



CONSERVATION FORUM

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UKOTCF works with TCI bodies to develop education courses and conserve wetlands

It has long been recognised that the wetland areas of TCI are of major importance for a variety of wildlife. The Ramsar site on North, Middle and East Caicos is one of the largest and most natural of all those designated by UK and its territories. UKOTCF has had a long involvement in this Ramsar site (as well as others), for example developing a management plan and a network of trails in collaboration with the Turks and Caicos National Trust (e.g. *Forum News* 30: 1&16). However, there are several other potential Ramsar sites in the Turks and Caicos Islands, as identified in the DEFRA-commissioned review of actual and potential Ramsar sites in the UKOTs carried out by UKOTCF in 2005 (www.ukotcf.org/pubs/ramsarReview.htm).

In particular, the potential Ramsar sites include the salinas of Grand Turk, which also constitute a globally Important Bird Area (see *Forum News* 37: 14). The salinas are internationally important staging areas needed by arctic-breeding migrant shorebirds, such as stilt sandpipers, short-billed dowitchers and greater and lesser yellowlegs. Amongst the breeding birds are least terns, laughing gulls and Wilson's plover.

The salinas lacked any protected status. In addition to their importance for breeding and migratory birds, they are important culturally and historically, representing a significant part of the history of the Turks and Caicos Islanders, particularly the salt industry

which was previously the economic basis of the country. Without protection, the salinas were rapidly deteriorating due to ad hoc and rapid infilling.

UKOTCF and its TCI partner conservation bodies were not the only ones to be concerned about the neglect of the importance of the Grand Turk salinas. In 2007-2008, a group of students from the H.J. Robinson High School on Grand Turk, with their teacher Ms Cordelia Creese, conducted a study on the salinas. During the course of this work, they became increasingly concerned about the degradation of the salinas, and put forward some recommendations about protection and management of the salinas, which they presented to the Ministry for Natural Resources. This study won the 2008 Inter-High School Science Fair (see *Forum News* 33: 3).

Since 2004, UKOTCF has been developing bird-watching trails on Grand Turk, focused on the salinas. A particular feature of the birds on the Grand Turk salinas is that waterbirds that are usually shy elsewhere allow close approach here – offering outstanding bird watching opportunities, even for novice bird watchers. This feature offers opportunities for the development of local ecotourism businesses for the large number of tourists, as well as a way of raising local awareness of the importance of the salinas. However, despite repeated promises from TCI

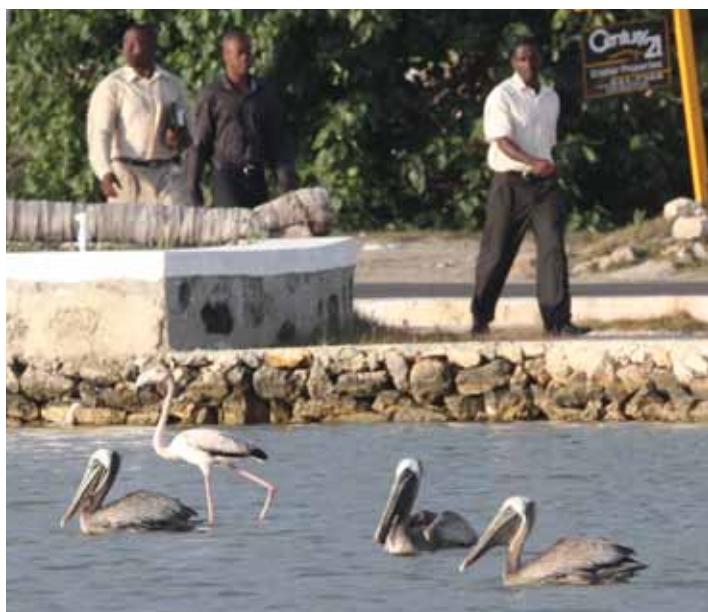


Reddish and great egrets hunting for fish on one of the salinas still needing protection, in the town of Grand Turk. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski



High-school students test the bird trail with teacher Cordelia Creese and Ann Pienkowski. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Government for funding for the final production of the guide leaflets and marker posts, to complement UKOTCF's donation of resources, this was not forthcoming. The opportunity to make the bird trails a reality came in late 2010. During a visit to TCI for other project work, including discussions about the *Wonderful Water* project (see below), UKOTCF and its Associate, the Turks and Caicos National Museum (www.tcmuseum.org), became aware that funds might be available from the TCIInvest-Carnival Corporation infrastructure fund. An application to this was successful, enabling the production of signage and interpretive materials for the bird tours. Additional, essential support for marking the trails was given by Turks and Caicos Utilities, which cut up old power poles which had been downed by Hurricane Ike in 2008, and recycled them as trail-markers, using their large drilling auger. The two trails, a walking and a driving trail, were opened in July 2011. As well as the official opening, the week of events included a guided walk for students from the H J Robinson High School, and their teacher, Ms Cordelia Creese. Other events during bird week included a film night at the Museum, which started with a short DVD made in-house by UKOTCF on the salinas and their birds. Mike and Ann Pienkowski were interviewed by local television about the bird trails and the environmental education work, and parts of this DVD were used to illustrate the interview. The first driving trail tour was undertaken with a coach load of interested people, and declared to be a great success. The TCI Junior Park Wardens summer programme also made use of the bird trails material.



Waterbirds shy elsewhere in the world, such as these brown pelicans and flamingo, allow close approach at Grand Turk, giving great potential for bird-watching and local small business opportunities based on this.
 Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Another initiative during this period was the collaboration between UKOTCF and the Turks and Caicos Education Department on the development of environmental education materials. At the suggestion of the Director of Education, the theme of *Wonderful Water* was decided upon. A successful application to OTEP provided part-funding for this project, which is running until 2012. The objective is to help school students understand the crucial importance of water resources in TCI, which has low annual rainfall. The project is developing a curriculum-linked teaching programme on water resources in TCI for the upper primary and the first years of high school. As well as highlighting the important wetland ecosystems in TCI, it addresses the increasing needs for scarce water resources, and how these needs can be met. The teaching materials will also include the hydrological systems which enable fresh water to be accessed through artesian wells,



The now protected Town Salina was, until recently, still subject to piecemeal destruction by infilling for building construction; other salinas remain under threat. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

the desalination process, wise use of water and water-saving measures, and issues of pollution. The project is led by Ann Pienkowski, UKOTCF's Environmental Education Co-ordinator, who designed the work, and involves local teachers, and training through workshops.

The efforts of stakeholders who understood the importance of the salinas came together in early 2011 in a very positive way. With the trails being finalised and, following a recommendation by the TCI Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR), two of the salinas in the centre of Grand Turk were declared protected areas. The work of the high-school students in promoting awareness of the need for protection and management was cited in TCI Government's announcement about the new protected areas, along with a reference to the article in *Forum News* 33.

At the same time, February 2011, teacher workshops were held in Grand Turk and Providenciales to introduce the draft resources produced for the *Wonderful Water* project, the pilot components being on wetland ecosystems in TCI, and the value of the wetlands, both as internationally important bird areas and as an exceptional outdoor classroom. The news that two of the salinas in Grand Turk were now protected, and that this process had been started by the study conducted by the H J Robinson students, was a great example of how young people, through environmental education, can bring about positive change.

So a great start has been made to raising public awareness of the importance of the Grand Turk Salinas, and making two of them protected areas. Of course, this is not the end of the story. The other salinas and wells on Grand Turk are also important, but threatened. In fact, the salinas of Grand Turk and Salt Cay should be thought of as a whole, so that under varying conditions there will always be some that are suitable for the birds. At various times, some of the salinas dry out, and some become over-full and too deep for the small wading birds to use. Therefore, it is important that the other salinas are placed within the protected areas. This holistic approach is reflected in the areas of Grand Turk, Salt Cay, parts of South Caicos and the outer cays, which form the proposed World Heritage Site, which has been accepted on to the new UK WHS Tentative List (see later article).

Proper management of the salinas is required. A science-led management plan is needed which will maintain the salinas in a healthy state, and enable restitution of those which have been damaged in recent years by poorly planned development. Specialist skills to help in this have been offered by UKOTCF, together with other UK conservation bodies. Plans are in hand for a multi-stakeholder group to apply for resources to take this vital stage forward by bringing in these skills to work alongside local partners.

Caicos Pine Recovery Programme

Background

Pinus caribaea var. *bahamensis* is endemic to the Bahamas Archipelago, where it is the National Tree of the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI). It occurs in very different situations in the northern Bahamas, and in TCI, south of the Bahamas, and there have been some suggestions that these are different taxa. In 2005, a joint UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), Turks and Caicos National Trust (TCNT) and Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (RBGK) field trip discovered that the pineyards on Middle Caicos had been infested by a scale insect which was attacking the pine trees. This introduced pest, subsequently identified as the pine tortoise scale *Toumeyella parvicornis*, often kills the pine trees, and reduces seed production. The insects also secrete sugary honeydew which enables a sooty mould to grow. Prior to 2005, the pine tortoise scale was unknown in the Caribbean and had never been found on the Caribbean pine. It is native to northern USA, where its population growth is controlled by the severe winters. In TCI it can grow and reproduce unchecked by climate or predators. It is thought to have been introduced accidentally from USA where phyto-sanitary checks on exports (as opposed to imports) are poor. In 2010 funding was received from OTEP for a 3-year project: *Building capacity and awareness to save the National Tree of the Turks and Caicos Islands*. This project has been reported in previous issues of *Forum News* (e.g. 35: 17).



Bryan Naqqi Manco and FCO Minister for the Overseas Territories, Henry Bellingham MP, view healthy pine seedlings (below) at the nursery on North Caicos in July 2011. Photos: FCO; Dr Eric Salamanca

The project is benefitting from continuing expert input from staff at RBG Kew (a Member organisation of UKOTCF), and from the studies of MSc students from Imperial College London, as well as the on-site expertise of project manager, Bryan Naqqi Manco, and hard-working nursery staff.

A first experimental pest treatment was carried out in February 2011. There has been no discernable effect on the scale insects from this first treatment. Other treatment chemicals will be tried on new pilot test plots.

This summer, work has included monitoring of the project's permanent monitoring plots on Pine Cay, North Caicos and Middle Caicos, and training of DECR personnel by RBG Kew staff on chemical extraction techniques for biochemical studies.

Land has been secured for the expansion of the Caicos Pine Recovery Programme nursery on the Government Farm, North Caicos. The nursery is going well, with a good clean collection of young trees.

Hurricane Irene went through the Turks and Caicos Islands on Tuesday 23 / Wednesday 24 August 2011. Fortunately the hurricane had weakened, and the Caicos Pine Recovery Project nursery suffered little damage. Whilst almost all of the trees had toppled over, no seedlings were lost, nothing was blown away, and the structure and shade cloth remained intact.

