

# FORUM NEWS 39

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## Main points of UKOTCF's submission to UK Government on its UKOT White Paper

On 27 September 2011, UK Government (HMG) launched a strategy, aiming 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. The Minister for the Overseas Territories, Mr Henry Bellingham MP, said "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. 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 has encouraged partners to comment, both directly to the FCO and via comments to UKOTCF. UKOTCF has now collated the information received from Member and Associate organisations in the UKOTs and elsewhere and other parties, to supply a response to UK Government by the deadline of 31 December 2011. UKOTCF's submission is available on its web-site. Some of the main points are summarised below.

This submission concentrates on the environment and its intimate links to good governance. The future well-being of the territories will be bright if HMG recognises: the global significance of biodiversity in the UKOTs and its local economic importance; and that good environmental management demands the shared resources of many parts of governments and of civil society – in the UK and in the territories.

UKOTCF has long been committed to working closely with government departments in the UK and in the UK's Overseas Territories (and in the Crown Dependencies). We welcome this opportunity to contribute to a fresh look at how best to protect and improve the well-being of these far-flung parts of the British family. Key points we believe should be included in the proposed White Paper are:

a) UKOTCF would wish to see in the forthcoming White Paper specific reference to environment and biodiversity

conservation, given the general recognition of the global and local importance of the rich but vulnerable biodiversity of the UKOTs, and its relationships to the livelihoods and well-being of the UK citizens (and visitors) that reside in the UKOTs.

b) Clarification of the relationships between the HMG bodies with apparently overlapping responsibilities would be welcome.

c) We recommend that HMG both restore OTEP as a small-projects fund to respond to applications for environmental work in the UKOTs, as committed by the Environment Charters, and institute a larger fund for larger – and often urgent – conservation needs.

d) We recommend that the White Paper address the issue of profitable engagement with civil society and that, for example, FCO explore with

UKOTCF reconvening the bi-annual joint meetings between HMG bodies and NGOs.

e) Given the FCO's current oversight and lead on the proposed White Paper, we recommend that the White Paper clarifies strategic level planning and budgeting across HMG departments and agencies with respect to the UKOTs.

f) Support from Britain is essential and the FCO thus has a dual role both in providing support and in making sure that appropriate support is provided by other government departments and by NGOs.

g) We recommend that HMG work with UKOTCF, its members and other NGOs, together with UKOT governments, towards a common view of biodiversity and other environmental targets. This will help pool resources and attract them from other funders, both charities and individuals.

h) We recommend that JNCC, together with representatives of relevant departments, and representatives of the NGOs, is tasked with preparing an action plan for biodiversity conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. This would not only progress a strategy currently lacking clear objectives and activities, but also generate wider and more collaborative working practices which should spread into other policy areas. We would wish to see that funding specifically allocated to JNCC, and indeed all parts



*Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks explains the plight of the he-cabbage, reduced to a few individuals (Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski). Conservation of several such threatened endemic species on St Helena and elsewhere has depended on small OTEP grants, now discontinued. Similarly, the loss of the ability to apply for funding from OTEP means that many potential environmental education projects will not now be possible. Below, Dr Tony Hutson shows a live-captured bat to enthusiastic primary school students in the Turks & Caicos Islands (Photo: Dr Oliver Cheesman).*



of government, be used most effectively for environmental protection and management in the UKOTs, but this would best be achieved in collaboration with the NGOs, not in isolation from them.

i) We would wish to see a strengthening of resolve on the part of the FCO (and other Departments) to ensure implementation and certainly no weakening of the commitments made under the 1999 White Paper, and reinforced by the FCO White Paper of 2006 *Active Diplomacy for a Changing World: The UK's International Priorities*.

j) With regard to the different Ministries leading on policy for different UKOTs and CDs (FCO, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Defence), other involved departments (e.g. DFID, DEFRA), and the governing of both inhabited and uninhabited UKOTs, we recommend that HMG review the way it relates to UKOTs & CDs, drawing on recent experience in the development of the devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

k) We recommend that UKOTs introduce (where lacking) and implement legal requirements for EIAs in planning matters and, in accordance with best international practice, make these easily available for reasonable time periods for examination and comment by local people and outside experts, and that, if development goes ahead, the implementation of conditions are monitored and publicly reported, with infractions being prosecuted and publicised. We further recommend that HMG takes an active interest in monitoring and advising on such matters, as well as implementing adequately its own responsibilities under international agreements.

l) Whilst welcoming the one-off contributions by HMG to the eradication of invasive species on Ascension Island and, a decade later, Henderson Island, UKOTCF recommends that substantial, regular funding be made available to meet this aspect of HMG's global responsibilities for biodiversity conservation, and that HMG support also work in the UKOTs on prevention of arrival of invasive species.

m) We recommend that HMG fulfil its commitment under the Environment Charters to support work in UKOTs on environmental education and awareness, and such activities as rainwater harvesting.

n) With regard to water and its management, and the contrast between the funding opportunities available to the UKOTs (and other Overseas Countries and Territories) compared to those available to EU Outermost Regions, FCO should consider working with DFID to (a) assess such needs within the UKOTs and (b) put considerably more effort into undertaking negotiations within the EU on changing the funding rules in favour of the UKOTs.

o) UKOTCF would wish to see specific recommendations relating to the establishment of crisis management plans by HMG and related cross-departmental teams.

p) We recommend that, on many environmental issues, departments like DFID and DEFRA deploy in support of UKOTs their own technical and social expertise, as well as national and international links to companies and civil society organizations which will be quite unaware of needs in the UKOTs unless someone takes the initiative.

q) We recommend that HMG involves representatives of UKOTs in international discussions on MEAs and other aspects. We recommend also that the Department of Energy and Climate Change engage with the UKOTs.

