets of trees up to 15 m tall have formed in some places, as the plant has spread across 75% of the island. On Ascension, the spread of *Prosopis* is assisted by the local population of feral donkeys, which distribute the seeds in their droppings, having fed on the seed pods. As well as causing serious amenity problems, the plant represents a significant threat to local biodiversity. Further spread, for example, could impact on sites where the endemic spurge *Euphorbia origanoides* occurs. Although Ascension supports relatively few indigenous species, a large proportion is endemic, and the island is an important breeding station for seabirds and green turtles; the barren landscape itself represents a rare set of natural habitats and geological features.

Given the extent of spread of *Prosopis* by the mid 1990s, chemical and mechanical control methods were considered impractical, except in critical areas like key seabird and turtle nesting sites. Drawing on biological control programmes using *Algarobius prosopis* and *Neltumius arizonensis* against *Prosopis* in South Africa, CAB International introduced these seed-feeding bruchid beetles to Ascension in 1997. A local programme of rearing for on-going releases was established, but this was abandoned shortly afterwards. Beetles were found attacking seed-work acacia *Leucaena leucocephala,* leading to suggestions that *Neltumius* and/or *Algarobius* had shifted to a nontarget species. It was subsequently shown that the damage to the acacia was caused by *Acanthoscelides suramerica*, an accidental introduction unrelated to the biological control programme.

Paucity of data hampers a detailed assessment of the status and impacts on *Prosopis* of the control agents introduced to Ascension. Initial observations suggested that both species had become established. However, subsequent work suggests that *Neltumius* may have since died out, although *Algarobius* appears to have spread through most of the Ascension range of the host plant, and can approximately halve its seed output. Although the rate of spread of *Prosopis* appears to have slowed, this may simply reflect the fact that most accessible sites have now been colonized by the plant.

Recent efforts to control invasive species on Ascension have concentrated on the eradication of feral cats, and measures to control

rat numbers. These activities appear to have been successful, and long absent species of seabird are returning to nest on the island now that their main predators have been removed. *Prosopis* remains a priority for control, although some islanders see the 'greening' of the island in a positive light. There is also some reluctance locally to pursue biological control, in particular, as a solution. This partly reflects lingering concerns over non-target effects arising from the discovery of *Acanthoscelides* on acacia, as well as the lack of any spectacular impact of the introduced bruchids on *Prosopis*. As seed feeders, however, they could never have been expected to eliminate existing plants from the landscape, and CAB International recognised that further measures would be required to effect such a level of control. The solution to the invasion of Ascension Island by *Prosopis* may lie in an integrated control programme, in which biological control has a potentially important role to play.

Oliver D. Cheesman, Secretary, Wider Caribbean Working Group, UKOTCF; oliver@dipsacus.org

This article is reproduced with permission from Biocontrol News and Information ***27****(1) [2006], where it first appeared with other articles on Prosopis. Further articles on this invasive plant can be found in BNI* ***27****(2) http://www.pestscience.com/news.asp*

Wetland of International Importance designated in Guernsey

The progress in the Crown Dependencies in respect of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands highlighted in *Forum News 28* has continued. On 1 March 2006, the first Wetland of International Importance in Guernsey was designated. The 426 hectare site encompasses Lihou Island, La Claire Mare Nature Reserve, and the Colin Best Nature Reserve, as well as the intertidal area and outlying reefs and rocks. The site contains a variety of habitats from internationally threatened shingle banks, to marshes, reed beds, saline lagoons, and the intertidal area. The site also has a rich biodiversity of flora and fauna, including a wide variety of seabirds, wildflowers,

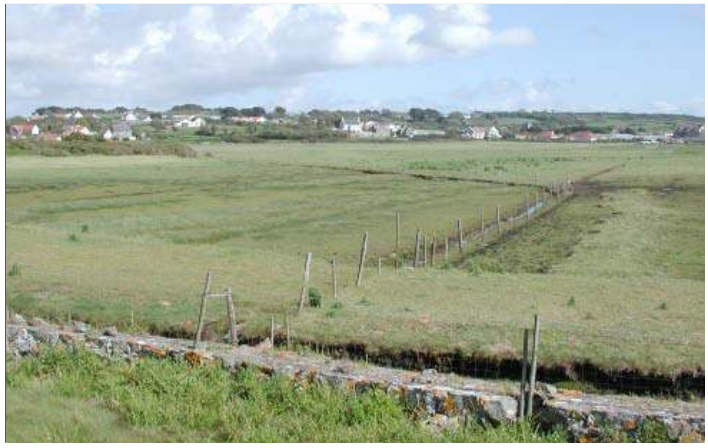
Deputy Peter Sirret (left) and Deputy Bernard Flouquet, members of the States of Guernsey, at the Ramsar site during the announcement of its designation

and marine organisms. Over 200 species of seaweed are recorded on the Lihou causeway alone.

UK Biodiversity Minister Jim Knight in announcing the designation congratulated the Guernsey Authorities. "The United Kingdom has a proud record of designating more Ramsar sites than any other country, and the Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories are home to particularly valuable and internationally important wetland habitats. Guernsey is a worthy member of this group and the Guernsey site will be the 165th Ramsar site in the British Isles."

Guernsey Environment Department Minister, Deputy Bernard Flouquet, said the announcement was great news for the island. "I am very pleased that an area of Guernsey's wetlands will now be recognised internationally. Designation elevates the status of the site to that of 'International Importance', bringing special notice to the environmental, cultural and heritage aspects of the area. This recognition provides a positive focal point for new education, tourism and environmental initiatives which contribute to the long-term conservation and wise use of that particular site and other wetland areas".

Dr Charles David, President of La Société Guernesiaise, said: "La Société Guernesiaise is very pleased that this area has been granted Ramsar status. La Société has been closely involved with the application, together with the Guernsey Biological Records Centre, which is run in partnership with the Environment Department. La Société is a landowner, with a number of our sites such as the Colin Best and La Claire Mare Nature Reserves included within the Ramsar



Colin Best Reserve

site. The site has some of the largest and most important intertidal areas in Western Europe, the size being due to Guernsey having a 10 metre tidal range – one of the largest in the world."

"The land area is also very rich, containing wet meadows. Some of the best orchid fields in the Channel Islands can be admired at La Claire Mare Nature Reserve. This area is also very rich in insect species, some not found elsewhere in the Channel Islands. The reedbeds provide very important habitat for bird life, and is one of the best birding sites in Guernsey. Saltmarshes are very threatened habitats in the Channel Islands and those found at the Colin Best Nature Reserve and on Lihou are among the best fragments of saltmarsh habitat remaining."

Several Red Data Book species occur on the site, including the fern allies *Ophioglossum azoricum*, which is found on Lihou and *Isoetes histrix* which occurs on Lihou and L'Erée headland. *O. azoricum* is a Red Data Book species in both the UK and France, and *I. histrix* is known only on one site in England. The ormer *Haliotis tuberculata*, a marine mollusc, is of great cultural significance locally, where it is a delicacy, although the gathering of ormers is carefully regulated under local legislation. Keen rock-poolers can discover a wealth of other marine organisms, including some species which occur on the edge of their natural distribution range. Many rare species and a representative sample of the north-western European fish fauna are found in the marine area of the site.

The site is also a good stepping-stone for critically endangered aquatic warbler *Acrocephalus paludicola*, as well as proving good roosting and nesting sites for seabirds. There are particularly large numbers of Eurasian oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus*, but other varieties of waders include: ringed plover, turnstone, and little egret.