The cones ripened early this year, so collection took place in September 2011, rather than October. The seed collection total for last year was only 772 plant quality seeds. This year, over 5000 seeds have been collected while still only halfway through the sorting stage. Unfortunately, not a single seed was collected from North Caicos, and only 187 from Middle Caicos.

TCI seabird monitoring

Nine years ago, UKOTCF (Mike and Ann Pienkowski and TCI naturalist Bryan Naqqi Manco) conducted breeding seabird counts on the isolated outer cays of the Caicos and Turks Banks. These established the area as Important Bird Areas (see: Pienkowski, M.W., Pienkowski, A.E. & Manco, B.N (2005) *Birds on the outer cays of the Turks and Caicos Islands. Journal of Caribbean Ornithology* 18: 31-43; and *Important Bird Areas of the Americas: Priority sites for biodiversity conservation* (2009): pages 357-368. Birdlife Conservation Series No. 16).

The Management of Protected Areas for Sustainable Economies (MPASSE) project steering group meeting in BVI in May 2011 coincided with the timing of the previous counts, so Ann and Mike Pienkowski took the opportunity (with Bryan Naqqi Manco and Eric Salamanca from the TCI Department of Environment and Coastal Resources DECR joining for one of the days) to repeat these counts. The counts on the Caicos Bank were made possible by Mark Parrish, of Big Blue Unlimited (www.bigblueunlimited.com) and on the Turks Bank by Debbie and Ollie Manos, Salt Cay Divers (www.saltcaydivers.tc). Both Big Blue and Salt Cay Divers donated staff and boat time to the project. Although detailed analyses still have to be done, preliminary findings are that the areas maintain their importance. It was pleasing to find Magnificent Frigatebirds in the area. One of the main breeding colonies, Man O'War Bush – a large mangrove tree on the Caicos Bank – was destroyed by the hurricanes of 2008, and the previous count had revealed dead Frigatebirds on the ground on their breeding cay on the Turks Bank. However, it was concerning to hear accounts of illegal seabird and turtle egg collections continuing, despite all these areas being protected.



Pair of white-tailed tropicbirds display over Big Sand Cay during the seabird count. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

UKOTCF workshop on developing ideas for biodiversity conservation objectives for UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies

Colleagues working on conservation in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies have made clear to UKOTCF (and others) their welcoming of support in terms of funding, human resources, technical expertise etc. to complement the internal resources of the Territories. In order to obtain resources to be able to provide this support, it is necessary to have clear strategies, with objectives and/or targets against which the effectiveness of use of resources provided by others can be assessed.

At UKOTCF's seminar (see *Forum News* 37: 9-11) in September 2010 on UK Government's "*UKOTs Biodiversity Strategy*" (2009), it became clear that, whilst the latter document was an agreement between three UK Government Departments, it did not include the elements one would normally expect of a strategy. At that meeting, and since in discussion with Government officials, UKOTCF offered help in developing some elements necessary to produce a more complete strategy.

UKOTCF therefore convened, in June 2011, a half-day workshop to make a start on ideas about objectives for a strategy. The intention was not to replace the UK Government document which agreed the share of roles between UK government departments, but to be complementary to it. In addition, it was not intended that any draft objectives developed be prescriptive for UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. Rather, they were intended to draw on previous views from these and elsewhere, to try to identify shared features. These could then be used to guide supporting work by outside bodies. As noted above, without clear objectives, it would be difficult for such bodies to resource, plan and execute their efforts to support the territories. The draft objectives might be useful also for UKOTs and CDs in any revisions of their own strategies, especially if common features could be identified, increasing the potential for co-operation in working and in influencing others. It will be interesting to see to what extent the UKOTs Biodiversity Strategy and the results of this workshop will mesh with the new UK Biodiversity Strategy currently being redrafted.

A report on the workshop is available at www.ukotcf.org/pdf/fNews/BiodivWorkshop1106.pdf. The agenda consisted of a few introductory presentations, intended to stimulate discussion, followed by that general discussion. These started with a review by UKOTCF (a version, revised in the light of comments by participants, is at Appendix 1 of the workshop report, followed by views from UK Government by its agency, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). Views were then expressed from a primarily governmental viewpoint in a Crown Dependency, by Liz Charter of the Isle of Man (Appendix 2 of the report), and a primarily non-governmental viewpoint in a UK Overseas Territory, by Annie Glasspool of Bermuda (Appendix 3 of the report).

During the discussions in the workshop, it became clear that UK Government and its agencies would not themselves wish to contribute to setting objectives or targets on the ground in the territories. However, they saw the need for territories themselves to have these, and for supporting NGOs to have ones embracing all territories – and they welcomed this initiative.

Participants from governments and NGOs in the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies noted that there is a resource constraint in many UKOTs, so that failure to deliver is likely to be due to lack of capacity, and not necessarily lack of interest. They recorded their appreciation of the efforts of UKOTCF (as well as support from UK Government). In this context, they supported the sending out of the material from the workshop, including the table

(Appendix 1 of the report), especially as a discussion document which people can contribute to. This can help focus minds; it is much more helpful to give Territories something to think about, rather than a clean sheet. They noted that it is important that we all work together (NGOs, governments, etc.) to identify common aims and goals.

The Table at the report's Appendix 1 was revised to incorporate the comments at the workshop and sent in by participants during the following month. UKOTCF had wished to find a structure for discussion which made the most of existing work, and incorporated new ideas, without re-inventing the wheel and duplicating effort. In considering best how to structure the table, UKOTCF noted that recently, at the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity at Nagoya, Japan, in late 2010, the parties – including UK Government – had adopted the Aichi Biodiversity Targets. It seemed appropriate to make use of such a recent and relevant list to which UK Government is committed.

Workers in several UKOTs have repeatedly made clear the importance and value they still attached to the Commitments in the Environment Charters. Much work in progress and many plans are linked to these, and it is essential to keep these active. Accordingly, UKOT Government Commitments are listed in the Table's second column, re-ordered to link as closely as possible to the first column. In some cases, there is not a one-to-one link, so that some cross-references are included, to avoid too much repetition within the column.

The Table's third column links in UK Government's Commitments under the Environment Charters in the same way. The Table's fourth column notes a few of the many points coming out of the periodic reviews of progress in implementing the commitments of the Environment Charters, as well as comments from the UKOTCF-organised conferences and other assessments from the Territories. The Table's fifth column picks up relevant points of the 2009 UK Government inter-departmental agreement published as their "Strategy". The Table's final column tries to draw on the preceding columns to develop first ideas for objectives or targets for UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, at least to help those organisations trying to support the conservation bodies in UKOTs and CDs.

The lower rows of the tabulation relate to those items in other source documents which do not match Aichi Targets. Some of these relate to signing up to conventions and fulfilling their commitments – which is why the Aichi Targets do not address these, as the Targets address elements after sign-up.

There are advantages in partner organisations working on common issues having the same or similar objectives. For example, UKOTCF wishes its strategy to be informed by the needs and priority objectives of the Territories, especially in relation to cross-territory work. It is possible also that individual Territories will find a set of objectives relating to the Territories together a useful source for refreshing their own strategies. The exercise should at least assist the exploration of co-operation in discussions.

UKOTCF undertook to circulate the record of the workshop and the presentations widely after these had been tidied up. The large table remains a work in progress (and, indeed, strategies normally remain so indefinitely). UKOTCF would welcome further comments on this, and hopes also that it will prove helpful to partners in refining their own strategies. UKOTCF intends to use this developing document to help guide its own future work.

Foreign & Commonwealth Office consult on new UKOT White Paper

The consultation, which will run until 31 December 2011, seeks views from communities in the UKOTs and the UK.

The aims of UK Government's strategy, launched on the 27th September 2011, are to: strengthen the engagement and interaction between the UK and the Territories; work with Territories to strengthen good governance arrangements, public financial management and economic planning; and improve the quality and range of support available to the UKOTs.

"Since we came to Office in May 2010, this Government has worked hard to re-invigorate the UK's relationship with the Overseas Territories. This consultation is an important part of that approach as we move toward a new White Paper on the Overseas

Territories next year" announced Minister for the Overseas Territories Henry Bellingham.

"There are many people and groups who have an interest in the future of the Overseas Territories and can provide us with insight into how to develop the UK's relationship with them. I look forward to receiving their ideas."

UKOTCF will prepare a submission, and encourages partners to comment, both directly to the FCO and via comments to UKOTCF.

For more information visit the FCO website at <http://ukoverseasterritories.readandcomment.com>

UK Government's policy paper on nature gives priority to UKOT biodiversity

UK Government's recent consultation paper on nature policy did not mention UK Overseas Territories. UKOTCF commented on this consultation, pointing out that most of the globally important biodiversity for which UK is responsible is in the UKOTs.

UKOTCF is pleased that the Government has taken this into account. The resulting White Paper, *The Natural Choice: securing the value of nature*, published recently says:

"We will also continue to give priority to the UK Overseas Territories (OTs) Biodiversity Strategy, through a co-ordinated approach across government that is led by the National Security Council. The Government will continue its engagement with

the OTs in their efforts to conserve their biodiversity through programmes such as the Flagship Species Fund and one-off initiatives such as the £200,000 contribution towards a project to eradicate rodents on Henderson Island in the Pitcairn Group.

Moreover, the Darwin Initiative is also making a significant difference to wildlife in our OTs. An additional £1.5 million has already been invested in Darwin projects in the three years from 2010, and this sum will increase further as a result of the new Darwin funding referred to above."

The White Paper can be read at <http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm80/8082/8082.pdf>

British Birdfair 2011

UKOTCF once again had a stand at the British Birdwatching Fair. This is held once a year, at Egleton Water, Rutland, this year from Friday 19 August to Sunday 21 August. The stand was manned this year by Catherine Wensink (UKOTCF co-ordinator), MSc student Phil Sanders (a willing volunteer who we hope to welcome back again) and Ann and Mike Pienkowski.

Rutland Water is home to the first ospreys to breed in England for 150 years. This year a sculpture celebrating the osprey, made mostly from paper, was exhibited (pictured). Ospreys are also, of course, one of the magnificent bird species which can be seen in many of our Caribbean UKOTs. Visitors to the UKOTCF stand had the chance to view the UKOTCF DVD made to celebrate the opening of the bird watching trails in TCI (see pp 1-2 of this issue), in which one of the TCI ospreys features.

One of the main reasons for UKOTCF having a stand at the Fair is to highlight the biodiversity of the UKOTs. It was particularly encouraging this year that there was clearly a greater awareness amongst the people visiting the stand of the biodiversity value of the UKOTs, the need for more resources to support the UKOTs in their efforts to conserve this, and the responsibility of UK Government to contribute to this. The sparsity of UK Government contribution to the rat eradication programme on South Georgia was a topic which many people were keen to discuss with us, following on a presentation by Tony Martin, the director of this project, at the Bird Fair.