r) We welcome the overall message from HMG that all HMG departments will now be expected to support UKOTs in the areas of their expertise. This will be a process that needs managing, and we call upon HMG to resource it adequately. UKOTCF, its member organizations and others have long experience in this area and could support this in a very cost-effective way, given modest support by HMG. In this context especially, we have endeavoured to maintain good working relationships with relevant departments, including FCO, DFID and DEFRA, but have found this increasingly difficult as HMG has more and more decreased its engagement with UKOTCF and other NGOs over the past five years. Engagement has now declined from a previously strong and effective level to a very weak and *ad hoc* process, and virtually always generated by those outside government. We wish to have really effective and meaningful engagement with government departments and call upon HMG to revert to its previous positive attitude and liaison practices.

s) UKOTCF considers strongly that the attitude taken by HMG's ministers and officials towards UKOTs needs to be based on recognition of the reality that they are not quasi-foreign countries, embarrassingly shackled to Great Britain so that HMG carries the can when things go wrong (as they have done over the years in several territories). The attitude should be positive: these are places whose citizens are British but with many distinctive features, so that local democracy, rather than colonial rule from Whitehall, is the guiding principle. However, there also needs to be recognition that, in ways analogous to local democracy in the UK, there needs to be acceptance of common standards in such areas as the rule of law, freedom under the law, freedom of information (subject to constraints affecting privacy of personal information) on matters of public policy, responsible fiscal and environmental management, and international obligations.

t) Support for UKOTCF-organised conferences has been the principal way in which HMG has been able to meet its commitment under the Environment Charters to "promote ... sharing of experience and expertise between ... other Overseas Territories and small island states and communities which face similar environmental problems." We note also that organisation by NGOs is generally considerably more cost-effective than organisation by a government body, due partly to the deployment of large amounts of unpaid voluntary effort. Accordingly, we recommend that HMG restore its financial support for UKOTCF-organised conservation conferences.

u) We recommend the opening of bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and the Big Lottery Fund to applications supporting conservation and other works for the UKOTs and CDs.

v) UKOTs have advised us that they would like to see greater engagement and interaction between Britain and the UKOTs with regard to education, training, and scholarships, as well the development of exchange visits, joint teams, sharing of knowledge, skills and potential resources between Britain and the UKOTs. UKOTCF supports this, has been engaged in this sort of approach for some years, and is currently developing further a skilled volunteers programme, as resources allow, despite HMG's unwillingness so far to support it.

w) Local checks and balances need to be underwritten by a monitoring role by HMG. This should not be micromanaging, but checking that UKOTs are doing what is agreed periodically, especially in the areas of good governance and international commitments. HMG should be in a position of offering early help, if needed. This would be much less intrusive than having to intervene in a major way if failures become major.

x) Other HMG departments (besides FCO) need to build up close working relationships with the equivalent departments in UKOTs.

y) Both HMG and the UKOT governments should be more ready to involve NGOs and other parts of civil society in support of good governance.

z) We recommend that HMG engage with the European Commission to reduce the bureaucratic load on applying for, accessing, and reporting on grants, especially small ones.

aa) UKOTCF recommends that HMG give more support to NGOs and others attempting to access EU funding for UKOT conservation work.

ab) We recommend that a greater level of creativity be adopted by DFID for environmental funding in the UKOTs, especially given the primacy of the UKOTs in DFID's responsibilities.

ac) We recommend that HMG reviews its commitment to UKOTs in respect of EU matters and particularly its frequency and level of representation.

ad) UKOTCF recommends that HMG either meet the needs of UKOTs as part of UK or else uses its leverage as a funding body to modify the rules of operation of the international bodies so as to include UKOTs as eligible. Crown Dependencies also are excluded from most funding sources.

ae) We recommend that a specific output of the upcoming White Paper is the production and implementation of a communications strategy, with necessary funding, involving government in partnership with civil society, both in the metropolitan UK and in the UKOTs.



# When is national heritage not national heritage?

The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is responsible for distributing the sum of 15 pence from each £1 UK National Lottery ticket sold. For some years, UKOTCF has been investigating why HLF does not support conservation of that part of the national heritage in UKOTs and most CDs. At first, it became apparent that those running the Fund did not know what the UKOTs are. Then, they argued that it was illegal for them to fund work in those areas – a comment that they later withdrew as wrong, saying that it was simply policy. Then they said that it would not be possible to manage audit trails for projects in the UKOTs, something that was soon disproved by reference, for example, to the Darwin Initiative.

Recently, Mr Henry Bellingham MP, the FCO Minister leading on UKOTs, has, pleasingly, started taking the same line as UKOTCF. However, officials' advice seems to be that the National Lottery cannot be played in the Overseas Territories and so grants from the National Lottery should not be made for UKOT work. To play the National Lottery, one can either buy a ticket via retail outlets (only available in the UK and Isle of Man) or online, for which the player must be resident in the UK or Isle of Man and also physically present in the UK or Isle of Man when playing the game. To receive winnings from online play, the player must have a UK (or IoM) address and bank account. This seems to be a confusion between who is and is not a UK citizen and some simple logistic points. However, it would seem that Ministers may have been briefed that, to change matters, would require changes in UKOT legislation in order for the National Lottery to be available to play in the Overseas Territories, changes in UK primary legislation, a change to the operating licence terms and a negotiation of a reciprocal taxation arrangement between UK Government and each territory concerned. To those of us who have previously worked in or dealt with UK Government, this looks like a classic case of finding the most complicated way of changing an issue, instead of the simplest.

It seems bizarre as, in reality, projects in the UKOTs to protect the UK's heritage there are high priority and would significantly contribute towards protecting the UK's natural, historic and cultural heritage.

Whatever it needs, with a properly responsible joined-up government, the changes (whether law, Government policy or Fund policy), would have been made long ago.

The Dutch Caribbean islands encountered similar issues when accessing their equivalent *Postcode lotterij* but have overcome them. This may be due to a much better general awareness of the Dutch territories in the Netherlands and an acceptance that they represent a large portion of Dutch natural and historical heritage. It seems time for the UK Government to catch up.