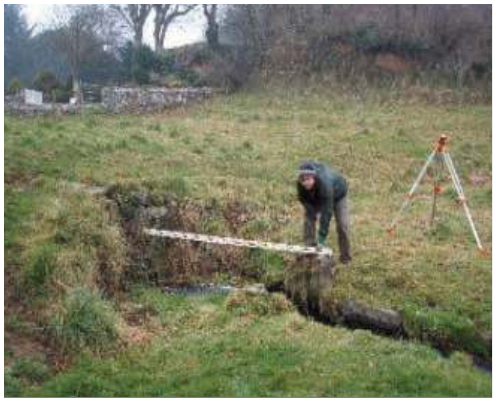
The Water Meadows in Jersey – Living History

Water-meadows are integrated agricultural systems that improve the quality and quantity of herbage through deliberate hydrological management. They have played an important role in Britain's rural heritage for over 400 years. John Constable (1830) painted them and Thomas Hardy (1878) wrote about them. They are a living historical document and a testament to Britain's rural way of life.

In the summer of 2005, the National Trust for Jersey noticed a series of depressions and odd patterns within the meadows next to their headquarters, 'The Elms'. In the autumn of 2005, the Trust lands manager Jon Horn contacted Dr Kathy Stearne in the UK, an authority on floated water meadows. Until then there had not been any recorded meadows of this kind outside of the UK mainland.

In January 2006 Dr Stearne visited to carry out further research, finding that the Elms meadows were indeed a catchwork water meadow system complete with the remnants of channels, sluices and culverts.

Dr Stearne worked on a report to help the Trust best decide how to manage these meadows. She surveyed the meadows, met local farmers, ecologists and Jurat Henry Perrée, who could remember the last time the water meadows were used in the 1960s. Many other historical features of note within the meadows include beautifully built walls, stone lined channels, cart bridges, sluices, tunnels, a cressoniére (a cress bed), an abreuvoir (roadside livestock drinking trough), a leat and channels. It is likely that most of these structures were built between 1830 and 1840 under the instructions of the then landowner, Mr Jean Perrée.



Countryside ranger Neil Harvey helps with the meadow survey

These meadows are historically important from two points of view. First, they show that water meadow technology was not just confined to the British mainland. Second, they bear witness to the farmers and craftsmen of the nineteenth century. So restoration and consolidation of these features on the meadows in appropriate and sympathetic material is a priority.

Historically water meadows helped provide early grass growth after the colder winters of the 18th and 19th centuries. However, cows today are housed in winter and with the ready availability of winter food, this is no longer a necessity. Therefore the meadows are irrigated today mainly to enhance their ecology and biodiversity.

In May 2006 the Trust, with the help of Community Service workers, began the initial phase of the restoration by digging out the first carrier channel. It is hoped to complete the project in phases over a three-year period. Later this year, the first sluice gate will be repaired and it is hoped to carry out the first flood in the autumn. The three-year plan is to fully restore the Elms water meadows so that the public can get an impression of the rural way of life in the 19th century. It is planned to combine the restoration work with public awareness and information including display panels and a heritage trail walk. It is also believed that this work will be of benefit to the local wildlife.

Kathy Stearne and Jon Horn
Further details contact Jon Horn at jhorne@nationaltrustjersey.org.je

Wondrous Wetlands of Montserrat

In April of 2006, primary and secondary school teachers on Montserrat attended two workshops on Wetlands Education Training.

These two-day workshops were ably facilitated by Lisa Sorenson, project coordinator for the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB), and Michele Kading, of Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre, Canada.

The workshop had the full support of the Government with the Minister of Agriculture and the Environment Hon Mrs Margaret Dyer Howe, Minister of Education Hon Mrs Idabelle Meade and their respective directors making valuable inputs and asking many questions in the opening sessions.

Also a first for the wetland workshop was the inclusion of the Royal Montserrat Police Force constables. Their attendance was part of the "Police and Community" development programme.

Members of the Montserrat National Trust, the Forestry Department and the newly formed Centre Hills Project staff also attended the workshop.

Teachers participated in a number of hands on activities and demonstrations from the *Wondrous West Indian Wetlands: Teachers Resource Book*. This comprehensive manual is designed to raise awareness about the importance of wetlands and wetland biodiversity, especially the importance of mangroves and serving as a home to migratory birds.

Teachers taking part in the survey workshop

Montserrat's major wetlands have been destroyed by volcanic activity but one area, *Pipers Pond,* has been declared a protected area and, according to the Environment Charter signed in 2001, one of Governments commitments is to "encourage teaching within the schools to promote the value of our local environment (natural and built) and explain its role within the regional and global environment."

Stephen Mendes, counterpart project manager for the Centre Hills project, noted that little attention has been given to wetlands recently, but having teachers teaching the youth and exposing them to the environment would certainly go far in raising national awareness, especially in Montserrat's current rebuilding phase.

A host of local and migratory birds were heard, spotted and documented into the wetland field guides. Potential ideas were bartered about with respect to developing the wetland areas as an open classroom and tourist attraction.

Partners and sponsors of the wetlands workshop included:
*West Indian Whistling-Duck and Wetlands Conservation Project
*Montserrat National Trust
*Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and the Environment
*Ministry of Education
*The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)
*The US Fish and Wildlife Service,
*Wildlife Without Borders Program
*Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act Fund
*Oak Hammock Marsh Interpretive Centre
*BirdLife International.

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UNITED KINGDOM OTEP OVERSEAS TERRITORIES ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

The Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) is a joint programme of the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and 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 OTEP. This is the fifth 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 third OTEP bidding round, thirty-five applications were received. Four applications were subsequently withdrawn as other funding arrangements had been identified by the Secretariat, with three of these being funded by FCO and one through the relevant DFID/OTD country programme. Fourteen applications were approved, to a total value of approximately £431,000, split almost equally between FCO and DFID.

An independent review of OTEP by Dr Steve Bass and colleagues at the International Institute for Environment and Development has been completed. The report, and the joint response from DFID and FCO to its recommendations, can be read in the OTEP section hosted on the Forum's website (www.ukotcf.org). The OTEP Secretariat would welcome feedback if anybody has any particularly strong views either way on any of the recommendations, but would ask that this be kept as concise as possible and that it be cross-referenced to specific paragraphs and/or recommendations. UKOTCF will be commenting.

Successful Project proposals 2006

Ascension Island: Improving Access to Green Mountain National Park (ASC301)

This project seeks to improve access and thus add value to the recently formed Green Mountain National Park.

Many of the historical paths and tunnels and associated buildings and structures around the Mountain are in a state of severe disrepair and are extensively overgrown with vegetation. Work is urgently needed to remedy and remove vegetation from these features to make them safe and prevent them from becoming irreparable or lost altogether.

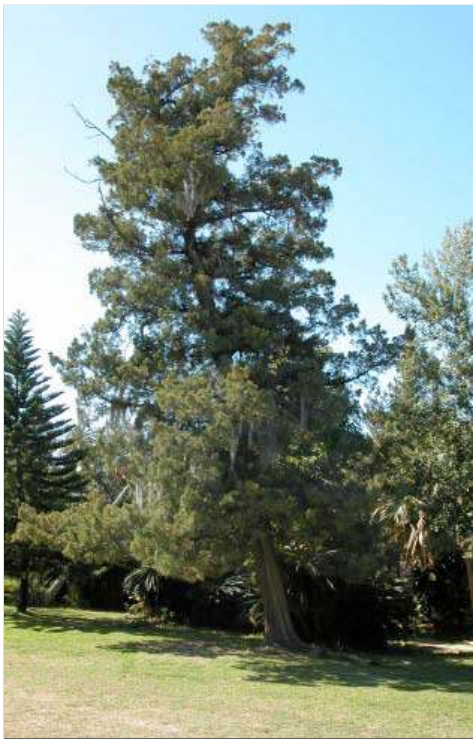
Green Mountain National Park

Retention of the Mountain's historical paths will assist with educational tours of the National Park and will enhance the local environment by providing added interest value and recreational opportunities.