A large number of people visited us, and expressed interest and support for what UKOTCF is doing. We were particularly pleased to welcome Michael Gore, ex-Governor of the Cayman Islands

and former UKOTCF Council member and Chairman of its Wider Caribbean Working Group, and Andrew Dobson, president of Associate organisation the Bermuda Audubon Society, as well as various colleagues from RSPB working in UKOTs, for whom we were able to provide some advice on matters of common interest. As usual, the UKOTCF stand was close to that of Falklands Conservation, allowing useful chats in moments when the pressure of visitors eased slightly

Many visitors to the stand enquired about how to visit some of the remoter UKOTs, and this is where UKOTCF corporate member Oceanwide Expeditions (whose senior executives also visited the stand) might have a solution (see *Forum News* 37:17).

The quizzes and Caribbean Rum punch "Happy Hour" (both now becoming something of a UKOTCF tradition at the Bird Fair) were very successful. So, look out for us next year at the British Birdwatching Fair (17-19 August 2012).



*The osprey with its 40 ft wingspan was star attraction at the Bird Fair.
Photo: Catherine Wensink*

FCO and DFID break 20 years of funding for environmental conservation in the UKOTs

In an extraordinary announcement in late September (see Box), the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Department of International Development suspended their OTEP small grants programme, despite assurances from both present and previous governments that this would continue. This means that, for the first time for some 20 years, there will be no FCO fund to which those working on environmental conservation in the UKOTs can apply – for even the modest funding previously available. This is a remarkably negative achievement by the UK Government, especially in view of the Foreign Secretary’s underlining earlier this year the Government’s ongoing commitment to “cherish the rich environmental assets” of the UKOTs “for which, together, we are responsible.” It is all the more extraordinary given that the commitment to OTEP funding was one of the very few specific commitments made in the “UKOTs Biodiversity Strategy” produced in 2009 but endorsed by the present government. “The UK Government will:

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

some wider environmental projects) with a budget of at least £1 million pa”

Clearly, words have a different meaning to FCO than to other humans.

Typical of the increasingly secretive way that UK Government and its agencies have adopted over recent years to environmental matters in the UKOTs (and other aspects), the Government did not consult NGOs about possible options – not even those on the OTEP panel. This is in marked contrast with earlier years, when joint Governmental/NGO discussion, planning and collaboration were the norm – with very constructive results, showing great value-for-money by combining volunteer effort and modest Government funding. A senior conservationist with experience of government and NGO working commented: “This sort of secrecy tends to occur when government officials have little experience and few skills in the areas concerned, and consequently have no confidence in their ability to maintain their arguments to wider discussion, not realising that this is usually constructive.”

In this context, it is particularly worrying that FCO & DFID are centralising their decisions as to how money will be spent,

The circular on OTEP of 26 September 2011 from FCO and DFID

Dear OTEP Stakeholders,

The Foreign Secretary announced in Parliament earlier this year that a new White Paper would be developed to bring together all aspects of the Government’s policies on the Overseas Territories. In that same statement, the Foreign Secretary underlined the Government’s ongoing commitment to ‘cherish the rich environmental assets’ of the OTs ‘for which, together, we are responsible’.

Since this announcement, the FCO and DFID have been liaising with DEFRA and other colleagues across Government about how the UK’s support to the ongoing environmental protection and conservation should be best delivered. In addition to making funding available for environmental project work through the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP), the FCO has commissioned the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to undertake two pilot projects, in the Falkland Islands and the British Virgin Islands, to look at how the UK Government might help OT Governments better to integrate – or mainstream – environmental issues.

These projects are designed to be highly participatory. Their aims are to understand the state of knowledge, legislation and capacity within each Territory to deal with environmental issues, and to assess the value of the natural environment to the economy. They will bring together the full range of stakeholders in a workshop to discuss findings and highlight areas where action could be taken to improve current processes on which future environmental engagement can then build. The intention is to use the results of these projects to identify how the UK can utilise its environmental funding and expertise to deliver more strategic, long-term outcomes within the OTs.

Whilst this work continues, FCO and DFID have agreed not to proceed with the usual OTEP bidding process for projects starting in 2012. The Government fully recognises that projects funded under OTEP have delivered considerable benefits across the UK’s Overseas Territories, and have collectively raised awareness of the environmental importance of the OTs within the Territories, across the UK and globally. Both FCO and DFID remain committed to continued environmental funding in line with the levels available this year, for at least the next two years. However, in light of the developments set out above, and as a significant proportion of the funding available next year has already been committed to ongoing, multi-year projects, we did not consider that the considerable efforts of all those involved in proceeding with a full bidding round would be justifiable.

The next few years are likely to be something of a hybrid. Further work will be undertaken to support greater integration of environmental issues within those OTs which are in a position to make such progress. Specific project work will likely continue in other OTs, particularly through DFID, in the ODA-eligible Territories, i.e. those which qualify for development funding (ODA stands for Official Development Assistance with the list of ODA eligible countries and territories being published annually by the OECD Development Assistance Committee DAC http://www.oecd.org/document/45/0,3746,en_2649_34447_2093101_1_1_1_1,00.html). In fact, as DFID has funding mechanisms in place that allows a carry-over to next year of the funding that would have been available to an OTEP bidding process from this year, they will be able to make available more resource for such specific projects in 2013-14.

Biodiversity funding through Defra’s Darwin Initiative (which covers developing countries and the UK’s Overseas Territories and is now co-funded by DFID) will remain unaffected. The Challenge Fund component of the Darwin Initiative which funds scoping projects in OTs to assess the feasibility of proposed projects will also remain in place and funding of main projects in the OTs will continue. Despite funding cuts across Government the Darwin Initiative has been protected and even increased with the guarantee of DFID funding for the next 4 years.

FCO, DFID and DEFRA will continue to work together on OT environmental issues. We look forward to continuing to engage actively with you all to ensure that the collective outcomes we have achieved to date through OTEP, in terms of direct environmental benefits to the OTs, as well as raising awareness of their unique and valuable environments, is further developed and enhanced.

With best wishes,
OTEP Secretariat
Heather Christie, FCO
Christine Roehrer, DFID
OTEP@fco.gov.uk

further cutting out the input of ideas from bodies which work in UKOTs, and which have a more direct understanding of the conservation issues and needs. This is exacerbated by late notice. UKOTCF's Chairman commented: "It is typical of the irresponsible way in which UK Government addresses such matters that the announcement of a cancellation of the call was not made until about the time that the call is normally made. Because of the requirements of the call, preparatory work needs normally to be done in advance. Therefore, UKG will have, again, needlessly distracted work from conservation by causing wasted effort. It had been reasonable for UKOT conservation bodies to expect continuance of the programme, as this will be the first year for some 20 years that FCO has not had even a modest grant programme for conservation work available for UKOTs."

One of the most bizarre aspects of the FCO/DFID statement is that it indicated that one reason that OTEP is being suspended is so that it can review strategic outcomes within the UKOTs. This seems somewhat at variance with UKG's statements at UKOTCF's workshop in June 2011 on developing strategic objectives for conservation in the UKOTs; there, UK Government and its agencies indicated that they would not themselves wish to contribute to setting objectives or targets on the ground in the territories. It is all the more extraordinary given that the review of strategic outcomes – the proposed White Paper – was announced in March, so why the need to wait six months to announce OTEP's suspension? It looks all the stranger when reference is made once more to the "UKOTs Biodiversity Strategy" where a review of OTEP is flagged up - "in the longer term, consider establishing a new UK Government funding stream that would support a wide range of environmental activities (including biodiversity projects) within the Overseas Territories, and would subsume OTEP and the Overseas Territory elements of the Darwin Initiative". This does not seem to suggest shutting down OTEP prior to any review and such does not make any sense. It would appear that joined-up Government is still some way away.

In 2001, UKG drafted the Environment Charters which were signed between UKG and the governments of UKOTs. UKG committed itself (amongst other things) to: "Use the existing Environment Fund for the Overseas Territories, and promote access to other sources of public funding, for projects of lasting benefit to the Territory's environment." Barely a year later, FCO absent-mindedly cancelled EFOT. The combined protests of the NGOs and the UKOTs, focussed at the UKOTCF-organised Bermuda conference in early 2003, caused FCO managers (who were at that time responsive to reasoned arguments) to re-instate a fund within a few weeks. In the following year, FCO and DFID, in consultation with UKOTCF, jointly funded OTEP, to replace and extend EFOT. Will current FCO and DFID managers be as sensible?

The FCO/DFID circular speaks of engaging with stakeholders, but their recent record here is not good, engagement having declined markedly in recent years. About 6 years ago, FCO closed down its environmental department (which had engaged well) and dropped almost all its environmental posts. Soon after, unilaterally and without discussion, it ended the very useful joint Government/NGO joint meetings which had been jointly chaired for many years by UKOTCF and FCO. Other contacts were also reduced. FCO & DFID have ended the small grant which helped UKOTCF fulfil UKG's request (which is still current, without funding – see elsewhere in this issue of *Forum News*) to publicise and disseminate information on OTEP. After two years of prevarication, UKG indicated earlier this year that it would no longer contribute to the UKOTCF-organised 3-yearly conferences, highly valued by conservation practitioners in the UKOTs (see below in this *Forum News*). Now, OTEP has been suspended. All this has taken place without consultation with NGOs or others – a markedly retrograde step since the situation up to 2005.

Fine words emerge from UK Government on conservation in the UKOTs; actions are somewhat different.

UKOT/CD conference in 2012 cancelled because of discontinued support from UK Government

The 3-yearly conferences for conservation practitioners in the UKOTs are highly appreciated by these persons, who report that they find them invaluable aids to achieving conservation in effective and cost-effective ways.

An initial approach was made in 2009 to FCO/DFID/DEFRA to contribute to the funding of a 2012 conference. This had been dealt with by the inter-departmental officials group, but then delegated to DFID to lead on the group's behalf. In correspondence in late 2009/ early 2010, DFID requested further information from UKOTCF (most of which had already been provided). UKOTCF's response to this request had then remained unanswered, despite several reminders. UKOTCF officers enquired in early 2011 of the DEFRA official, who convenes the inter-departmental officials group, whether the inter-departmental officials group had considered the matter further.

However, he referred the matter back to DFID on the grounds that this was a matter just for that Department (despite previous communications to the contrary). UKOTCF therefore approached the DFID officer who had replaced the one who had been dealing with the matter originally. She agreed to look into the issue (not having been involved in the earlier exchanges). Bizarrely, a

response was subsequently received from FCO, stating that no funding was likely to be available – so perhaps it was still an inter-departmental matter, after all! Meanwhile, it had been noted that a UKOT conference (although not necessarily described in those terms) had appeared in JNCC's work programme for 2012. NGOs are somewhat unhappy that the government appears to have switched funding, from an NGO which had developed an effective approach, to another process within Government – not quite what the new Government's Big Society was supposed to be about.