The Big Lottery Fund (BLF) is responsible for distributing the proceeds of another 13 pence of each lottery ticket bought. In August 2011, the Cabinet Office began a 12-week consultation on proposed new policy directions for the BLF, which is "committed to bringing real improvements to communities and the lives of people most in need and has been rolling out grants to health, education, environmental and charitable causes across the UK since June 2004". The fund "helps communities and people most in need throughout the United Kingdom to improve the quality of their lives by making a difference to the things which matter most to them."

Although limited to two questions with a 200 word limit, and the doubts UKOTCF had about a serious in-depth consultation, a response was submitted. UKOTCF suggested the inclusion of UKOTs as eligible for grants, because they are parts of UK sovereign territory and their citizens are UK citizens. By specifically including the UKOTs, BLF would acknowledge the important role they play in the UK's and, more specifically, BLF's commitment to improving the lives of communities through the sustainable management of natural resources, an approach not currently taken by the Heritage Lottery Fund.

UKOTCF suggested also that the future directions of the BLF should include the need to distribute funds to an exceptionally important part of UK heritage, not met elsewhere by specific funders and in areas in which fundraising is particularly challenging. Furthermore, a flexible application process was needed, including core funds thus recognising the specific challenges facing small organisations such as those in the UKOTs and should actively encourage applications on this basis.

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## Still paving Paradise?

Many of the economies of the UK Overseas Territories, especially those in the Caribbean, rely to a great extent on tourism. The reasons why tourists want to visit are self-evident: sun, sand, wildlife, coral reefs, pristine environments. Enticing descriptions highlight the wonderful natural features: "Beautiful by Nature"; "The Other Side of the Caribbean"; "Embraced by unrivaled white beaches and breathtaking turquoise seas", "Rediscover Paradise; "60+ Islands, one unforgettable experience"; "Nature's Little Secret" are some examples from tourist promotion materials

On this basis, one should be able to find numerous examples of sustainable tourism and other developments in the Caribbean UKOTs. There are indeed some which have gone out of their way to work with the environment and preserve the natural heritage. Some examples of these from the Turks and Caicos Islands include the Blue Horizon Resort on Middle Caicos, Amanyara on Providenciales, Pine Cay and Parrot Cay resorts. But there are also numerous examples there and throughout the Caribbean of the opposite type of development, where the natural ecosystems, like tropical dry scrub and mangroves, have been destroyed for the construction of large resorts following the "Miami" model.

It is fair to say that many of these less than sustainable developments were planned and implemented before economists were able to put a \$-value on the natural environment and the ecosystem services it provides, and before the value of natural ecosystems in combating global warming and climate change were fully appreciated. But these values are now widely known, so one would expect that future developments in areas where the tourist \$ is a major part of the

economy, and is reliant on the natural environment, would go out of the way to encompass sustainable development.

Unfortunately, this is far from the case.

UKOTCF is often informed by colleagues and partners in the UK Overseas Territories of development proposals which do not seem to fit with sustainable development practices, nor take note of vital ecosystems. UKOTCF willingly works with local partners to raise wider awareness of these issues, and lends its voice to campaigns to influence and change planning decisions towards a more sustainable position. *Forum News* 38 carried an article about the concern of Bermuda conservationists regarding a Special Development Order for



*Small, well designed resorts can be fitted into the landscape with minimal damage to natural vegetation and set back from the shore: aerial view of Blue Horizon, Middle Caicos. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski*

Tucker's Point, Bermuda. As a result of campaigns, some amendments to the development order were made, but these were not thought to address the fundamental issue of allowing any development on part of this critically important habitat. What will happen next would seem to depend on the Bermuda Planning Development Application Board (DAB).

The impacts on the environment of recent development proposals in the Cayman Islands have been of considerable concern. One example is the Emerald / South Sound Development proposal, which was approved in August 2011 by the Cayman Islands Central Planning Authority. The proposal would link the development of housing and canals to South Sound via a new canal, and involve re-alignment of the coast road. A local community group was formed (Protect South Sound) to raise awareness of the environmental impacts of this development, most significantly the damage that would be caused to the marine ecosystem of South Sound which is a designated Marine Replenishment Zone. There were additional concerns about increased flood risk from storms and hurricanes. UKOTCF supported their campaign by raising awareness through its Wider Caribbean Working Group and its eNewsletter. The campaign generated over 2000 formal written objections to the development. At the time of writing, there is positive news to report. The coastal works depended on the granting of a coastal works license, and indications are now that this will not be granted. Although this does not stop the housing development, it does prevent the dredging of the canal to connect with South Sound.

Conservationists in BVI were shocked when a court of appeal decision concerning the proposed development on Beef Island ruled that legislation for protected areas under the fisheries legislation is not legally binding. The development plan, originating in 1995, was for the construction of 663 residences, a 180-acre golf course, and two marinas in one of the largest wetland and mangrove areas of the island – the last remaining sanctuary for a number of migratory birds, some of the most diverse reefs, and an area of major biological importance for numerous species of fish. It is well documented that mangroves provide protection against increased storm activity due to climate change and additionally are an important carbon sink. According to the British Virgin Islands Heritage Conservation Group, around

80% of the mangroves of the British Virgin Islands have already been destroyed, largely to make way for tourist development. The Beef Island development proposal had been successfully fought by the Virgin Islands Environmental Council (VIEC), who highlighted their campaign as widely as possible, including at the UKOTCF-organised conference in Cayman in 2009. They were successful in the courts in getting the development stopped, with part of the argument supporting their case being that the golf course and marina were located next to, and partially within, the Hans Creek Fisheries protected area. There are concerns now that the court of appeal ruling that the fisheries protected area is not legally binding will allow the development to proceed. The world has moved on since 1995. It would be logical to expect the entire Beef Island development proposal to be thoroughly reconsidered by all concerned.