Simon Emson, Acting Conservation Officer, Ascension Island Government, Conservation Centre, Georgetown, Ascension Island, South Atlantic Ocean, ASCN 1ZZ. Tel/Fax: +247 6359; conservation@atlantis.co.ac

Bermuda: Habitat and Native Species Restoration in Bermuda National Trust Nature Reserves (BDA306)

This project will enable a capital project as a part of a long-term programme for culling invasives and planting native flora over two nature reserve sites, comprising a total of 9 acres of open space owned and protected by the Bermuda National Trust. The project will require the preparation and approval of Woodland Management Plans for each site with the objective of completely culling the two reserves of invasive species in the woodland areas and to initiate a staged replanting programme to sustain a native forest infra-structure.



Endemic Bermuda Cedar

The two reserves are:

1.Gladys Morrell Nature Reserve, Sandys Parish, Bermuda Site area – 2.08 acres [0.84 ha]

2. Tivoli North Nature Reserve, Warwick Parish, Bermuda Site area – approximately 7 acres of woodland [2.83 ha]

Executive Director - Steven Conway MRICS, Bermuda National Trust, PO Box HM 61, Hamilton HM AX, Bermuda. Tel: +1 441 236 6483; Fax: +1 441 236 0517; steve@bnt.bm or palmetto@bnt.bm

Bermuda: Development and population of a dynamic, map-based, interactive Bermuda biodiversity web layer for island–wide and global information dissemination (BDA304)

Over 4,000 scientific documents describe Bermuda's natural history which, coupled with numerous isolated datasets, house critical biodiversity information which the Bermuda Biodiversity Project (BBP) has collated. The BBP team now proposes to develop and populate a dynamic, map-based interactive web-page which will allow policy-makers, resource managers, scientists, educators, students and travellers immediate access to this information in a user-friendly format that will be both engaging and instructive. The site will also house the Bermuda Species Database with access to information on nearly 6,000 local species, as well as the Natural History Bibliography, and essential instructional biodiversity resource materials.

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British Indian Ocean Territory: Exercise Diego Survey III Conducting a census of the seabirds of Barton Point Important Bird Area, Diego Garcia (BIO301)

This proposed Project is a follow up to BIO 201 (Seabird Census of Diego Garcia) that was part sponsored by an OTEP grant, conducted in May 2005. That census revealed that seabirds nesting on Diego Garcia are not seasonal and probably breed continuously throughout the year. Therefore, to assist in building up a complete picture of the seabird populations' life cycle in the Chagos, a second survey, utilising the same census methodology as for BIO 21 is proposed, but at the opposite end of the year to the previous study.

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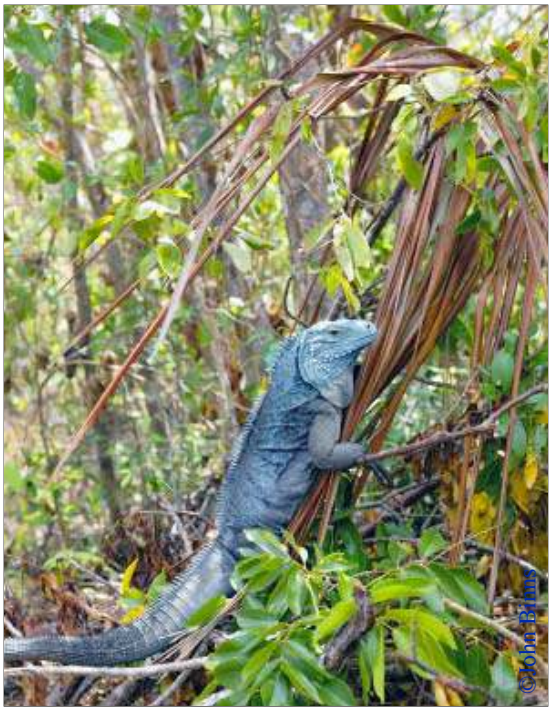
Cayman Islands: Sustainable Flagship Financing Strategy for Shrubland Preservation (CAY301)

The Blue Iguana Recovery Programme has succeeded in stemming the catastrophic decline of the Grand Cayman blue iguana. However the biodiverse shrubland on which it depends remains threatened by clearance and fragmentation. Supported by significant local matched funds, this project will construct a multipurpose *Cayman Shrublands Education and Research Centre,* at the established blue iguana captive breeding facility. Sustainably funded through the implementation of educational guided tours of the facility, this initiative will place the charismatic blue iguana centre-stage, as a high-profile flagship for the protection of critical but inaccessible shrubland, and the endangered endemic flora associated with this habitat.

Mr Fred Burton, Programme Director, Blue Iguana Recovery Program (BIRP), An Environmental Programme of the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, PO Box 10308 APO, Grand Cayman, Cayman Islands. Tel: +1 345 916 2418; Fax: +1 345 947 6061; FJBurton@BlueIguana.ky



Sapphire, a blue iguana female before her demise, she was mauled by near-feral dogs when they entered the Botanic Park in June 2006.

Montserrat: Increasing Montserrat's capacity to manage protected areas and conserve biodiversity (MNT301)

The project will produce legislation enabling effective management of protected areas and biodiversity conservation in Montserrat. The process will include four components: 1) review of existing local, regional, and international legislation; 2) consultation with stakeholders to identify gaps in existing frameworks and to advise policy change; 3) revision of environmental legislation to meet needs identified, and; 4) outreach to raise awareness of the need for legislative review and to solicit participation in the consultative process. The resulting framework will enable the establishment of Montserrat's first national park in the Centre Hills, which is home to numerous endangered and endemic species.

Ms. Carole McCauley, Project Manager, Centre Hills Project, P.O. Box 393, Olveston, Montserrat. Tel: +1 664 491 3088; Fax (c/o Forestry and Environment Department): +1 664 491 9275; darwin@candw.ms

Montserrat: Develop and deliver a training course on tools and opportunities for effective conservation (MNT302)

The project will develop a training course on international conservation legislation, and its use; identifying and involving stakeholders; putting financial and other values on conservation; project planning and management; education and public awareness; using local and regional initiatives; capacity building. The course will be delivered in Montserrat. The course is being designed by MNT and UKOTCF for MNT Council and staff, and other senior personnel including Governmental, as well as other interested stakeholders and personnel from Anguilla.

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Montserrat National Trust, Northern Main Road, Olveston, Montserrat. Tel: +1 664 491 3086; Fax: +1 664 491 3046; mnatrust@candw.ms

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands: South Georgia Habitat Restoration Programme (SGS301)

The project aims to establish a long-term plan for the complete eradication of rats and mice from South Georgia. Principal project aims are to evaluate feasibility of eradication, establish suitable methods, estimate costing and to draw up a timetable for eradication. This will focus on a pilot eradication on Greene Peninsula. A basic study of rat home range and density will be undertaken.

Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands, Government House, Falkland Islands FIQQ 1ZZ. Tel: +500 27433, Fax: +500 27434; sg.habitat@horizon.co.fk gordon.liddle@fco.gov.uk

St Helena: Enabling the people of St Helena to conserve the St Helena Wirebird (STH301)

The endangered St Helena plover (wirebird) is St Helena's only surviving endemic bird. Its future survival depends mainly on the maintenance of its preferred habitat, pastureland, which is under threat from invasive plant species and to a lesser extent the control of introduced predators. The project will undertake research to better understand the bird's ecology, assess the extent of threats and test solutions to address them. This information will be used to prepare a species action plan that details the measures required to conserve the wirebird in the wild. The planning process will be highly participatory and work to strengthen capacity on St Helena so that the island is well placed to implement the plan.