All this has put UKOTCF in a difficult position. The unnecessarily long delays in responses from UK Government meant that UKOTCF has been unable to provide a definitive response either to partners from across the UKOTs who were enquiring when the next conference would be held, or to other partners who had kindly offered to host the event.

The timescales involved in preparatory work mean that an event in 2012 is now impractical (irrespective of funding availability), and that even a 2013 conference would be challenging. Nevertheless, UKOTCF continues to look for ways in which this valuable and appreciated activity will be reinstated in some form in a future year.

EU announces €2 million pilot scheme for biodiversity projects in Overseas Territories

Several years ago, UKOTCF and its French and Netherlands partners in Bioverseas indicated to the European Commission the need for a scheme to make support available for conservation in the Overseas Countries & Territories (OCTs) of European Union (EU) Member States and also those Outermost Regions (ORs) not covered by the EU's conservation directives. This would be a voluntary scheme inspired by the statutory *Natura 2000* sites within the EU itself.

At the meeting was Mr Ladislav Miko (now Deputy Director General of the European Commission's DG SANCO, previously acting as Director for Nature of the European Commission's DG Environment). He extended the idea at the July 2008 conference on *The European Union and its Overseas Entities: Strategies to counter Climate Change and Biodiversity Loss*, held in La Réunion under the French Presidency of the European Union and attended by UKOTCF.

Paragraph 13 of the Message from Réunion Island said:

“There is an urgent need for EU Member States and the European Commission, together with the ORs and OCTs, to establish a voluntary scheme for the protection of species and habitats, inspired by the *Natura 2000* approach. This scheme should be easily accessible, flexible, adapted to the local situation, balance conservation and development needs, as well as take into account existing mechanisms and tools. The implementation of the scheme should be based on local commitment and shared financing.”

Mr Miko then led the development of this concept as BEST, the voluntary scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in the

Territories of Europe Overseas. Mr Maurice Ponga, and Mr Elie Hoarau, both Members of the European Parliament elected for the overseas constituency, were instrumental in securing funding for ‘preparatory action’.

In October 2010, at the tenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Nagoya, Japan, representatives of the European Commission, the European Parliament, France and the United Kingdom jointly announced this voluntary scheme. The funding was approved in December 2010 and on 1 March the Commission announced the pilot scheme with €2 million for the implementation of BEST pilot projects in 2011 and a call for proposal was made in May,

Bioverseas is the joint initiative of the umbrella conservation bodies for the overseas territories of the Netherlands, France and UK (UKOTCF). DCNA (Dutch Caribbean Nature Association) addresses conservation in the Netherlands territories in the Caribbean. The French National Committee of IUCN (UICN-F) has a committee which acts as an umbrella body for nature conservation in the French overseas regions and territories.

The project submitted by Bioverseas will, if successful, strengthen links between organisation in the EUOTs with EU, bring them together at a meeting and look at building initiatives for future rounds of BEST with some small development projects. UKOTCF is also a partner together with DCNA in a proposal by UICN-FR looking at judicial tools for declaring protected areas and testing methodologies to do so. Successful projects will be notified in November 2011 if the European Commission stays on schedule.

New UK Tentative List of World Heritage Sites

UKOTCF has long been concerned at the under-representation of the outstanding heritage of UK Overseas Territories amongst UK's actual and proposed World Heritage Sites; a concern shared by a wide consultation commissioned by UK's Department of Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) in 2009. Countries can propose sites for World Heritage status only after they are included in the national Tentative List. In 2010, DCMS invited bids for sites for a new UK Tentative List, to replace the List issued in 1999. 38 sites were put forward, including 4 from the UKOTs and 2 from a Crown Dependency. DCMS appointed an expert panel to assess these.

On 22 March 2011, DCMS Minister for Tourism and Heritage, John Penrose MP, announced that UK Government is following the recommendations of this panel that the new UK Tentative List includes three UKOT sites. These are:

- Gorham's Cave Complex, Gibraltar: a site important for remains of Neanderthal man and other features of human archaeology;
- The Island of St Helena: a site of quite staggering world importance for many endemic species, genera and ecosystems, as well as of great historical importance;
- The Turks & Caicos Islands: a site of great importance to endemic species, migratory birds, coral reefs and the location of an internationally important salt industry for centuries.



Aspects of the tremendous biodiversity of St Helena. Foreground: the cloud forest of the Peaks; the background, only 5 km away, the desert of Prosperous Bay Plain with many endemic invertebrates.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

UKOTCF remains ready to assist, where possible, in the further work necessary to take forward these cases for designation.

UKOTCF is disappointed that Fountains Cavern, Anguilla, which was on the 1999 List, has been dropped from the new List. This is despite progress towards designation of this site, which would have been the first World Heritage Site of ceremony and rock-art of the native Caribbean people.

The UKOT sites already on the World Heritage List are:

- Henderson Island, Pitcairn: for its remarkably intact natural ecosystems and endemic species;
- Gough and Inaccessible Islands, Tristan da Cunha: for their natural systems, endemic species and hugely important seabird populations;
- Historic Town of St George and Related Fortifications, Bermuda: for historic buildings.

Bermuda concern about Special Development Order for Tucker's Point

Elsewhere in this issue of *Forum News*, the great lead being taken by the Bermuda Government to protect the Sargasso Sea is reported. Unfortunately, there is currently a major threat to Bermuda's terrestrial and marine environment via built development.

In early 2011, a proposed development at Tucker's Point caused a great deal of concern amongst environmentalists, including UKOTCF member organisations, the Bermuda National Trust and the Bermuda Audubon Society. News items

about this were posted on the UKOTCF website. The developers wanted to build private homes and hotel accommodation over critical habitat. The land earmarked for the development includes pristine hills and endangered woodland on top of a network of ancient underground caves. Only very small areas of natural habitat survive in Bermuda, and the hills of Castle Harbour are one of the few places left where multiple habitats of major and critical significance are sustained. The geology of the area has meant that it has remained relatively undeveloped while the rest of Bermuda was being built upon. Indirectly, this has resulted in this section of the island serving as a safe haven for numerous unique life forms, many critically endangered, in the most extensive remaining tracts of forest left that pre-date settlement. These areas consist of some of the last natural refuges of critically endangered flora such as the yellow-wood tree or the endemic wild Bermuda pepper, to name a few. The caves include many endemic species in their waters and are the prime reason why this area is part of a proposed Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention – so that UK and Bermuda Governments have an international responsibility to safeguard their natural state. Allowing large swathes of green



Dr David Wingate explains to protestors the potential impact a development, as seen in the background, would have on Tuckers Point.

Photo: Mark Tatem

space to be used for property development is against the sustainability principles enshrined in Bermuda's planning law. The Planning Development Applications Board (DAB) does not have the authority to allow such a large development on open space. However a Special Development Order (SDO) can be used to circumvent those statutes if Government deems it a 'national priority'.

Of particular concern were the financial considerations which seemed to be driving the granting of a SDO. The operators of

Tucker's Point, Rosewood Hotels and Resorts, claimed that expansion was needed to secure the five star resort's financial viability. The Bermuda Government position was that the SDO was in the national interest as the resort is important to Bermuda's tourism product.

The conservation NGOs grouped together to protest about this. They held a huge protest walk, involving 2000 people, where they demonstrated what would be lost if the development went ahead. Despite this, an amended SDO was passed on 25 March 2011, which did scale back the original proposal (although undermining the arguments originally made in favour of it). However, conservationists in Bermuda are concerned that the concessions made in the amended SDO did not address the fundamental problem of allowing further development in this area.

As with any development on the Island, Tucker's Point must now submit a plan to the DAB, which will then decide whether to approve it. The Bermuda Environmental Sustainability Taskforce (BEST) is preparing to lobby the DAB, and possibly Environment Minister Walter Roban, when the developers lodge their proposal.

Sargasso Sea Alliance

The Sargasso Sea is a unique pelagic ecosystem based on species of Sargassum that are able to develop without contact with land. The Sargasso Sea is bounded by ocean currents circulating in the North Atlantic. It includes the Bermudan Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ), but the vast majority occurs outside national jurisdiction. The Sargasso Sea supports a range of endemic species and plays a critical role in supporting the life-cycle of a number of threatened and endangered species such as the Porbeagle shark, the American and the European eel, as well as billfish, tuna and several species of turtle. There is emerging recognition of the crucial role it plays in the wider ecosystem ranging from the Atlantic to the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico.

There is, as yet, no general international mechanism for the establishment of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) on the high seas, or Pelagic Protected Areas (PPAs). The Sargasso Sea Alliance (www.sargassoalliance.org) has been formed to promote international recognition of the importance of the Sargasso Sea ecosystem and widespread understanding of its value within the greater temperate/sub-tropical North Atlantic ecosystem.

The Sargasso Sea Alliance is a partnership led by the Bermuda Government, in collaboration with scientists, international marine conservation groups and private donors, who all share a vision of

protecting the unique and vulnerable ocean ecosystem that is the Sargasso Sea.

As a first step towards protection of the wider Sargasso Sea, the Bermuda Government are working with the Pew Environment Trust amongst others to establish a large marine reserve somewhere within Bermuda's 200 mile exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Progress towards Dog Island rat eradication

Funding has now been secured for a rat eradication programme on Dog Island, which is a low lying, uninhabited rocky island, 13 km northwest of the main island of Anguilla. A rat eradication feasibility study was conducted in 2007, with funding from OTEP (*Forum News* 31: 7) but significant funds were needed to carry out rat eradication of the entire island.

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation has now committed US\$205,000 from its Seabirds Keystone Initiative to this project. Matching funding and in-kind support, worth at least US\$238,000, will be provided by the project partners: Fauna and Flora International, Anguilla National Trust, Anguilla Department of Environment and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Dog Island is one of the Caribbean's most important seabird islands, with nine breeding species of seabirds, as well as being

significant for hawksbill, leatherback and green turtles, and endemic terrestrial reptiles. Introduced black rats and feral goats have had an enormous impact on the native flora and fauna.

The implementation of the eradication programme is planned for January to April 2012. Dog Island is the largest island in the eastern Caribbean on which a rat eradication programme is being undertaken, and has the potential to serve as a model for other UKOTs and Caribbean Islands.

SCSCB

The Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB) meeting in the Bahamas in July was a great opportunity to catch up with news, old friends, and make new ones. An informal meeting of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group enabled valuable face-to-face discussions with colleagues who would normally only be able to participate in such meetings by Skype.