Anguilla has been the subject of much debate about tourist-related developments. In early December 2011, a development proposal for Scrub Island was revealed, with the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Anguilla Government, the owners of Scrub Island and the development team for the Scrub Island Hotel, Marina and Golf Course project. The development proposes “two boutique resorts on the 870 acres; one in the east and one in the west; a world-class golf course; 150 hotel rooms and 190 residential units that will include condominiums; and very exclusive estate homes that will sell for between US\$20 million and \$30 million each. There will also be 50 boutique shops near the marina and a Fijian style development in the eastern section that will be very romantic.” Scrub Island is currently uninhabited. It would be encouraging to think that the developers will look at successful sustainable tourism developments in the Caribbean, such as Amanyara and Pine Cay in Turks and Caicos Islands, to inform their plans.

Discussions with UKOT and UK colleagues and partners have recently focussed on the need to discuss with politicians and decision makers the value of adopting a longer term, sustainable approach to development considerations, especially regarding mitigation for climate change and the value of marine protected areas. This is something that UKOTCF, with partners, will explore further in the future.

## Bonaire: a year living and working in the Dutch Caribbean

*Throughout 2011, while still undertaking her UKOTCF Coordinator role, Catherine Wensink has been living in Bonaire, an island in the Dutch Caribbean. The whole of the coastline forms a marine protected area; it has five Ramsar Convention Wetlands of International Importance; and several endemic bird species are found there. There are problems on the island associated with cruise tourism, development and feral animals, similar to many Caribbean islands. We have just managed to get Catherine back to UK, although UKOTCF knows that our DCNA colleagues wanted to keep her! Here is an account of her experience over the last year.*



*Donkeys were originally brought to Bonaire by the Spaniards in the 17th*

*century as transportation, but were abandoned when the Spanish left, deeming the island “useless”. Now they pose a threat to native vegetation as well as to drivers late at night. Photo: Catherine Wensink.*

It was at a World Conservation Union (IUCN) conference in 2006 in Paris that I was fortunate to meet both Mike Pienkowski and Kalli de Meyer. A conversation with the former led eventually to my involvement with the Forum; a conversation with the latter began an aspiration to live and work in Bonaire. At the time I also did not realise the significance of sitting in one of the sessions next to Simon Glass (then conservation officer for Tristan da Cunha), who had made a considerable journey to be there. Much of my dream to work in Bonaire was to do with the passion with which Kalli spoke about the measures being implemented to conserve its biodiversity. We had several things in common: we are both English, both had Dutch partners, and both with a background in marine biology. I was sold. It just took a few years before my husband and I were ready but, in 2011, the time was right to make the journey. We arrived at the strikingly pink Flamingo International Airport weary but full of excitement. Oh, did I mention the two small children we brought along?

Bonaire is a truly beautiful place. The north of the island is rugged and wild, and dotted with flamingos and other shore-birds; man-made salt-flats next to the coastline dominate the south, where you are guaranteed to see ospreys fishing. The underwater seascape is teeming with fish and coral. I hadn't realised how far south the island was. It lies just 60 km from Venezuela, in a chain of islands with Aruba and Curaçao. The island is not without its problems. Lionfish arrived on Bonaire at the end of 2009. The park management had been warned and had made some preparations – but such is the nature of the invasion in the Caribbean that individual sightings are no longer recorded and dealt with on site, as there are so many. Feral





Left: An empty conch shell taken from Soroban beach, with Lac Cai, one of Bonaire's five Ramsar sites in the background.



Right: Isla and Johan on Ti Amo beach with Kralendijk "Playa" in the background. A large cruise ship can be seen at the pier.  
Photos: Catherine Wensink

donkeys and goats roam the streets (literally) and persistently shape the vegetation on the island. Acacia and cacti are the only trees able to survive the constant grazing. There are several beautiful native trees such as wayaka (lignum vitae *Guaiacum officinale*), Paulo de saya (balsam *Bursera simaruba*), and calabash *Crescentia cujete*, which can be seen sporadically around the island, but which are at risk of becoming extinct. This is without mentioning the rate of development for luxury homes and the negative impacts associated with high volume cruise tourism.

The Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA), which partners UKOTCF in the Bioverseas initiative (see p. 6), is a "regional network of protected areas set up to help and assist the park management organisations on the islands of Aruba, Bonaire, Curacao, Saba, St Eustatius and St Maarten to better safeguard the unique natural world and to promote sustainable nature management". Executive Director, Kalli de Meyer, is assisted by Nat Miller, Projects Officer, and Accounts Assistant, Emeray Martha-Neuman. I worked with the team on a variety of assignments including: office, library and communications inventories; lionfish management and turtle monitoring plans for the parks of the Dutch Caribbean; and an information dossier that will be used to promote the biodiversity of the Dutch Caribbean in the Netherlands. I have also developed a resource, which will enable the network of parks to access images and videos of the islands for outreach and publications. Much of this work was supporting the organisation in its daily activities. This is so important to a three-person team as sometimes there are just too few hands on deck. It was pleasing that, while I was at DCNA, a renewed agreement was signed by the partners (see p. 6) as this has breathed new life in to a very useful initiative.

Echo is a small foundation established in July 2010 by Dr Sam Williams to protect the yellow-shouldered parrot *Amazona barbadensis* on Bonaire. There are many ecological and human factors that threaten parrots there. As the organisation is newly established, Sam needed help with fund-raising and developing a strategy and communication plan for Echo. From May until August, I joined parrot field expert Jose Diaz to carry out research on nest activity, success and fledging. A highlight of this work was the results of a camera trap we set up outside one of the nests in Washington Slaagbai National Park. In 2010, the parrot team had suspected that the chicks in the nest had been predated, and sought to find some evidence of this. Sure enough, two days later, we returned to find several still images of the adult parrots outside the nest, followed by a feral cat several hours later. The cat returned for two consecutive nights. We had mixed emotions when we studied the tape and the nest cavity as, on one hand, the chicks were dead but, on the other, we now had evidence of predation by feral animals in the National Park.