The endemic wirebird, Charadrius sanctae-helenae *on Deadwood Plain*

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St Helena National Trust, Broadway House, Jamestown, St Helena Island, South Atlantic Ocean, STHL 1ZZ. Tel/Fax: +290 2190; sth.nattrust@helanta.sh

St Helena: St Helena Environmental Information System (SHEIS) (STH302)

The project will synthesize existing information from land management (registry, use, agriculture and forestry), heritage projects, environmental mapping and monitoring both at sea and on land, and fisheries data, and provide protocols for updating, managing and applying information using Geographical Information Systems, internet and database technology. Development of an educational GIS portal that will be made available to schools. It will build on existing OTEP interventions on island, ensuring information from these is synthesized in strategic and daily planning, and environmental education.

Director, St Helena National Trust , Broadway House, Jamestown, St Helena Island, South Atlantic Ocean, STHL 1ZZ. Tel/fax +290 42190; sth.nattrust@helanta.sh

Turks and Caicos Islands: Second stage of implementation of the Plan for Biodiversity Management and Sustainable Development around the Turks and Caicos Ramsar Site: to increase local awareness and ecotourism usage (TCI301)

The project is central to TCI's implementation of the Environment Charter. It builds logically on the previous stages of Darwin-funded research to develop a management plan, and OTEP-, UKOTCF- and locally-funded work to provide the infrastructure for conservation and visitor usage. The emphasis of this phase is on increasing education, local awareness and internal eco-tourism to give the local community the experience necessary to develop international eco-tourism to the benefit of themselves and their internationally important heritage.

The project will: develop the TCI NT Ecocentre as front-of-house for local tours and small family businesses linked with the ecotourism industry; and help to expand local capacity and small businesses to develop opportunities further. To do this the following are required: revision of management plan and supporting work, production of interpretive material including video and website plus physical catalogue of field roads. Alongside this, strategies will be put into place to raise local awareness of the Environment Charter and the value of the natural and cultural heritage. The successful primary school material 'Our Land, Our Sea, Our People' will be updated. New educational material will be developed for High School Students. Public Awareness will be heightened by the development and implementation of a 'Bird of the Month' Scheme and a Red Data Plant programme (re successful Kew project in BVI). A volunteer programme will be developed and put into place to facilitate involvement of volunteers both locally and from overseas to work alongside TCI National Trust staff.

Turks and Caicos National Trust with the support of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, Contact: Dr Mike Pienkowski, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, 102 Broadway, Peterborough PE1 4DG, UK. Tel/fax +44 1733 569 325; pienkowski@cix.co.uk

Turks and Caicos Islands: Enactment and Improvement of Relevant National Legislation to Accede to Key Multilateral Environmental Agreements extended to the Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI) (TCI302)

A number of Ordinances exist in the TCI that have relevance to environmental and MEA consideration. However, these laws are fragmented and in many cases archaic. Consequently, there are a number of areas where environmental protection would benefit from legislative improvement and the application of more contemporary, international law. The DECR has set as a priority, the ratification of four MEAs. Ratification of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Flora and Fauna (CITES) will enable TCIG to have input into the development of this Convention ensuring protection of our endemic and endangered species, in particular, where those species are or may become part of trade. The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) establishes commitments for maintaining our natural resources while allowing and promoting sustainable development. Similarly, the Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife Protocol (SPAW) is a regional Convention, which will re-enforce national protected areas legislation and will also assist in the implementation of CBD. Finally, ratification of MARPOL, the International Convention for the

Prevention of Pollution from Ships, would provide TCI with regulations that would ensure maximum compliance from the cruise ships visiting our shores.

So far, a draft Endangered Species Bill to implement the CITES has been prepared and national Protected Areas Legislation currently exists. An Environmental Legislative Consultant will be required to move the CITES Bill through the legislative process, enhance current protected areas legislation to ratify SPAW and develop new legislation to ratify the CBD and MARPOL.

Judith Garland-Campbell, Director, Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR), Turks and Caicos Islands Government, South Base, Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos Islands. Tel: +1 649 946 2970 or +1 649 941 5122; Fax: +1 649 946 1895 or +1 649 946 4793; jlcampbell@gov.tc

Tristan da Cunha: A Field Guide to the Plants and Animals of Tristan da Cunha and Gough Island (TDC301)

The Tristan da Cunha island group is home to large numbers of endemic plant and animal species. The project will produce a photographic field guide to the birds, mammals, plants and marine life of the Tristan da Cunha group and nearby Gough Island. The main aim of the guide will be to raise awareness and to promote the unique and globally important natural heritage of the islands. It will be targeted at both the small local population and the increasing number of tourists that visit each year. Most of the revenue raised from the guides will go to the Tristan Environment Fund to support future conservation work on the islands.

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James Glass, Head, Department of Natural Resources, Mike Hentley, Administrator, Tristan da Cunha, South Atlantic TDCU 1ZZ. Tel: +870 600 245 563; Fax: +870 600 245 565; hmg@cunha.demon.co.uk (note – please do not send emails with attachments to Tristan da Cunha)

Tristan da Cunha: An assessment of the potential for rodent eradication in the Tristan da Cunha Islands Group – Supplementary application to visit and conduct an on-site feasibility study on Gough (TDC302)

On a request from Tristan, the RSPB has received funding from OTEP to assess the potential for rodent eradication in the Tristan da Cunha Islands Group. Extensive press coverage earlier this year has shown there is considerable international concern about the devastating impacts of mice on the seabird populations of Gough. This application will supplement and enhance the above mentioned project by enabling the visit of an eradication expert and helicopter pilot to Gough so that the options for reducing or removing mice impacts and restoring the island can be evaluated on site.

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OTEP has always welcomed joint approaches in terms of funding and operation, where these are appropriate and practicable. *Forum News* includes below articles on a number of projects which have benefited in some way from support by OTEP, and which have also had considerable collaboration with other organisations, via added funding or expertise, resulting in effective partnership working.

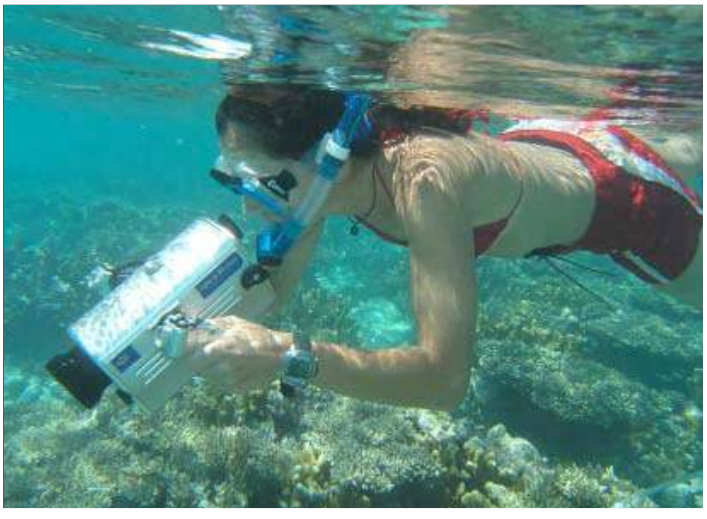
Chagos expedition 2006 and the Biota! Exhibition

The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) has had a long association with the Chagos archipelago through the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum. The opportunity arose to send a member of staff on the 2006 expedition to the islands and for ZSL to make the first steps in establishing a link between these remote and exciting habitats and a new exhibition being planned for late 2009 called Biota!