A host of interesting presentations and workshops made this a very valuable event. With reference to the UKOTs, Mike Pienkowski (UKOTCF) gave a well-received presentation about the development and official opening of the TCI Grand Turk Bird Trails, a few days earlier. Farah Mukhida (Anguilla National Trust) talked about the rat eradication programme for Dog Island, explaining the challenges and potential for this project (see pp

9-10 in this issue of *Forum News*). Ted Eubanks explained the concept of the Caribbean Birding Trail, which has great potential for the Caribbean UKOTs as well as the region as a whole. The Seabird Conservation Workshop highlighted the urgent need for information about seabird populations in the Caribbean, especially in the context of the Deep Horizon Oil Spill. The presentations and discussions highlighted the challenges and cost of acquiring monitoring information for seabirds. For example, the TCI seabird counts made by UKOTCF in 2002 and repeated in 2009 (see p. 3 in this issue) provided the only information from TCI in the database.

Throughout the meeting, presentations of studies which were funded by international funding mechanisms highlighted the challenges facing the UKOTs, in that many of the funding sources cited were unavailable to UK Overseas Territories. This remains a great source of frustration for UKOTs, in that equivalent funding from UK is not available.

Big Lottery consultation

The UK Government is consulting on new policy directions of the Big Lottery Fund. In common with other funds of the National Lottery, this does not currently give grants to UK Overseas Territories. UKOTCF will comment, and encourages others to do so – see www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/big-lottery-fund-consultation-proposed-policy-directions

Tristan Oil Spill Recovery Efforts

The *MS Oliva*, a 75,300 tonne bulk carrier en route from Santos in Brazil to Singapore carrying 65,000 tonnes of soya beans, ran aground on Nightingale Island, Tristan da Cunha on 16 March 2011. Fortunately, all 22 crew were rescued. Fifteen crew members were taken to Tristan aboard the *MV Edinburgh* and were looked after by Islanders. The remaining crew returned to Nightingale Island aboard the *MV Edinburgh* to monitor the vessel and await the arrival of the salvage team which arrived from Cape Town.

Bad weather caused the *MS Oliva* to begin to break up and heavy oil leaked from the ship and surrounded Nightingale's coast. A team from Tristan Conservation Department were already on Nightingale for other work, and made an initial assessment of the damage to Nightingale's seabirds. Unfortunately the oil spread to Inaccessible Island, a World Heritage Site, home to the flightless rail. Although a few birds were found dead, no significant impact on the population of rails is expected.

Around 3,700 Northern rockhopper penguins were brought to



MS Oliva shortly after running aground on Nightingale Island
Photo: Sean Burns

Tristan da Cunha and were rehabilitated by the local community. In June, three months after the first oiled were brought ashore, the final batch of birds were successfully released to the sea. A survival rate of approximately 10% was achieved through the dedication of the team.

Trevor Glass, Tristan da Cunha Conservation Officer, recently reported that the Tristan Conservation Department had measured the density of rockhopper penguins on Nightingale Island and found it to be higher than in 2009, which was excellent news.

In September, a dive team had been surveying the waters around Tristan. While diving the wreck, they had found that it had broken up dramatically. Kelp was already growing on the twisted metal. The administration had been advised previously that the weather was likely to break it up quickly. Subsequently, in shallow water, there was no sign of oil and limited evidence of soya beans. There are still some concerns for the fishery, the main livelihood for the islanders, as dredging in deeper water has collected rotting soya from the sea bed. The insurers have committed to providing more equipment for a detailed survey and expert advice is being provided. Subject to the above, the marine environment around the island seems in a good condition but the sustainability of Tristan's economy is of great concern. Fisheries quotas have been re-modeled and have been sent to interested parties. Understanding the impact on juvenile lobster and recruitment may not be apparent for many years.

We are grateful to the Tristan da Cunha Association (www.tristandc.com) for posting updates, news and photographs. The local community on Tristan are to be congratulated on their efforts in dealing with this disaster. UKOTCF expects to be discussing with UK Government the lessons it has learnt during the handling of this matter and its revision of its future procedures for supporting UKOTs in such circumstances.

New Associate Organisation: Turks and Caicos Reef Fund

The Turks and Caicos Reef Fund (TCRF, www.tcreef.org) was established in 2010 to help preserve and protect the marine environment of the “Beautiful by Nature” Turks and Caicos Islands - an environment that draws so many visitors to the islands and is critical to the survival of the islands themselves. TCRF is raising money, primarily through voluntary donations from island visitors, for marine environment-focused research, education and preservation projects.



Tube worms are filter-feeders living in colonies of up to twelve – pictured at Boat Cove. Photo: Turks and Caicos Reef Fund

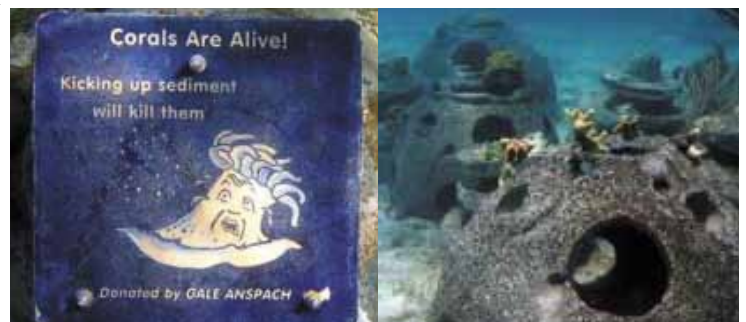
Modelled after successful programmes on other islands, such as Bonaire in the Dutch Caribbean, TCRF is working with water-sport operators and other retail establishments throughout the TCI to sell tags to scuba divers, which they can attach to their dive gear to show their support for TCRF. Snorkelers and other visitors can show their support by purchasing silicone wristbands from dozens of locations across the Turks & Caicos Islands. As TCI is rated highly and consistently as a dive destination and boasts some of the best beaches in the tropical Atlantic and Caribbean area, visitors and residents have a vested interest in preserving the health of the reefs and related marine environment.

*Right: Reef Balls and tiles on the TCI Snorkel trail
Photos: Richard Green Junior*

The first project that TCRF is undertaking is the restoration of the snorkel trail markers that were placed around the shallow inshore reef in front of the Coral Gardens resort on Providenciales. TCRF is working closely with the TCI Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR). The snorkel trail is an attraction that is well known and heavily utilized by visitors to the islands, but hurricanes, storms and algae growth have taken their toll on the trail markers. These markers consist of tiles mounted on reef balls and are intended to provide snorkelers with valuable information about the reef and its inhabitants.

Unfortunately, in the decade since their installation with assistance from a UK grant, several of the trail markers have been broken or have disappeared. Even the ones that remain intact are in dire need of a thorough cleaning, as they are virtually unreadable due to algae and calcium build-up. The restoration effort will involve removing the trail marker tiles that remain, to give them a thorough cleaning and repairing their reef ball mounts. The missing and broken markers will be replaced with new markers that will be produced by the original local artists on Providenciales.

Founded by two long-time visitors and now part-time residents on Providenciales, TCRF is a completely voluntary organization with the founders donating their time to run the organization. Don Stark and David Stone are both avid divers and active in many environmental projects within TCI and elsewhere. Their goal for TCRF fundraising efforts are to return at least 85% of all the money raised to marine conservation programmes and projects across TCI.



Changes in UKOTCF officers

Several changes in UKOTCF officers were detailed on pages 5-6 of the Annual Report April 2010 – March 2011. These are summarised here.

During the year, funding available to UKOTCF for the Development Officer role came to an end. Although Council kept this role going for much of the year on other funding, it reluctantly recognised that it was no longer able to continue the role after the end of the reported year. Council recorded its thanks to Dr Oliver Cheesman for his work in this role, together with earlier roles, including as representative of a Member organisation, as a Council member, and as WCWG Secretary. Council expressed its hope that there will be other roles for Oliver in UKOTCF in the future.

Other changes included Ann Pienkowski taking over as Wider Caribbean Working Group Secretary, while retaining her role as the Forum's Honorary Environmental Education Co-ordinator. Dr Keith Bensusan (of Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society) was welcomed as Secretary of the Europe Territories

Working Group. Rob Thomas (of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland) joined Karen Varnham as joint Chairpersons of the Southern Oceans Working Group, allowing Iain Orr to further develop the role of Parliamentary liaison officer.

Further changes took place at the AGM in September 2011. Mike Freeman stood down from Council. UKOTCF is very grateful to Mike for his support and contributions over the years, undoubtedly reaching a magnificent peak in organising the Jersey conference in 2006, but continuing in other contributions, notably on Council. We look forward to Mike's continued involvement via the Europe Territories Working Group. Colin Hindmarch's term on Council also ended at the AGM. His attention had become increasingly focused in recent years on the Net-BIOME project, to which he made a contribution which can genuinely be described as unique. Council welcomes its newly elected members, Rob Thomas, of the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, and Alison Debney, of the Zoological Society of London. Profiles will appear in a future issue.

Developing a community-led marine management action plan for the Pitcairn Islands

In December 2010, Professor Terry Dawson from the University of Dundee made a preliminary visit to Pitcairn, conducted under the Darwin Initiative for the Overseas Territories Challenge Fund project. This project was a one-year pilot study of the marine ecosystems of the Pitcairn Island, comprising both desk-based research and a fieldwork (diving surveys) component, together with a series of stakeholder collaborations on Pitcairn to establish a community-led marine management action plan.

The principle aims of this project are to: engage and collaborate with local and international stakeholders to consolidate earlier marine survey data, fisheries and environmental reports and local community knowledge to produce a baseline report publication; establish an equipment pool on Pitcairn Island for diving and fishing monitoring and other activities; undertake preliminary marine surveys at selected sites to evaluate basic ecological status of the corals, fish and invertebrates; and, in collaboration with the Pitcairn Island Council, develop a Darwin Initiative main project application to establish a future conservation and management plan for the fisheries and marine and coastal biodiversity of the Pitcairn Islands for submission in 2011.



St Paul's Pool is a popular location for swimming and snorkelling by the local community and could be utilised as a SCUBA training pool. Inset: drummer fish with yellow variation. Photos: Terry Dawson

During the stay, the visit of the cruise ship *Hanseatic* provided an opportunity for the Pitcairners to sell or trade their marine resources, mainly in the form of fresh fish, or live lobsters. This was an opportunity to evaluate the lobster fishing activity, which



Lobster fishermen on Pitcairn. Photo: Terry Dawson

could form the basis of a sustainable fisheries management plan.

The lobsters are kept in large wire cages at the Bounty Bay landing site; these were lifted by the quayside crane (pictured). Approximately 200 lobsters were caught over a one-month period prior to the cruise ship arrival. All lobsters were retained, including berried females and undersized specimens. It was noted that only full adult-sized and non-berried were removed from the cage and sold to the cruise ship. Christian's Cafe at Big Fence, normally sells any remaining lobsters during their Friday-night-only openings.