The queen conch *Strombus gigas* (or Karko as it is called locally), on Bonaire is endangered, as in much of the Caribbean. It lives in the shallow waters of Lac Cai, a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance. The conch has been fished to near extinction, but a recovery programme developed by DCNA and Stichting Nationale Parken (STINAPA), the authority managing the Marine Park and National Park, is working towards restoring its numbers. Drs Sabine Engel is leading a scientific study, and is assisted by former conch fisherman Gevy Soliana. I supported the team by helping to capture,

measure and tag conch, which were not easy to spot in the seagrass. Although the work was serious there could not really be a better place to do a hard day's work.

As a family, we took part in beach clean-ups on our local beach where several turtle nests are found, and in lionfish-hunting in an organised group with certified divers with spears and free diving events (which involves swimming to depths on a single breath without the need for diving tanks). I was also fortunate to attend several interesting guest lectures presented at the Council on International Educational Exchange (CIEE), an organisation that brings exchange students from the US to carry out marine biological research on the island.

This year was not just about conservation but new experiences. Isla (which is unfortunately also the name of the huge oil refinery on neighbouring Curaçao), my 3-year old daughter, was enrolled in a Dutch-speaking school and now speaks Dutch with ease. Johan has spent much of his time shirtless and will no doubt struggle with all the layers he will require when we return home to the UK. His first words have been *vogel* (bird) and *hond* (dog) which, for me, who struggles with languages, has been very rewarding.

It's hard for me to explain what contribution I have made as a volunteer, so perhaps it is easier to let Dr Sam Williams reflect on this: "The value of our volunteer team has been monumental for Echo. We simply would not have had a chance with the rescue, where we cared for over 100 parrot chicks, without the many dedicated people who gave their time. On a day-to-day basis, we also rely heavily on longer-term volunteers who come out to Bonaire for a conservation experience. Echo is progressing rapidly and there is no doubt that it is because of our committed volunteers who move the organisation forward when we have very limited resources".

Volunteers, who would like to assist with conservation projects and work within organisations and are willing to give their time, approach UKOTCF on a regular basis. We are building a programme to facilitate this (see p. 6).



Parrot watering time. The aviary was built after 100 parrots were seized after a tip-off led police to premises where the birds were being prepared for illegal export. The parrots are soon to be released to the wild after being cared for by the Echo team. Photo: Jon Llona Mínguez

## A blind date for conservation: UKOTCF volunteers programme

Engaging volunteers locally is often the ideal scenario for increasing the capacity of an organization. However, often specific skills are required – which may mean assistance from outside a UKOT is needed. Often a small human population also limits the pool of potential volunteers locally.

UKOTCF has in the past provided some support via volunteers in the UKOTs (*Forum News* 32: 6-8; earlier in this issue) and is keen to develop a more structured programme. Although funding has not yet been forthcoming to establish this formally, UKOTCF is keen to move forward and facilitate some placements. A key feature of the programme will be that UKOTCF will facilitate matching the particular skills of volunteers with the particular needs of territory partners. Whilst there are no restrictions, we envisage that most placements will range from a few weeks to a few months.

Some partners have considered the types of projects they would require assistance with and where volunteers might be well utilised, while potential volunteers continue to approach UKOTCF with offers of assistance – even though we have not yet invited these. With regard to the practical costs involved, some partners have indicated that they would expect to provide accommodation for volunteers; this would otherwise be very expensive. However, we know that, in some territories, this would not be practicable.

The volunteers themselves and the coordinating project may, in some cases, be able to resource funding for flights, training before arrival, and/or subsistence while on island. We see this as varying in individual cases, and each placement will be negotiated as a separate exercise. UKOT partners have noted that the volunteers will be working within the local community, and engagement with them, if appropriate involving training, will be encouraged. In turn, this may encourage local community involvement for larger projects. Means of doing this include open days or functions to celebrate the organisation and volunteers' work.

UKOT partners are invited and encouraged to contact Catherine Wensink ([cwensink@ukotcf.org](mailto:cwensink@ukotcf.org)), with outline notes on projects which need support. These notes (which need initially only be a page or two) should indicate: the issue being addressed; the nature of the support needed; the range of periods of presence that would be useful and any seasonal or other date constraints, and the conservation outcome expected. Likewise volunteers are encouraged to send a note indicating their relevant skills and qualifications, interests, availability, an indication of level of self funding and any other information they wish to volunteer@ukotcf.org. UKOTCF intends to start promoting the developing volunteer programme at various venues and opportunities in 2012.

## Bioverseas agreement: Conservation in the EU Overseas Entities

Bioverseas is the joint initiative of the umbrella conservation bodies, bringing together the organisations working on the ground in the overseas territories of the Netherlands, France and UK.

As outlined on pages 4-5 of this issue, DCNA is a regional network of protected areas set up to help and assist the park management organisations on the islands of the Dutch Caribbean, to safeguard their natural resources and to promote sustainable nature management. The French National Committee of IUCN (UICN-F) has a component, which acts as

an umbrella body for nature conservation in the French overseas regions and territories. Earlier achievements of the initiative have been documented in *Forum News* (e.g. 30: 2; 33: 9; 34: 8; 38: 8).



Left: Kalli De Meyer, DCNA Executive Director, with the new Bioverseas agreement she has just signed in her office in Bonaire. Right: Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF Honorary Executive Director, takes a moment off stand duty at the British Birdwatching Fair to sign the agreement. Photos: Emeray Martha-Neuman and Catherine Wensink.

## British Overseas Territories Law

This book provides a comprehensive and up-to-date description of the constitutional and international status of the overseas territories. It outlines their constitutional position and relationship with the United Kingdom, and focuses on the legislative, executive and judicial authority and controls, the sources of law and human rights protection in the territories. It analyses defence, security and emergency powers in the territories; the nationality and status of people 'belonging' to them; their public finance arrangements; their relationship with the European Union; and the conduct of their external relations. It examines the status of the territories in international law, their relationship with the United Kingdom in that context and the United Kingdom's international responsibility for them. It concludes with a description of the means of terminating British sovereignty. An annex sets out key features of each territory in turn, describing briefly its history, status, constitutional structure, courts, sources of law and economy.