The scientific expedition, organised by Dr Charles Sheppard of Warwick University, visited the islands and atolls of the Chagos archipelago for 6 weeks in February and March of 2006. A total expedition team of 18 conducted research into a variety of topics including assessments of seabirds and turtle abundance, recording numbers of invasive species and levels of recruitment of juvenile corals, levels of micro-contaminants in sea water and mapping of the reef structure itself.

My work, spread over almost 4 weeks in the islands, was structured into two parts. The first was to make an assessment of the presence and distribution of coral diseases. Coral diseases are a topic of international concern and a major threat to reef health worldwide. This project will establish the degree to which the reefs of the area may be impacted by diseases by identifying disease types, species affected, degree of mortality and distribution, and is the first formal assessment of this factor on the reefs in question.

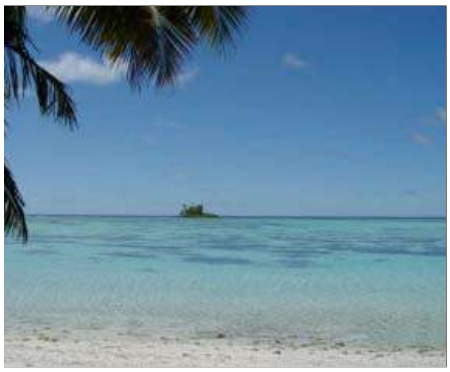
The second element of the work was to research a suitable site for the development of reef exhibits for a new visitor exhibition. Biota! is an exciting new project being designed to showcase the diversity of aquatic habitats around the planet. ZSL has a long history of conservation work in-situ around the world and Biota! will be a chance to link exciting and realistic exhibits with real places



Rachel Jones conducting a snorkel transect

and the conservation issues that face them. It will be divided into 4 biomes recreating geographical areas – one of which is the Indo-Pacific. The showcase exhibit of the Indo-Pacific biome will be a 140,000 litre coral reef tank containing a representative community of fish and invertebrates to reflect a specific site. The aim is to use a Chagossian reef as both inspiration and template for this exhibit which will reflect a steep reef slope with a diverse community of soft and hard corals, and the fish and other invertebrate species that live among them.

With this in mind, part of the fieldwork was devoted to looking for specific reef sites that might be suitable candidates for the reef-wall exhibit. The site needed to be a steep, but not sheer, slope, with very good coral coverage and a large proportion of soft coral species. Several of the sites the team dived during the trip were the right combination of species diversity and aspect, but one in particular on the atoll of Peros Banhos was absolutely perfect. Information and images were gathered on the species compositions and the overall look of the site, all of which will contribute to the design of a realistic and natural representation of this specific reef slope.



Salomon Atoll

The Chagos archipelago represents a remote and largely undisturbed series of marine habitats with a special significance to the British population. However, very few people know much, if anything, about them, and certainly have very little idea about what their underwater environment looks like. We are planning to work collaboratively with other expedition team members from Bangor University, who were developing innovative methods for imaging large areas of reefs during the trip. By combining exciting technologies such as these with accurate living communities of animals, we hope to provide over a million visitors a year with a window onto the amazing reefs of the Chagos.

Rachel Jones – Deputy Team Leader, Aquarium, Zoological Society of London

Falkland Islands Host International Albatross Workshop

An international workshop '*Albatross and Petrels in the South Atlantic: Priorities and Conservation'* was hosted by Falklands Conservation in the Falkland Islands from 12 to 15 March 2006. It addressed the seriously declining populations of these seabirds, and provided recommendations to ensure their protection and conservation in the South Atlantic.

In addition to the Falkland Islands, all the remote UK Overseas Territories in this region were involved. These are crucial places for the survival of many of the world's albatross and petrels. The Falkland Islands hold 65% of black-browed albatrosses, and the largest global population of southern giant petrels. The Tristan albatross and Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross are found only on Tristan da Cunha. South Georgia holds important populations of grey-headed, light-mantled, and wandering albatrosses. All these are recognised as globally threatened by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) and BirdLife International.

The meeting drew on the experience of world leaders in albatross and petrel research to identify priorities for the UK Government, and its Overseas Territories, within the framework of the international Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels (ACAP), which the UK ratified in March 2004. Discussions were focused on land-based and at-sea research and management, education and awareness, plus reporting methods for providing vitally important data on population numbers and trends for the ACAP species.

The meeting has resulted in a detailed programme of positive action required to address the dramatic seabird declines across the South Atlantic. A series of wide ranging recommendations is to be set out in the Workshop Report (available shortly from Falklands Conservation: www.falklandsconservation.com). The Workshop recognised that successes in the Falkland Islands and South Georgia need to be extended to other Overseas Territories and beyond to further improve the status of these endangered seabirds.

Falklands Conservation is very grateful to the UK Overseas Territories Environment Programme and to the Falkland Islands Government who provided funding for the Workshop, and to Consolidated Fisheries Ltd and Cable and Wireless for their sponsorship of this event.

Ann Brown, Company Secretary, Falklands Conservation, ann@falklands-nature.demon.co.uk

Twenty-one UK Overseas Territory delegates attended, from Tristan da Cunha, Ascension Island, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, British Antarctic Territories and the Falkland Islands. In addition, there were participants from South America and South Africa, countries in whose territorial waters these magnificent seabirds roam.

"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.

Preparations are very well advanced on this international conference on UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small islands. The conference themes are those selected by wide consultation as the subjects which will be of most use to conservation practitioners in these places. Full details (which are periodically updated), including the programme and booking forms, are on the Forum's web-site (www.ukotcf.org).

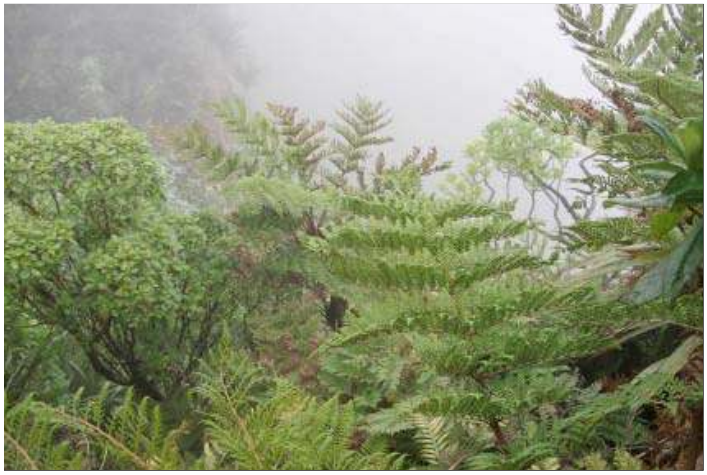
At the time of writing (July), the workshops before and after the main conference are fully booked. A very small number of places for the main conference remain, but this may not be the case for long. Any other people who wish to attend but have not yet booked should contact the Forum immediately to investigate if places remain.

Invertebrate survey finds many endemic species surviving in the relict cloud forest of St Helena

From December 2005 to March 2006 a survey of the invertebrates of the Central Peaks of St Helena was carried out by Howard Mendel from the Natural History Museum (for the first month), Philip Ashmole and Myrtle Ashmole, with assistance in the field from Edward Thorpe. This was part of the OTEP-funded project to develop a protected area management plan for the Peaks, implemented by the St Helena National Trust.