St Paul's Pool (pictured) is a natural rock pool located in the south-east of Pitcairn Island, and is regularly flushed by wave action, although it is a calm and safe place in normal sea conditions. The depth is up to 4 metres in places. Ecologically of note, there were some small coral formations (mainly *Acropora* and *Porites sp.*), diadema, holothuria and small reef fish (wrasse, moorish idols, including a small flounder *Bothus mancus*).

A Yamaha 30 HP outboard engine was purchased in New Zealand as part of the project. The outboard was prepared and installed on the Government of Pitcairn-owned Stabi-craft. This craft is available for hire by the local community at NZ\$25 per day, and provides safety cover if the lifeboats are deployed for community activities, such as fishing. A full circumnavigation was undertaken including to the site of the *SS Cornwallis*, an English merchant-vessel which was wrecked on 23 January 1875.

South of the island, 200m from Hand Rock, the underwater landscape is a variation of rocks and boulders with many coral formations up to two metres in diameter. Alongside the species listed above, large shoals of drummer, unicorn fish and a white-tipped shark approximately five feet in length were observed. Significant fish species caught by spear-fishing included the coral trout *Variola louti* and greasy grouper *Epinephelus tauvina*.

From individual household surveys and discussion with the community, it was noted that virtually all households eat locally-caught fish, and many also eat lobster.

For more information contact Professor Terry Dawson t.p.dawson@dundee.ac.uk

Correction

In the article *Remembrance wreath* by Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew that appeared in Forum News 37 (p.26), it was reported that '*Deschampsia flexuosa* tussock grass' from the Falkland Islands was included in the wreath. Unfortunately, neither name is correct for the giant native grass that has been very badly affected by over-grazing and burning. This plant is usually described as tussac grass, the older form of this species' name, which also serves to separate it from other tussock-forming grasses occurring on Southern Ocean islands. Furthermore, the scientific name for tussac grass is *Poa flabellata*. *Deschampsia flexuosa* is the scientific name for wavy hair-grass, a widespread small decorative grass with several cultivars that occurs in Europe and the Americas. UKOTCF thanks its friends at Falklands Conservation for correcting the information originally provided to UKOTCF.

Summaries of OTEP projects

The Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) was a joint programme of the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to support implementation of the Environment Charters and environmental management more generally in all the UK's Overseas Territories (but see pp 6-7 in this issue for news of FCO & DFID suspending this programme).

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum has been providing aspects of communication management for OTEP since the programme started, including material in Forum News and on its web-site, amongst other measures. Some of this work by UKOTCF was originally part-funded by DFID/FCO as well as by UKOTCF itself. This arrangement ended in early 2011 when the UK Government discontinued funding of external dissemination work - even when, as with UKOTCF,

this was very cost-effective because of the non-governmental contribution. This policy seems in complete conflict with the Government's declared wish for increased work in partnership with civil society. Despite this misguided and wasteful approach by UK Government, UKOTCF continues to try to find resources to maintain this service, but inevitably this will involve delays.

Below, we publish abstracts of projects supported in the 2011 OTEP round. With the declining interest by FCO and DFID, UKOTCF envisages further problems in securing reports on projects, so that these can be disseminated, as FCO and DFID previously showed little interest in this important function. However, UKOTCF will continue to welcome these from project managers. Further information on some projects (including outputs in cases where these have been supplied by project managers) can be found in the OTEP section of www.ukotcf.org.

Building a Foundation for Anguilla's Wetland Future (ANG801)

The purpose of the project is to build an information and capacity base for Anguilla's globally important wetlands by: the publication of a wetland inventory; development of a National Wetland Conservation Plan; revision of Important Bird Area (IBA) designations and submission of sites for Ramsar designation; and the enhancement of local capacity (knowledge resources, skill development and institutional strengthening).

Farah Mukhida, Anguilla National Trust antpam@anguillanet.com



Mangroves are important as nurseries for fish and other creatures, as they can prevent flooding and can lessening impacts of hurricanes.

Photo: Anguilla National Trust

Enhancing capacity for fisheries enforcement and management in Anguilla (ANG803)

The purpose of this project is to improve fisheries enforcement and management capabilities. This will be achieved through: the enhancement of local capacity (knowledge resources, skill development, and institutional strengthening); the strengthening of the long-term fisheries monitoring system in Anguilla; and the creation of an on-going fisheries enforcement programme.

James C. Gumbs, Government of Anguilla james.gumbs@gov.ai

Implementation of the Anguilla Energy Policy 2008-2020: Phase Two – Building The Anguilla Model (ANG807)

The project is a 10-year plan for achieving carbon neutrality as a replicable model for small island nations worldwide as described

in *The Anguilla Model*. Successful implementation of Anguilla's climate change mitigation strategy will impact livelihoods and employment, economic development, environmental management - including waste stream management and local food production, human resource development and education.

Beth Barry, The Anguilla Renewable Energy Office beth@anguillareo.org

An Ecosystem Approach to Plant Conservation on Ascension Island (ASC801)

This project will be a significant advance towards an ecosystem approach to the conservation of the endemic and native plants of Ascension Island. This will be achieved by: filling the knowledge gap on important keystone species, i.e. bryophytes; delivering staff training in all relevant departments so that they are better able to develop and implement sustainable conservation measures that incorporate climate change and employ the ecosystem approach; restoring plant communities on Ascension; and delivering commitments in the Ascension Biodiversity Action Plan.

Stedson Stroud, Ascension Island Government Conservation Department stedson.stroud@ascension.gov.ac

Status of marine turtles of Ascension Island (ASC803)

Previous work by the University of Exeter has shown that Ascension Island is of global importance for marine turtles, and that these species are vulnerable to global climate change. This project will produce an updated status and management plan for



Turtle tracks found on Ascension. Photo: David M. Laurence

these threatened species on Ascension Island. This work will determine whether systems for monitoring and management put in place following the management plan developed a decade ago are still valid, and will enable development of expertise in monitoring and conservation in the Ascension Island conservation community. The outputs are important for management of this species at Ascension Island, regional management plans and global (IUCN) species assessments.

Dr Annette Broderick, University of Exeter, UK, a.c.broderick@exeter.ac.uk

British Virgin Islands Environmental Profile Programme: Phase 2, Anegada and Virgin Gorda (BVI801)

Environmental Profiles are recognised as an effective means to ensure that environmental issues are included in development planning and public policy decision-making. The British Virgin Islands Environmental Profile Programme will provide an expanded information base — informed by the application of sound science — to guide the choices of public and private sector stakeholders and decision-makers. The Programme will take a retrospective look at environmental change, assess priority environmental issues, and place these within a forward-looking context that supports sustainable growth. As a result, BVI Islanders and their Government will better understand the need to balance how they want to grow with what they want to protect.

Judith A. Towle, Island Resources Foundation jtowle@irf.org

First Passage Island Rat Eradication (FAL802)

The project will:

1. Create a rat-free environment on First Passage Island, thereby improving habitats and wildlife biodiversity for a key island group in the Falkland Islands.
2. Develop skills and economic opportunities for Falkland Islands residents.
3. Develop and enhance local capacity for eradication of invasive species on larger islands in the Falklands, e.g. Bleaker Island (2070 ha).
4. Strengthen local capacity to manage wildlife habitats and implement good biosecurity practice.

Nick Rendell, Falkland Islands Government Tel: +50028480

Conserving the Centre Hills in Montserrat through effective control of feral livestock populations (MNT802)

The project will deliver enhanced biodiversity conservation and natural resource management in and around Montserrat's proposed Centre Hills National Park through the implementation of a feral animal control programme and the identification of a number of indicators that can be measured, monitored and quantified to show the effectiveness of this programme. It will result in the reduction of feral animal populations; underpin the Species Action Plans for Montserrat oriole, Montserrat galliwasp and mountain chicken, and support the implementation of the Centre Hills management plan. In addition, it will benefit both the people of Montserrat and the wider Caribbean UKOT region.

Gerard Gray, Department of Environment grayg@gov.ms

Raising Montserrat's Marine Ecosystem from the Ashes: The Montserrat Reef Project - Stage 2 (MNT803)

The Montserrat Reef Project is designed to replace lost and damaged marine habitat resulting from the Soufriere Hills Volcano eruptions. The new reefs created will be ideal fish nursery habitat, capable of strengthening the fisheries population. Additionally, the

reefs will provide a growth base for propagating imperilled corals. The new marine habitat(s) will be configured as an interactive educational snorkelling trail to facilitate programs on the importance of marine habitats.

Andrew Myers, Montserrat Reef Society montserrat.reef.project@gmail.com



Pillar coral is listed on the IUCN, Red List of Threatened Species as Vulnerable. This species is native to Montserrat and is found in several locations around the island. A large colony and several smaller colonies are found in Little Bay where the new jetty/break wall will be built. The project has successfully transferred a fragmented piece of pillar coral, but this is only a first step. Photos: Montserrat Reef Project



Rodent Eradication – Preparation and Evaluation (SGS802)

Invasive rodents have a major negative impact on rare and endemic bird species on South Georgia. This project will monitor the outcome of the trial phase of a rodent eradication project and provide key data to underpin a subsequent island-wide eradication. It will assess the effects on target, non-target and putative beneficiary species following the trial phase, establish base-line data on key beneficiary species around the island and, using aerial photos and genetics, investigate the efficacy of (rapidly retreating) glaciers as barriers to rodent movements, which is fundamental to the success of an island-wide eradication. This work will demonstrate the UK commitment to the long-term stewardship of the island.

Darren Christie, Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands env@gov.gs

Creating a mechanised recycling facility at SHAPE, St Helena's Active Participation in Enterprise (STH801)

The aim of this project is to establish the first paper and card recycling and, later, composting facilities on St Helena. SHAPE is a social enterprise providing training and employment for disabled people. Among its various activities, it currently recycles paper and card to produce fuel bricks, packaging and paper, but capacity is seriously constrained by lack of machinery. Mechanisation will increase capacity from the current manually produced 20 fuel bricks to 1000 per week. Benefits will include establishment of weekly recyclable collection from organisations; the availability to households of environmentally friendly fuel and compost; increased employment opportunities for disabled people.

Martin Joshua, SHAPE, shape@cwimail.sh

Restoration of a functioning Bastard Gumwood population on St Helena (STH803)

The project will enable the restoration of a self sustaining bastard gumwood population on St Helena. The intensity of care required to ensure survival of some species reduced to otherwise unsustainable levels will be provided. Benefits will accrue to St Helena from restoring one of her unique endemic species: a principal tourism asset. It will directly contribute towards preventing loss of biodiversity in the UK and her Overseas Territories. Conservation on St Helena will also benefit from the addition of a dry land specialist tree species as a component for habitat restoration and dry land re-vegetation work.