Ian Hendry and Susan Dickson both hold posts at the United Kingdom Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It was published by Hart Publishing in March 2011, as a hardback with 364 pages. ISBN 1849460191 / 9781849460194

## Gibraltar general election

Congratulations to UKOTCF Council Member Dr John Cortés. John decided to stand down from his long-held role as General Secretary of the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society to stand for election, as a candidate in the Gibraltar Socialist Labour Party, to Gibraltar's Parliament in the general election on 8 December 2011. Personally, John came second in the number of votes received amongst the 30 candidates. All 10 candidates of the GSLP/Liberal Party coalition were elected, so that they take over the government from the Gibraltar Social Democrats. On 12 December, the Hon Dr John Cortés took up the post of Gibraltar's Minister for Health and Environment. We wish him well.



# Net-BIOME announces successful research projects

Previous reports have outlined progress in the Net-BIOME project, in which UKOTCF is a partner. The project is supported by the European Commission (EC) Research Directorate General, under its ERA-NET programme. This is intended to facilitate co-ordination across the countries of the European Union. Net-BIOME, which addresses biodiversity research in tropical and semi-tropical regions, is the first ERA-NET project across Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories of EU Member States. This project has been successful in assembling a fund for biodiversity research in the Overseas Entities of European Union Member States. This invited bids some months ago, and the list of successful bids is in the table below.

Unfortunately, the UK Government failed to contribute any funding for this. Therefore UKOT and UK bodies could not be major partners in bids. Nevertheless, a few UKOTs are involved in some of the successful applications, due to the generosity of France, Spain and Portugal and their overseas entities.

A senior UK conservationist involved in the process commented: "It has been depressing over recent years to witness the lack of commitment by successive UK governments to conservation of the most globally important biodiversity for which it is responsible. UK Governments have performed appallingly badly compared with those of other EU states."

Funding from the EU for co-ordination by the Net-BIOME project ends shortly. The 11th meeting of the Net-BIOME Executive Board (EB) was held in Noumea, New Caledonia on 21-28 November, in parallel with the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC) seminar *Oceans at Risk: Protection from the ocean to the coast*,

*sharing marine resources*. This meeting was the first of a series of three under the PECC International Project on *Sustainable Management of Marine Resources (2011-2012)* and provided a good opportunity for interaction between members of the EB and those attending the PECC meeting.

The EB considered:

- The outcome of the Joint Call for research proposals including production of a booklet describing the processes involved in the call and an analysis of the results; a status review of the approved projects and follow-up arrangements after March 2012; and arrangements for a kick-off meeting with the project coordinators
- Wrapping-up of the first phase of the initiative (utilising EC funding) and planning for the second phase after February 2012; working methods for the second phase
- Preparation for the final meetings under phase one which will be held in early 2012
- Producing a strategy for the second phase of Net-BIOME,
- Mechanisms for maintaining and enhancing the network
- Preparation for a second call for research proposals which would be a transnational call
- A communications strategy for the initiative including revised awareness materials, a wrap-up newsletter for phase one, and updating of the website

Working groups were established to pursue these. The next meeting of the EB will be held in association with the final gatherings as will be the next Governing Board meeting.

Acronym and Title of the Project	Project Coordinator	Regions/Territories involved in the consortium
FRAG&BINV : Consequences of forest fragmentation and conditions for biological invasions: the case of Caribbean birds	Stéphane Garnier	France, Martinique, French Guiana, Portugal, United Kingdom
Island-Biodiv : Understanding biodiversity dynamics in tropical and subtropical island in an aid to science based conservation action	Brent Charles Emerson	Canary Islands, Reunion, France, Azores
MOVECLIM : Montane vegetation as listening post for climate change	Dominique Strasberg	Reunion, Guadeloupe, Azores, French Polynesia, Canary Islands, France, South Africa, Switzerland, Germany, Malaysia
POMARE : Polynesian, Martinique's, Reunion's marine benthic invertebrates: interactions and chemodiversity evaluation for a sustainable use	Cécile Debitus	French Polynesia , Reunion, Martinique, Netherlands, United Kingdom, France
SafePGR : Towards Safer Plant Genetic Resources through improved viral diagnostics	Claudie Pavis	Guadeloupe, France, Reunion, Azores, Madeira
SEAPROLIF : Diversity and functioning of coastal marine biomes under siege: implications of seaweed proliferations across three oceans	Claude Payri	New Caledonia, France, Portugal, Azores, Reunion, Guadeloupe
VABIOME : Characterization, Protection, Sustainable use and valorization of Vanilla Biodiversity in Tropical EU	Pascale Besse	Reunion, French Polynesia, France, French Guiana, Guadeloupe

## Cayman acquires "missing piece" of Salina Reserve

The National Trust of the Cayman Islands has purchased a strategic piece of land to extend its Salina Reserve, which previously had a less-than-ideal northern boundary, because of a privately owned piece of land situated almost entirely inside the reserve. The reserve protects globally threatened tropical dry shrubland, which is also key habitat for the Grand Cayman blue iguana. Fred Burton, Director of the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme, said "The purchase has unlocked a previously blocked fragment of habitat which, together with the new parcel, now almost doubles the area of shrubland available here for the blue iguanas to recolonize."

The Trust is grateful to the willing landowners and the financial support by Maples FS and the European Union. The latter funding forms part of the project *Managing Protected Areas by Supporting*

*Sustainable Economies* (MPASSE). This provides support also to work in the British Virgin Islands and the Turks & Caicos Islands. At the request of the territory partners, the governments of the three territories and FCO, UKOTCF coordinated the application for part-funding of this project in 2003, and has donated much time in the eight years since to overcome the European Commission procedures, which the latter's own consultants describe as disproportionately complicated. Such administrative problems continue, but UKOTCF is delighted to see at last some tangible conservation success to emerge. The Forum congratulates the National Trust for the Cayman Islands on this, as well as those in the Commission and the Technical Assistant to the project who helped overcome the procedural challenges.