The Central Peaks retain only about 16 hectares of the original cloud forest and much of this area has been invaded by an array of alien plants. Nonetheless, an important set of endemic trees and shrubs, along with many mosses, liverworts and hornworts (see *Forum News* 28) are still present. This fragment of tree fern thicket and cabbage tree woodland also provides habitats for many of the endemic invertebrates of the island.

In 1965 and 1966 the invertebrates of the whole of St Helena were comprehensively studied by a group of Belgian entomologists. Since then, little entomological survey work has been done, apart from our study on Prosperous Bay Plain in 2003 in relation to the proposed airport. Calculations from the Belgians' numerous publications have revealed that of the 393 invertebrates occurring on the Peaks, about 217 (55%) are endemic and, of these, about 127 may be restricted to



Cloud Forest on St Helena

the Peaks area. This makes the Peaks an exceptionally important area of invertebrate endemicity, so it seemed important to find out how many of the native species have survived the contraction of the habitat and invasion by aliens that has continued during most of the four decades since the Belgians' survey.

The recent work spanned three months, but was most intensive in December-January while Howard Mendel was on the island. Techniques included the use of flight-interception and Malaise traps, as well as pitfall trapping, litter collection and sweeping and beating of vegetation, in an effort to detect the widest possible range of invertebrates. Much of the effort during the later part of the survey was focused on insects associated with particular endemic plant species.

For most taxonomic groups, the final identifications will not be available for many months. This is because, although some specimens can be studied in London within the Natural History Museum, many have to be distributed to specialists elsewhere, often overseas and most of them overloaded. The global tendency for inadequate support for taxonomy comes home to roost in situations such as this, where development of an intelligent strategy for biodiversity conservation is constrained by incomplete understanding of the taxa involved.

An outstanding example is provided by the wolf spiders (family Lycosidae) of St Helena. As well as previously described species, two apparently new lycosids were found on the Peaks during the recent survey. Two more (in addition to the known species) play a key role in the ecology of Prosperous Bay Plain, the area threatened by the proposed airport, but so far they cannot even be securely assigned to genera. Lycosid taxonomy has been effectively in abeyance for many years and the scale of the problem is highlighted by Norman Platnick of the American Museum of Natural History, who recently commented – in response to our suggestion that some funds from the US National

Peaks lycoid spider

Science Foundation's Planetary Biodiversity Inventories project might be used on the lycosids – that "Proposals for this program must be to inventory groups that can be covered globally in 5-6 years with no more than $3 million dollars, and the lycosids are far too large a group for that to be feasible!"

Nonetheless, preliminary identifications of our recently collected specimens demonstrate that many of the most significant endemic invertebrates of the Peaks of St Helena still have viable populations. Several species found during the survey may prove to be new to science. Many of the endemic insects are associated with particular endemic plants, so that protection of these plants is the key to long-term survival of the insects. Furthermore, many endemic invertebrates seem to depend on the humid and stable microclimate provided by a closed canopy of tree ferns and cabbage trees; open stands appear to have fewer animals and lower biodiversity. Even small relict stands of endemic trees with associated dead wood can maintain diverse communities of endemic invertebrates, but many of these animals may be lost as the number of trees in the stand declines and its structure is destroyed. Strengthening of such stands by planting more of the endemic trees within and around them should be a priority, with intensive care of the trees until established.

Clearance of New Zealand flax *Phormium tenax* and other invasive alien plants can permit restoration of lost areas of natural habitat, but as those working on St Helena are only too aware, it will succeed only if work in cleared areas is continued until native plants are fully re-established; otherwise, there is a real risk of replacing a stand of flax with a stand of some other alien plant (often the composite whiteweed *Eupatorium pallidum*). One element in the current Peaks project involves removal of flax from a more or less sheer cliff at High Peak and it is most encouraging to see the immediate response of the endemic tree ferns *Dicksonia arborescens* and dogwoods *Nesohedyotis arborea* that had survived under the flax.

Conservation and ecological restoration work on St Helena has had outstanding successes and some failures. The keys to success appear to be coherent planning and continuity in management, as well as hard work on the ground.

Myrtle and Philip Ashmole, Kidston Mill, Peebles, Scotland, EH45 8PH. Tel. 01721 721321. Email philip.myrtle@ashmole.org.uk

"The Invertebrates of the Central Peaks and Peak Dale St Helena: Interim Report March 2006" and "The Invertebrates of Prosperous Bay Plain, St Helena: a survey by Philip and Myrtle Ashmole, September – December 2003" are available on www.kidstonmill.org.uk

Effective partnerships show signs of success for Cayman

The Cayman Islands Darwin Initiative project has made good progress since commencement in October 2005. Led by the Cayman Islands Department of Environment and University of Exeter, with the support of over a dozen local and international partners, the project is on course to deliver on ambitious targets set for the next two years.

Acquisition of satellite imagery of the marine and terrestrial environments of Grand Cayman, Little Cayman and Cayman Brac is currently underway, along with the development of a comprehensive habitat classification system. This will enable integrated habitat mapping of all three islands, as a basis for conservation planning and management.

The maps will also contribute to the creation of a Biodiversity Action Plan for the Cayman Islands. Combining action plans for key species and habitats, the BAP will fulfil the requirement of a National Conservation Action Plan, prescribed by the (draft) National Conservation Law. This new legislation will radically update the capacity of the Cayman Islands to deliver on a range of MEAs, and has been committed for consideration by the Legislative Assembly by September 2006.

Education and awareness programmes represent the third component of the Darwin project, with an emphasis on interactive learning. A new website www.CaymanBiodiversity.com (currently under construction) will assist in the delivery of educational materials and activities, including "virtual safaris" of the Islands, and interactive resources for budding birders.

The *Red List Assessment of Cayman Islands' Native Flora* was completed in March this year, and will be published by Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. Some 85 species are listed as critically endangered. An electronic copy is available through www.CaymanBiodiversity.com RESOURCES. Compiled by Fred Burton, and funded by the Overseas Territories Environment Programme, the Red List has already proved invaluable in the prioritisation of SAPs and HAPs.

The challenges of developing and implementing an effective BAP are, of course, significant, even for large countries. Small island states, such as the Cayman Islands, share many of the biodiversity issues of larger countries, but with more limited access to resources, personnel and expertise. Effective partnerships have been the key to success of the Darwin project in Cayman so far.

With the support of the University of Exeter, local capacity building has been undertaken in the form of training workshops and events. Dr Michael Coyne and Dr Pat Halpin (Nicholas School of the Environment and Earth Sciences, Duke University) delivered a GIS training course to local staff, and Dr Colin Clubbe and Dr Damien Hicks of Royal Botanic Gardens Kew have given talks on the Millennium Seedbank Project, and seed preservation techniques. Ms Karen Varnham is supporting projects which will address issues of invasive species.

Cooperative working between Department of Environment, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park, the Cayman Islands Orchid Society and Shade Brigade has attracted private and corporate sponsorship to establish two new side-projects: the construction of a Shade House for growing native orchids, and a commercial native tree nursery. Both projects aim to produce native flora for the commercial market, to increase the ecological value of suburban areas, and also for the reintroduction of threatened species into the wild. Further information on these projects is available through www.CaymanBiodiversity.com NEWS.

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A new Alliance for biodiversity in Europe's Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories

Nine major Nature Conservation Organizations, working with local partners in Europe's 7 Outermost Regions (ORs) and 21 Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs), have agreed to build an official alliance. These organizations are:

- Brussels: IUCN, BirdLife International, WWF
- France: IUCN French Committee, LPO BirdLife, WWF France
- Netherlands: IUCN Netherlands Committee, Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA)
- UK: the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), also representing the IUCN UK Committee

The European ORs and OCTs are home to very important ecosystems and biodiversity of world-wide importance, vastly more so than that of continental Europe. They are facing major environmental threats and need strong commitment and support to achieve sustainable development.