Darren Duncan, Agriculture & Natural Resources Department, canro@anrd.gov.sh



The species status of the gumwood tree will be improved from one individual to a thousand secure plants with supporting vegetation across two sites. Photo: ANRD

Securing the endemic Wirebird population through invasive predator control (STH805)

The project will implement an intensive programme of invasive predator control to improve Wirebird productivity and survival at key sites on St Helena. The project will develop a long-term Wirebird predator control plan, which will be implemented by the main stakeholders, leading to more efficient use of existing conservation resources. It will also lead to more responsible pet ownership. The tourism industry and wider community will benefit from the improved protection of the island's national bird.

Jamie Roberts, St Helena National Trust sth.natrtrust@cwimail.sh

Geo-referenced baseline vegetation survey of Tristan to allow future monitoring of environmental change (TDC801)

A systematic vegetation survey of Tristan to map the distributions



The recovery of Wirebird numbers to a level at which they are no longer under severe threat of extinction is assisted through predator control.

Photo: St Helena National Trust

of native and introduced plants will be conducted during this project. This will provide a much-needed baseline for monitoring changes in native vegetation due to the effects of climate change and grazing pressure. It will identify important plant areas for conservation and inform priorities for alien invasive plant control. Better-informed conservation management decisions will benefit native biota dependent on terrestrial habitat. The people of Tristan da Cunha will be better able to understand and manage the threat of alien invasive plants and the effects of climate change on their terrestrial biodiversity.

Trevor Glass, Conservation Department, Tristan da Cunha tg.conservation@gmail.com

Clearing alien plants from Tristan da Cunha and Gough Island (TDC802)

The project will continue the long-term control of invasive plants at Gough and Inaccessible islands in order to achieve the eventual eradication of New Zealand flax and *Sagina procumbens*, and provide increased knowledge and control of other alien plants. Flax and *Sagina* are key threats to the Gough/Inaccessible World Heritage Site, and if left unchecked have the potential to irrevocably alter the unique vegetation of these islands, should they spread beyond the current small affected areas. The project will deliver conservation benefits to both islands, as well as creating opportunities for work, training and skills development.

Dr Richard Cuthbert, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds richard.cuthbert@rspb.org.uk

Achieving GSPC Target 2: the UKOTS Plant Species Red List (XOT802)

An assessment of the conservation status of all known UKOT plant species, to guide conservation action, will be achieved through this project. Results will be uploaded to the IUCN Red List, thus raising the profile of these unique UKOT species. This will provide a platform for conservation action and aid prioritising resources effectively. These data will provide a baseline for suitability modelling for adaptations to climate change. Selected threatened species from a range of different territories will be used to produce models highlighting species' ability to adapt to climate change. All UKOTs will be in a better position to implement plant conservation.

Martin Hamilton, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, m.hamilton@kew.org

Falkland Islands Protected Areas Strategy: Cooperative Management of Biological Diversity (XOT803)

This project will provide the foundation for creating a network of protected areas in the Falkland Islands. Drawing upon efforts to identify key biodiversity areas and the knowledge of landowners, the project will provide a framework for building a comprehensive network of protected areas in partial fulfilment

of the Falkland Islands Biodiversity Strategy and to help meet existing international commitments. It will develop decision-making tools, management policies, mechanisms for maintaining and enhancing biodiversity on private and public lands, and tools to support the monitoring of those areas. Key lessons will be shared among UKOTs, supported by practical training and mentoring.

Falklands Conservation info@falklandsconservation.com

Rockhopper Copper rocks into best-seller lists

When a mass circulation national newspaper like *The Daily Mail* says a book is about to become an international best seller, you can be certain the prediction will prove accurate – not least because the publicity in their pages ensures a self-fulfilling prophecy. What is remarkable in this case is that the *Mail*'s forecast concerns “a little book” about conservation on a remote South Atlantic UK Territory – Tristan da Cunha. And as the paper's Scottish edition revealed, “the hidden existence of Tristan” is now to be revealed in a film version by the Glasgow-based company behind box office successes such as *Hallam Foe*, and *Perfect Sense* with Ewan McGregor.

This unlikely highlighting of the battle to conserve the biodiversity of the South Atlantic comes out of that “little book” first devised by Tristan's Police Inspector, Conrad Glass MBE, as a means of answering the many questions from cruise ship visitors about life on the island. He started to jot down its remarkable story and that of its wildlife, from the founding of the island's egalitarian and communal society by his direct forebear, Corporal William Glass, to today's work conserving the rockhopper penguins, South Atlantic fur seals, the endemic flightless birds of Inaccessible and Gough Islands and the priceless colonies of endangered sea-birds, such as the Tristan albatross.

Conrad made the point that the work of bodies such as the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum was bringing to a wider audience a realisation of the global importance of the Tristan archipelago's unique biodiversity and the need to reverse the depredation caused by rats, mice, invasive plants, hunting and long-line fishing.



Rockhopper Copper Connie Glass keeps the peace on the shoreline of Tristan the most isolated community in the world. Photo: David Mackenzie

By 2005, that “little book” had grown to a sizeable illustrated paperback aimed at those cruise ship passengers and, with the help of a family friend, Chris Bates, and the latter's former boss's publishing business and their printers, the catchy title *Rockhopper Copper* ensured a sell out. It was the first book to be written by a

Tristan islander. What caught the eye of so many, was Conrad's laconic observation in its pages that, whilst the 260 people who form the human population of this, the most remote inhabited island on the planet, cause him few problems, those rockhopper penguins are a different matter. “The Rockhopper penguin is a most disagreeable bird and always ready to have a go at its neighbour and myself” he wrote. “Almost all of them could be held on a charge of a breach of the peace”.

Thus it was that the entire first run sold out, helped by interest in the UK among conservationists, volcanologists, philatelists and others fascinated by Tristan.

Conrad's spell in the office of Chief Islander for three years coincided with dramatic developments on Tristan. The fish factory and the electricity power supply were destroyed by fire, followed rapidly by the collapse of the harbour crane and then, very nearly, of the harbour itself. These events put Conrad's plans for a revised edition on hold. But by last year, with the help of Chris Bates and Polperro Heritage Press publisher Jerry Johns, a new, fully revised and rewritten edition was ready for the book trade – this time available not only in high-street book stores, but also from the likes of Amazon, Tesco, Waterstones, and on-line book stores around the world. Meanwhile, a large consignment is on its way to Tristan for Conrad to offer to the island's increasing number of visitors.

Media publicity, not only in the *Mail*, but in regional and specialist publications, is adding to the demand – and Sigma Films' award-winning producer and writer, David Mackenzie, has already spent time on Tristan working on ideas for a film version of the book, though what form that will take, and whether it will be fictional or factual, has yet to be decided.

Meanwhile, with Tristan now having a fully fledged conservation department under Trevor Glass, and the active involvement of NGOs and UK Government Departments and programmes, the prospects for island conservation look brighter – not that publicity or the book will in itself rid Gough of its “super-mice” and the threat of extinction they pose to the Tristan albatross, but because awareness of the importance of conservation on the isolated islands is now so much higher.

Conrad, we're reliably told, is already working on a follow up...

* *Rockhopper Copper* by Conrad Glass (ISBN 978-0955364877) is published at £9.95 by Polperro Heritage Press, Clifton-upon-Teme, Worcestershire WR6 6EN, and is available from them via www.polperropress.co.uk or from booksellers everywhere. Copies autographed by the author can be sent from Tristan da Cunha for £15, including postage worldwide, by sending an undated sterling cheque (or using registered post, £ sterling, US \$, Euro or South African rand banknotes to the equivalent value) to Conrad Glass, Thompson Street, Edinburgh-of-the-Seven-Seas, Tristan da Cunha TDCU 1ZZ, South Atlantic Ocean

South Georgia survey reveals richest marine environment in the Southern Ocean

The first comprehensive study of marine biodiversity around South Georgia reveals a region that is richer in biodiversity than even many tropical sites. The study provides an important benchmark to monitor how these species will respond to future environmental change.

A team from British Antarctic Survey (BAS), funded by the British Government's Darwin Initiative Challenge Fund and the South Georgia Heritage Trust, examined over 130 years of polar records. About 1500 species were recorded. Specimens were collected from scientific cruises, fisheries vessels and by scuba divers from the seas around South Georgia. Marine biodiversity was recorded as rich across taxonomic levels with 17,732 records yielding 1,445 species from 436 families, 51 classes and 22 phyla. Most species recorded were rare, with 35% recorded only once and 86% recorded <10 times. Species identified include sea urchins, free-swimming worms, fish, sea spiders and crustaceans all of which are thought to be endemic to South Georgia.

The near-surface waters around South Georgia are some of the fastest warming on Earth so this study provides a framework to identify ecologically sensitive areas and species, identify conservation priorities and monitor future changes.

The team from BAS hope to begin to understand how these animals will respond to future change, and this study provides the baseline data.

The data suggests that the ecological implications of environmental change to the marine ecosystem here could be severe. If sea temperatures continue to rise, the team suggests that changes will include depth profile shifts of some fauna towards cooler Antarctic Winter Water (90–150 m), the loss of some range-edge species from regional waters, and the extinction of some of South Georgia's endemic species that are only just being recorded.



Giant isopod Glyptonotus antarcticus at Husvik
Photo: Shallow Marine Group



Sea slug or nudibranch Flabellina sp at Stromness
Photo: Shallow Marine Group

For more information: Oliver Hogg, British Antarctic Survey Tel: ++44 (0) 1223 221212; email: olgg@bas.ac.uk

Commander John MW Topp OBE RN FLS



Commander John MW Topp OBE RN FLS 1937-2011

The founder of the Chagos Conservation Trust died suddenly on 15 March 2011. John Topp was born in 1937 and joined the Royal Navy in 1955. He retired in 1989 with the rank of Commander. As Representative of the Commissioner in the British Indian Ocean Territory, he developed his

vision for the conservation of the Territory's natural environment, including strict nature reserves in key areas of the Chagos

Archipelago. He then worked with Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew on a major study and collection of the flora of the Chagos Archipelago, and with other colleagues on a scientific proposal for Chagos to become a World Heritage Site. Government did not implement the proposal but committed itself to treat the area "as if" it were a World Heritage Site. In 1992, John was appointed Conservation Consultant for the British Indian Ocean Territory and, in the same year, he founded the 'Friends of Chagos' (now the Chagos Conservation Trust). In 1998, he was elected a Fellow of the Linnean Society. In 2003, he was awarded an Order of the British Empire (OBE) for services to the environment and conservation. John's contribution to Chagos conservation, science and education is immense and he rejoiced in the creation of the Chagos Marine Protected Area in 2010. He was always a strong supporter of UKOTCF, and will be sorely missed.