# Surprising decisions by European Commission on BEST proposals

The background to the pilot European Union project funding scheme Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in the Territories of Europe Overseas (BEST) was outlined most recently in *Forum News* 38:8. The results of the first round of applications were announced in December 2011. UKOTCF was disappointed that the proposal that it coordinated, in conjunction with its Netherlands (Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance) and French (UICN-France) equivalent bodies and with the support of many constituent partners in the territories, was unsuccessful. This is particularly sad as it is thought to have been the only application generated from the expressed needs of local bodies in the territories of UK, France and the Netherlands. The project coordinated by UICN-F, with the support of DCNA and UKOTCF, was also unsuccessful. Production of the applications is a major piece of work, despite the European Commission promising that this would be a simplified procedure; in fact, the Commission's requirements meant that UKOTCF's application had to be the size of an old-fashioned telephone directory.

The eight successful applications are listed in the table opposite. There were 41 applications, as summarised below.

Country (including its territories) of coordinator	Number of applications	Number awarded	% awarded
Belgium	1	1	100
Germany	1	1	100
France	19	6	32
Denmark	1	0	0
Netherlands	3	0	0
Portugal	2	0	0
Spain	6	0	0
United Kingdom	7	0	0

One conservationist with experience of running both projects and conservation funding programmes commented: "It is difficult to argue with the suggestion that coordinators have to be from France or, better still, from an institution with little on-the-ground involvement with overseas territories based in a country with

Title of successful application	Applicant
Quantification des services écosystémiques des aires marines protégées de la Caraïbe en vue de leur paiement (Project CARIPES); Quantification des services écosystémiques associées aux agroécosystèmes - Cas des systèmes à base de bananes plantains en Martinique (proposal with 2 specific actions)	Conseil Régional de Martinique
Coral reefs in a changing world - ecosystemic services from coral reefs : public tools for decision making in New Caledonia and French Polynesia	Institute for the Pacific Coral Reef
Protection et gestion durable des oiseaux terrestres de Polynésie française menacés d'extinction et de leurs habitats	Association Manu Société d'Ornithologie de Polynésie
Piloting the Development and Implementation of National-level joint activities between the Rio Conventions in support of Ecosystem-based approaches to climate change mitigation and adaptation	CBD Secretariat
Building partnerships and awareness of biodiversity and climate change in Europe overseas for the future of BEST	IUCN Brussels Regional Office
Gestion Raisonnée de l'Environnement et des Espaces Naturels : biodiversité et services écosystémiques de Nouvelle Calédonie	ADECAL (New Caledonia Economic Development Agency)
Suivie Opérationnelle des Pécaris à lèvres blanches du Parc Amazonien de Guyane	Parc National de la Guyane
Création de nouvelles aires protégées dans les forêts publiques à la Réunion et à Mayotte	Office National des Forêts

none." It is to be hoped that the European Commission provides funding for further rounds of BEST, but makes its application procedure far less bureaucratic and adjusts its decision making to give a less bizarre result.

## Kew launches its UKOTs Online Herbarium

UKOTCF congratulates its member organisation, the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, on the official launch of its UKOTs Online Herbarium. At the launch event, the leaders, Dr Colin Clubbe, Dr Martin Hamilton and Sara Barios, noted that this had been a real team effort and included input from many partners over the last two years. This project has been a great success and has the potential to enable future plant conservation activities. RBGK thanked: their funders, OTEP and the South Georgia Heritage Trust; their Kew colleagues and in-Territory partners who have assisted with the project; and their dedicated volunteers and interns.

To date, over 17,000 specimens and 10,000 taxa have been collated in the database held at Kew. The specimen records have been comprehensively digitised, *i.e.* databased, geo-referenced and imaged. This includes historical as well as contemporary collections from recent fieldwork.

So far, over 5588 species names have been checked and incorporated into the main database. Of these, 3864 names are considered accepted, 1313 are synonyms, 290 are taxonomically unresolved names, and 121 lack valid publication. With these species in the main database, the team were able to upload 7907

specimens to the online herbarium. The remaining specimens are awaiting resolution of taxonomic issues, many of which will be fairly straight forward.

RBGK has prepared a manual for using the database through Brahms online which is accessible from:

<http://dps.plants.ox.ac.uk/bol/UKOT/GroupResources/Index>  
Click on the PDF file "UKOTs Online Herbarium Manual\_Version\_16-Sept-2010.pdf" to open or save a copy.

Start on the main project page and then move to the South Georgia page using the manual to familiarise yourself with using the database. Any feedback is most welcome, especially on the individual territory pages.

If you want to be included in future updates as the team move forward with their next OTEP-funded project, *XOT802 Achieving GSPC Target 2: the UKOTS Plant Species Red List*, please supply your email address to Martin Hamilton, UK Overseas Territories Programme Co-ordinator, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Herbarium, Library, Art & Archives, Richmond, Surrey TW9 3AE, UK: [m.hamilton@kew.org](mailto:m.hamilton@kew.org)



# Channel Islands Inter-Island Biodiversity Meeting 2011

The Channel Islands Inter-Island Biodiversity meeting was hosted this time by Jersey, at Les Creux Country Park, St Brelade, Jersey, on 6 & 7 October 2011.

UKOTCF was represented by Mike Pienkowski, Honorary Executive Director, whose presentation was directed at stimulating discussion on ways in which UKOTCF may be able further to help Channel Islands partners, and by Liz Charter, Chair of UKOTCF's Europe Territories Working Group. Liz was typically multi-tasking: as Principal Biodiversity Officer of the Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture, she spoke on the Island's Biodiversity Strategy and Aichi Objectives, linking well to UKOTCF's work in this area (see *Forum News* 38: 4 & 20). She gave also, on behalf of her colleague Dr Fiona Gell, a marine update, including on the recently designated nature reserve (see *Forum News* 38: 19-20) – and, on behalf of JNCC, a presentation on their training and research programme.