Over the past decades, NGOs have been trying to raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity in the ORs and OCTs and to stress the need for effective and coordinated European policy in this field. Yet, a comprehensive and effective approach to stop the loss of biodiversity in these regions is still lacking. The alliance was established to improve this situation. The goal is to influence EU decision-making, in order to raise the profile of the exceptional biodiversity of the EU ORs/OCTs and obtain a financial and legal commitment to protect it.

To achieve these goals, a working group was established with representatives of members of the Alliance. A secretariat, is based in Brussels at the IUCN regional office for Europe, has the role of supporting the working group and improving the exchange of information between all relevant stakeholders. The secretariat is managed by: jean-philippe.palasi@iucn.org and erik.van.zadelhoff@iucn.org

The alliance will complement and build on the work of its constituent partners to develop partnerships with institutions and authorities at local, national and European levels. The alliance will also do its best to get on board appropriate umbrella organisations from the three other European member states that have ORs and OCTs: Denmark, Spain and Portugal.

This is the first time such a global and coherent platform dedicated to environmental issues in the ORs and OCTs has existed. It is hoped that it will be a useful tool for all relevant local, national and international NGOs, working with governments.

An important part of the work is to inform the decisions and actions of major EU Institutions. Over the last months, members of the alliance have visited the Directorates of Environment and Development Cooperation, as well as the European Parliament. In the June Green Week in Brussels, a side event on the ORs and OCTs was organized. These efforts have resulted in the prominent exposure of biodiversity issues in some major events.

Once a year, there is a meeting between the authorities of all OCTs and the European Commission. The next is in Nuuk in September 2006. The alliance has been invited by Jacques Roman, desk officer in charge of OCTs at DG Development (with approval from the OCTs). Mike Pienkowski of UKOTCF and Jean-Philippe Palasi will represent the alliance.

The conference will not be focusing entirely on environmental issues, but at least two of the biggest OCTs, Greenland and French Polynesia, are pushing to have a strong message on environment. They have identified marine issues and climate change as big environmental priorities that are common to all OCTs.

IUCN is organizing a conference on Biodiversity in European Development Cooperation (Paris, 19-21 September 2006), with support from the European Commission and 4 member states. A specific workshop will be entirely dedicated to OCTs.

New Forum Member

The Army Ornithological Society (AOS) has been in existence for almost 40 years. In earlier times the Society was represented around the world by many distinct branches. Now, in line with military withdrawals and reductions, the Society has only one main body with the majority of its members based in UK. It is open to serving and retired members of the military community as well as those in the Civil Service working in the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and members of Commonwealth forces (reflecting past links). It also operates closely with the Societies in the other Services.

Objectives of the AOS include:

- Encouragement and promotion of bird watching and conservation within the Army.
- Promotion and dissemination of the science of ornithology in all its aspects.
- Provision of a focus for MOD Bird Count.
- Acting as a central body for the Army for liaison with other recognised Ornithological Societies.

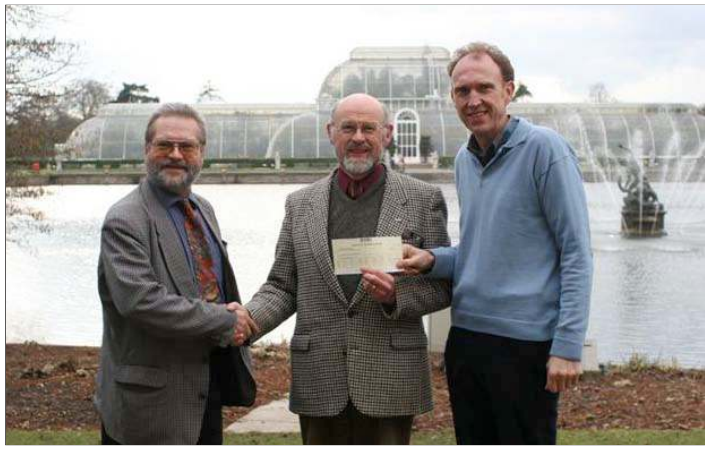
It offers many activities mirroring members' interests. It organises several trips each year, ranging from a day on the Norfolk coast to a 2-week tour and/or expedition abroad. An example of our work is that for 20 years there have been expeditions to Ascension Island, a UK Overseas Territory. Ascension is a very important base for tropical Atlantic sea birds. In the main the Society has been involved in the survey of breeding sooty terns and the impact of factors on their population which has a direct read across to other sea birds. Survey data have helped with the formulation and implementation of an island-wide conservation plan which includes the Sea Bird Restoration Project.

However the AOS's main UK focus and direction is tied in with the MOD estate (DE). Members are already involved in a number of MOD local conservation bodies and the Society is looking to involve them in wider roles. The main point of effort is the MOD Bird Count which is being led by Lt Col Roger Dickey. The joint aim is to ensure that the MOD estate is properly covered and the information provided allows DE to form a complete picture that is relevant to Government needs as well as of use to other ornithological bodies. The AOS would like to reach a point where as a Society it is able (through its active members) to offer assistance to the various conservation bodies on ornithological matters. This could vary in form from giving advice to actually carrying out a full survey of an area. The Society is also very keen that all serving and retired military participants in all the MOD conservation bodies take the opportunity to join it in order to make it more effective and relevant.

Those who require further information should contact Maj Andrew Bray. Telephone: military - 94391 2910; civilian - 01264 382910. E-mail: Andrew.bray216@mod.uk or secretary@aos.org.uk.

Royal Bank of Scotland contribution to the Forum

Nigel Crocker, Treasurer of the Forum for the last nine years, retired from The Royal Bank of Scotland at the end of April. During recent years the bank has supported Nigel's voluntary work with the Forum through the donation of a small annual grant. The photo accompanying this article shows the presentation of the latest donation to Dr Mike Pienkowski and Dr Colin Clubbe at Royal Botanic Gardens Kew in February 2006. The Royal Bank of Scotland engages in offshore banking in a number of overseas territories and it is anticipated that one of their senior executives will be at the conference in Jersey in October 2006.



Nigel Crocker presents a cheque from the Royal Bank of Scotland to Colin Clubbe, Forum Vice chairman (right) and Mike Pienkowski (left)

Forum small projects with St Helena and Tristan da Cunha

UKOTCF's *Annual Report 2004/05* acknowledged the support of the Bryan Guinness Charitable Trust for two small projects for some of the Forum's UKOT partners.

St Helena Flax Mill Museum

As noted in the *Annual Report*, the first of these projects concerned the establishment of a flax mill museum in St Helena. Cathy Hopkins, Director of St Helena National Trust, reports that the first stage of this work, supported by the grant via the Forum, has been completed. This has also stimulated support from other sources for the other phases. A local building contractor has cleaned the building, chipped and painted the internal walls, plastered and painted the new dividing wall (between the museum and the Prisoner Rehabilitation Centre), repaired the floor and laid a new wooden floor, and cleaned the Robey and Co. Lincoln steam engine, which was sent to St Helena in 1895. Advice from a visiting steam engine buff will now enable the correct cleaning and maintenance of the engine. The Education Office was extremely helpful in allowing one of their members of staff time off to give assistance in designing the interpretation boards. A frenzied period of activity with Ryan Moyce, a qualified graphic designer, produced the first drafts and the text should be completed by the end of June.