Professor Tony Atkinson

Professor Tony Atkinson passed away, on the 19th June 2011, in Salisbury Hospital after a short illness. He was aged 66 years. Tony was Chairman of the British Microbial Biodiversity Association, and had been particularly involved in scientific and conservation work in Bermuda and Montserrat in the 1990s. Tony was very supportive of UKOTCF and continued his involvement long after his major research and conservation work in the territories. His help and support are greatly appreciated.

House of Lords debate on 10 March 2011 “To call attention to recent developments in the British Overseas Territories; and to move for papers”

The debate was generated by Baroness Hooper who, in her opening speech, noted “Perhaps one of the most important recent developments in the overseas territories is a recognition of the importance of environment, climate change and biodiversity.” She referred also to the *UKOTs Biodiversity Strategy*, which she believed committed the Government to helping the territories access the large international funds for biodiversity and climate change which the territories cannot access directly themselves. She asked the Minister to confirm that the Government intend to help the overseas territories in this way, and asked whether territories would be able to access the £2.9 billion allocated in the recent comprehensive spending review to the international climate fund.

She emphasised that biodiversity in the overseas territories is globally significant and that over 75% of the globally threatened species for which the United Kingdom is responsible are located on these small islands – which hold more bird species under threat of extinction than the entire European continent. She praised the work of the UKOTCF and the RSPB as invaluable in calling attention to these issues, but pressed the Minister with regard to the challenges facing the biodiversity in the UKOTs and asked whether the Government will give their support and ensure that United Kingdom overseas territories are not disadvantaged in relation to EU policies, strategies and funding.

Baroness Hooper referred also to funding for cultural heritage projects, as the built environment often links the historical ties between the territories and the United Kingdom and asked the Minister whether there was any hope that the Heritage Lottery Fund could be made available for projects in overseas territories.

She noted that the current relationship between the European Union and OCTs, was under discussion and that they are due to expire in 2013. The Baroness sought confirmation that the Government will ensure that the United Kingdom OCTs will not be disadvantaged.

In the Minister’s reply, Lord Howell of Guildford (Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office; Conservative) failed to respond to any of these points, preferring to deal with a range of other issues raised by the other eight speakers; these included in particular: air passenger duty; defence issues; financial services/tax havens; governance issues especially in TCI; the future of the BIOT and relationships with the Chagossians and Mauritius; relationship to the Commonwealth; and science in Antarctica. A number of speakers also raised environmental issues and climate change.

Speaking for the Opposition in responding to the debate Lord Anderson said “With regret, I note that there is often a prevailing attitude in this country to the overseas territories of ignorance and neglect. I am very ready to concede initially that that neglect did not begin at the time of the previous election, nor did the problems we have in looking to the future. Save at times of crises, there is little

The St Helena olive, a small and spreading tree up to a few metres tall, was the only representative of its genus. It is unrelated to the true olive. The last wild tree died in 1994, and the last in cultivation in



2003. In December 2003, despite major efforts, the species was declared Extinct, as no other live material (plants, seeds or tissues) remains. With this extinction, the whole genus became extinct. Many other species, also occurring only in UK Overseas Territories, are threatened by extinction, and the signs that UK Government is reducing even further its tiny support are concerning. Photo: Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks

mention in the UK of the overseas territories. An exception was the interesting series of articles in *The Times* in November 2009 by Michael Binyon. About the overseas territories, he wrote: “They feel abandoned, forgotten, former strategic assets that are now seen in Whitehall as costly liabilities”.

It is difficult to disagree with that analysis.

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leased by the Manx Fish Producers’ Organisation, to be managed by fishermen for sustainable queen scallop fisheries. This will help meet the Marine Stewardship Council accreditation requirements.

The MNR extends from the northern tip of the Isle of Man, the Point of Ayre, throughout Ramsey Bay and down to the prominent landmark of Maughold Head with its well-known lighthouse on a high rocky cliff.

In the high current Ballacash Channel, off the Point of Ayre, lies an extensive horse mussel reef. These reefs are formed by long-lived horse mussels which shape the seabed into large ridges of reef. This habitat is of European importance – and the Point of Ayre site is one of only a few such sites throughout the Irish Sea. Associated with the mussel reefs are dense beds of soft corals and hundreds of other species of animals and plants. The Horse Mussel Zone is protected from all dredging, trawling and potting, whilst recreational angling will continue.

In the inner Ramsey Bay, is the conservation zone which will be permanently protected from dredging and trawling. This zone is notable for the large areas of maerl beds and kelp forests. Maerl is a bright pink seaweed which lays down a hard skeleton and looks very like coral. Over 600 species of animals and plants are known to be associated with maerl in the Irish Sea. The maerl beds are also known to be a nursery ground for scallops and cod and they are packed with species, studded with sea anemones, sponges and starfish. The kelp forests have suffered from dredging and trawling in the past. It is hoped that the designation will allow this important habitat to restore and flourish.

To the south of the bay is the most highly protected area, the Eelgrass Zone, which is a No-Take Zone (with the exception of catch-and-release angling). The area contains an important seagrass bed and also diverse rocky shore and rocky reef habitats.

It is hoped that the Marine Nature Reserve will bring a new focus to the tourism and recreation possibilities offered by Ramsey’s marine life, coastal biodiversity and beautiful scenery. The Marine Nature Reserve runs adjacent to the newly designated Maughold Brooughs Area of Special Scientific Interest, which holds significant colonies of coastal bird breeding and the Ramsey North Shore Area of Special Scientific Interest, designated for its unusual strandline vegetation. The MNR is also close to the extensive Ayres National Nature Reserve, well known for its breeding Little Terns and distinctive lichen heath. This suite of designations draws attention to the wealth of species and habitats to be found in the north of the Isle of Man and to the interest of the area for locals and tourists alike.

The Marine Nature Reserve has had good support from the local community, from commercial fishermen to divers and from businesses to the local authorities. The next challenge will be to ensure that the designation is fully implemented and in effective operation by the end of 2011. Awareness raising and involvement of the local community will be fundamental to success. However, based on the experience of selecting and designating the MNR, we expect continued and growing support from the community to fully utilise this opportunity to safeguard the marine environment and marine resources for the future.

Dr Fiona Gell, Senior Marine Biodiversity Officer, Fisheries Directorate, Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture, Isle of Man Government fiona.gell@iom.gov

Friends of the UK Overseas Territories

Four good reasons to become a Friend:

1. You know how valuable and vulnerable are the environmental treasures held in the UK Overseas Territories.
2. You understand that the only way to guarantee their protection is to build local institutions and create environmental awareness in the countries where they are found.
3. You care about what is happening in the UK Overseas Territories and want to be kept up to date by regular copies of *Forum News* and the Forum's *Annual Report*.
4. You understand that the UK Overseas Territories are part of Britain, and therefore are not eligible for most international grant sources - but neither are they eligible for most domestic British ones, so help with fundraising is essential.

EITHER: I wish to become a Friend of the UK Overseas Territories at the annual support level: £15 £50 £100 £.....

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Name of individual Friend or contact person for Corporate Friend:

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Please complete one of options 1 to 4 below. UK taxpayers are requested to complete section 5 also; this will allow UKOTCF to benefit from the tax you have paid, at no additional cost to you.

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Bank address: Bank postcode:

Please pay: UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum at NatWest Bank, 9 Bank Court, Hemel Hempstead HP1 1FB Sort-code: 60-10-33
Account number 48226858 the sum of £..... now and a similar sum thereafter on this date annually.

My account number: Name

Address: Postcode:

Signature: Date:

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

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

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The Isle of Man and the Convention on Biological Diversity

Over the last 15 years the island has, at regular intervals, revisited the question “can we be party to the Convention on Biological Diversity?” In 2004 at the suggestion of a Defra officer the island invited the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, who contracted Alastair Taylor of the Natural History Museum, to undertake an assessment. This identified which areas the Island was compliant in and which areas required further work.

In 2010 a consultation exercise was undertaken (documents can be found on the www.gov.im website, Feb 17th 2010, <http://www.gov.im/consultations.gov?menuid=16918&type=closed&page=19>). This received 105 responses, of which 95% were in favour, some asked for more information and only 3 were opposed.

In July 2010 the proposal received Council of Ministers approval. Following this a revision of the 2004 assessment was completed, including the more recent developments. One of these has been to distribute the biodiversity team around the other sectoral divisions of the new Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA). This updated assessment was submitted to Defra and JNCC. By the end of 2010 we had a positive response from JNCC recognising that integration of biodiversity into fisheries, forestry and agriculture had been a valuable step in meeting the CBD requirements.

In February 2011 the Manx Government wrote formally to the Ministry of Justice to request that the UK extend the Convention to the Isle of Man. We are awaiting a response (and still are in October 2011).

Meanwhile we have begun to evaluate how we start to draft a Manx Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (BSAP) with a workshop for senior officers of DEFA and the Manx Natural Heritage. This was guided by Bob Brown, who has chaired the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Partnership which oversaw the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy. This made 76 recommendations to Government.

The next challenge for the Isle of Man Government is to ensure Biodiversity is included in the Islands new Government Strategic Plan, after the general election in September 2011. To see the last Government Strategic Plan go to <http://www.gov.im/cso/plan/>. This will be the test of the level of political support. It is hoped that the UK will respond with confirmation of our CBD status before that time.

Liz Charter Principal Biodiversity Officer, DEFA, Isle of Man liz.charter@gov.im

Isle of Man designates 1st Marine Nature Reserve

The first Manx Marine Nature Reserve came into effect on 1 October 2011, after a three year consultation process involving hundreds of stakeholders and meetings all over the Isle of Man. During this consultation for the Marine Nature Reserve (MNR), over twenty suitable sites were identified as potential MNRs for their important habitat or species. These ranged from diverse rocky reef sites, for which the island is famous amongst divers, to hotspots for the ocean giant, the basking shark for which the island is known internationally. Ramsey Bay was identified for its suite of subtidal habitats of high conservation importance. It was also selected for designation because it was proposed by the Manx Fish Producers' Organisation for its potential to benefit local scallop fisheries. The local fishermen had the vision and foresight to identify a site which will bring maximum benefits to sustainability of the fisheries as well as marine conservation. This was based on their experience of the successful Port Erin Closed Area in the south of the Island.

The Ramsey Marine Nature Reserve covers an area of nearly 95km², including a highly protected No-Take Zone, a range of conservation zones and a Fisheries Management Zone which will be

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Illustrations of a little of the biodiversity of the Isle of Man. Clockwise from top: choughs (Photo: Peter McEvoy); cliff seabird colony (DEFA); bee orchid at Airport (DEFA); wood vetch (Dr Mike Pienkowski); maerl bed with sea anemones in Ramsey Bay (Jim Self); white plume anemones on long stalks, octopus, tompot blenny (all: Caroline Perry).