A partial reconstruction of one of the flax stripping machines has been made and will be housed on one wall of the museum with a mural depicting an old flax mill. The reconstruction of a scutcher is now going ahead. The Trust is most grateful to Brian Turpin who, with support from Nick Thorpe, has undertaken this work voluntarily.

Structurally the only other work that is needed is to restore a circular window above the entrance. The window, surrounded by carved red stone, had been cemented up some years ago and it was the intention to re-open it. However in attempting this, it became clear that the stone was crumbling and so a temporary cement cylinder was put in place to prevent further collapse. The SHNT has sought the support of the Tourist Office's Heritage Sites Working Group for funding of the repair from a limited fund they hold for Heritage sites projects. Subject to obtaining Highways Authority approval for moving the door at the same time and a detailed estimate being prepared for the window, the application will be considered further at the next meeting of the group.

Audio-visual equipment in the form of a DVD surround-sound and monitor was secured from a Good Government Fund underspend identified to the Trust by the Staff Officer to the Governor.

It is now planned to open the Flax Mill Museum to coincide with an Art and Culture Festival in December 2006.

Tristan da Cunha environmental education resources

In addition to the main island, there are three other islands – Nightingale, Inaccessible and Gough. Together, these form one of the most important sites in the world for breeding seabirds, with millions of pairs of birds including four species unique to the Tristan islands. Many other species found on the Tristan islands, both animal and plant, are unique to the islands, including the Tristan crayfish, upon which the economy is based.

There is only one school on Tristan – St Mary's School, which has five classes of children aged between 5 and 15. In addition there is a playgroup for pre-school children aged from 3 to 5. The upper-school children study for a UK-accredited GCSE course in Tristan Studies, which includes modules on the environment. However, the school is lacking in resources to teach classes about the local wildlife, even though it is of such global importance, and school projects often have more emphasis on the wildlife of the UK than that of Tristan. The production of materials for the school specific to Tristan will enable teachers to run projects on the local wildlife and to highlight the significance of the biodiversity of Tristan. A high proportion of school leavers go on to jobs with the Tristan Government, and at present 10 of the 60 government employees work periodically on conservation projects. It would greatly help these projects if school leavers had a good knowledge of the wildlife of Tristan.

The work to provide these resources is being undertaken by Paul Tyler and Alison Rothwell, who worked with the RSPB-led Darwin team on Tristan da Cunha, and in close consultation with the Conservation Officer and the school on Tristan. Information collected during the recent Darwin Initiative project on Tristan (which involved visiting scientists and conservationists working alongside local personnel to help transfer skills to the latter as well as progress studies and conservation), including digital photographs, have been used, along with historical information, to produce a set of full-colour fact-sheets on the Natural History of Tristan da Cunha. These are supported by student activity sheets, teacher's notes and supporting material on CDs. Topics covered include geology, habitats, birds, plants, marine life and man's impact on biodiversity

Example of one of the Tristan da Cunha Fact Sheets

The Natural History of Tristan da Cunha

Tristan crayfish

Tristan name **Crayfish**
Scientific name **Jasus tristani**

What does it look like?

Hard shell with reddish-brown colouration
Long tail and 10 walking legs
Long antennae

Where is it found?

The Tristan crayfish is found nowhere else in the world apart from a few seamounts in the open ocean. This species of crayfish is broadly similar to other crayfish found in other parts of the world. Crayfish are normally found on rocky reefs, particularly on exposed oceanic coasts.

What does it eat?

A wide variety of animal and plant foods, including seaweed and carrion.

How does it breed?

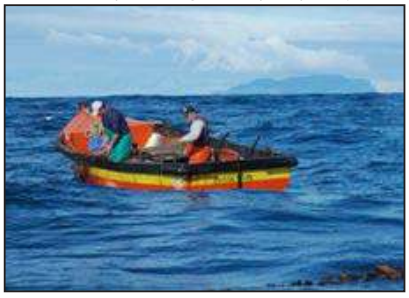
The female lays several hundred eggs which are fertilised by the male. The 'berried' female carries them beneath its abdomen until they hatch. The small larvae are free-swimming, feeding on smaller plankton. When they are large enough they settle on the seabed as miniature crayfish. It is a mystery how they do not get swept away from Tristan on the ocean currents.

How does it grow?

Because it has an exoskeleton ('exo' means 'outside') it has to cast off its shell to grow bigger. Its a bit like living inside a suit of armour - the suit cannot grow any bigger, you just need a bigger suit. The crayfish emerging from the old shell is soft. It pumps itself up with water before the new shell hardens, and will slowly grow inside to fill the new shell. This is when it is at its most vulnerable - the soft shell is an easy target for a hungry octopus.

A Tristan crayfish. As well as its 10 walking legs it has several other modified legs which it uses to handle its food, and antennae to taste the water

Tristan crayfish are found in very large numbers thanks to careful management of the fishery



Fishing for crayfish. Tristan's economy depends almost entirely on selling these shellfish. The survival of the Tristan islanders' way of life therefore depends on managing the stocks wisely

(continued from front page)

On the same date that the new Conservation Ordinance was presented to the Chief Islander, Anne Green, the Governor wrote to the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office, requesting that the UK's ratification of ACAP be extended to Tristan. The extension was formally effected by the submission of a diplomatic note to the Australian Government, which acts as the legal depository for the Agreement, in Canberra on 13 April 2006, with the extension taking effect from that date.

Eleven species listed in ACAP's Annex 1 have so far been recorded for Tristan. Of these, six species breed within the territory: Tristan, sooty and Atlantic yellow-nosed albatrosses, southern giant petrel, and spectacled and grey petrels. Tristan Islanders will know these by their island names of *Gony, Mollymawk (or Molly), Peeoo, Stinker (or Nellie), Ringeye* and *Pediunker*. The Tristan albatross, Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross and spectacled petrel are endemic to the island group, breeding nowhere else. The remaining seven species of albatrosses and petrels have been recorded as non-breeding visitors to Tristan waters (including within its Exclusive Economic Zone out to 200 nautical miles from shore). They include the regularly seen black-browed albatross (*Cape Molly*) and white-chinned petrel (*Cape hen* or *shoemaker*).

All six Tristan-breeding ACAP species have a globally threatened or near-threatened status according to BirdLife International, with the spectacled petrel, which breeds only on Inaccessible Island, being considered critically endangered. The Tristan albatross on Gough is suffering from the depredations of the introduced house mouse, and a study is underway to see if it will be feasible to eradicate the mice from that island.

Much still needs to be found out about Tristan's ACAP seabirds. For example, it is still not known whether the grey petrel breeds (or has ever bred) on Inaccessible, one of the four main islands in the Tristan group. This winter-breeding species has so far escaped detection, probably because all the recent ornithological expeditions to uninhabited Inaccessible have been restricted to summer months. If the *Pediunker* continues to breed on the main island of Tristan it seems likely it will be in small numbers only, since it is most probably at risk from the introduced black or ship rats.

As Tristan da Cunha looks towards eco-tourism as a growing source of income, its new Conservation Ordinance and membership of the Albatross and Petrel Agreement will both help ensure that its spectacular seabirds are conserved for islanders and visitors alike to appreciate and to enjoy.

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Mike Hentley, Administrator, Edinburgh of the Seven Seas, Tristan da Cunha
James Glass, Head, Natural Resources Department, Edinburgh of the Seven Seas, Tristan da Cunha

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Photographs courtesy of: Bermuda National Trust; John Binns; Oliver Cheesman; Bob Crawford; John Cooper; Falklands Conservation; Tara Pelembe; James Glass Tristan da Cunha; Guernsey Environment Department; Rachel Jones; Mike Maunder; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Stephen Mendes; Mike Pienkowski; and Kathy Stearne.

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