The meeting was chaired by Dan Houseago, Jersey's Director of Environmental Management & Rural Economy, and organised by a strong team led by John Pinel, Principal Ecologist, Department of the Environment, States of Jersey. The UKOTCF visitors would particularly like to thank Research Officer Kathryn Fleming and her colleagues for all the help on the logistics.

As well as the contributions mentioned above, presentations from the "visitors" included Paul Buckley on RSPB's conservation work relevant to the Channel Islands. A strong team from France outlined work on a marine national park in the waters of neighbouring Normandy and Brittany, and discussions started to explore any potential linking to Channel Islands waters. Olivier Abellard, Project Manager, *Agence des aires marines protégées* (French Marine Protected Areas Agency) spoke on "Marine Natural Park in the Gulf Normand-Breton", and the "Atlas project: Benthic invertebrates in the Normano-Breton Gulf" was contributed by Patrick Le Mao, *Institut français de recherche pour l'exploitation de la mer* (IFREMER), Dinard; Nicolas Desroy, IFREMER, Dinard; and Laurent Godet, *Laboratoire Géolittomer, Université Nantes*. From the Channel Islands side of the Gulf, Greg Morel, Marine and Coastal Officer, Department of the Environment, States of Jersey, spoke on "Progressing Integrated Coastal Zone Management in Jersey. How far have we come? How far have we got to go?"

The complementary presentations continued on seabirds, with Amélie Boué (Coordinator, Future of the Atlantic Marine Environment) and Yann Février (*Groupe d'Etudes Ornithologiques des Côtes d'Armor*) presenting on the European Union-supported

"FAME project 2010-2012 for seabirds conservation: first local results about Balearic Shearwater", and Paul Veron (Head of Policy & Research Policy & Research Unit, States of Guernsey) on "Summary of seabird results of the 2011 season in Bailiwick of Guernsey & update on the plans for the next British Seabird Census in 2013-2016".

The outstanding work of the Guernsey Biological Records Centre (now being contracted to work on other islands too), summarised by its Manager, Charles David, was complemented by a presentation by Henry Glynn (Natural Environment Officer (Warden), Department of the Environment, States of Jersey) on "Phase 1 Habitat Survey".

Another interesting comparison within the Channel Islands was provided by the presentation on "The true cost/benefit of Conservation Grazing: on the Alderney Grazing Animals Project 8 years in" by Julia Henney (Conservation Officer, Alderney Wildlife Trust), followed by a field visit to Mourier Valley, St Mary, Jersey, to see the sheep grazing project there. We managed to dodge the threatening rain, and had fascinating discussions with the reserve warden/shepherd – whose dog was a little suspicious of such a large gathering of people, rather than sheep.

The meeting coincided with Jersey's food festival, so that the conference dinner provided an excellent menu at a very reasonable price. This fortified all for the second day. Then, interesting parallels from different islands continued, this time on exciting community projects on woodland. Julia Henney (Conservation Officer, Alderney Wildlife Trust) spoke on "Alderney Community Woodland" and Andy McCutcheon (Principal Environment Services Officer Policy & Research Unit, States of Guernsey) on "Tree planting in Guernsey: 1992-2006 – A Review". The latter showed the fascinating sudden increase in average wind-speed in Guernsey at the time of the loss of trees due to Dutch Elm Disease, and the gradual reduction again during the period of tree-planting.

Other wide-involvement projects featured also, in the "Birds on the edge project" by Dr Glyn Young (Conservation Biologist, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust), and the "iBats car transect" by David Tipping (Natural Environment Officer (Information), Department of the Environment, States of Jersey). Lindsey Napton (Natural Environment Officer (Legislation), Department of the Environment, States of Jersey) gave an interesting summary of progress on biodiversity policy and law in Jersey. The latter led to a discussion about a dedicated inter-island meeting about wildlife legislation, likely to be held on the Isle of Man in the New Year.

Throughout, the meeting benefitted from active and constructive discussions. Those not dashing for planes or ferries were able to enjoy a field visit on wetland management and protection, at St Ouen's Pond with Jon Horn (Lands Manager, National Trust for Jersey).

Following this excellent event in Jersey, Alderney will pick up the baton for the 2012 meeting.

## Jersey Avian Red List

A Red List for Jersey's avian fauna is in its final stages and should be published shortly. The report, put together by Dr H. Glyn Young, Conservation Biologist at Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Jersey, details status determined by Jersey's first Red List committee of local ornithologists. This much needed report marks a great step forward for avian conservation in the Island as it now sets a baseline to which reference can be made when planning management or monitoring changes in populations.



Some of the participants on the field-visit to Mourier Valley, St Mary, Jersey, discuss the sheep grazing project, in a sunny spell between the squalls. Photo (and shadowy presence): Dr Mike Pienkowski

## Camera traps in Jersey

In November 2010, the National Trust for Jersey acquired a remote wildlife camera trap using funds from the Royal Bank of Canada's *Bluewater project*. The purpose was to help the countryside team better to monitor and understand the bird-life within the reed-beds at two of their wetland sites. In particular, the team was keen to focus on some of the more secretive birds such as water rail *Rallus aquaticus* and bittern *Botaurus stellaris*. Within the initial two months, the monitoring of Jersey's wintering bittern's proved so successful that the decision was made to purchase another three camera traps.

The new traps have continued the previous trend, recording passing migrants, some of the wetlands' marsh harriers *Circus*

*aeruginosus* and behaviour not previously recorded in Jersey, such as bittern swimming. This year, they have confirmed the breeding of the ducks pochard *Aythya farina* and shoveler *Anas clypeata*, as well as water rail. Water rails were confirmed as a breeding species only in 2010. In May 2011, they bred again with great success, one of the pairs having five young. One of the island's ornithologists has said "It is fantastic to be able to gain this much insight in to what is normally such a secretive bird that so little is known about."

Although these cameras have been active only for a few months, they have already given greater insight into the avian world within Jersey's wetlands. Now that the trial is proving successful, plans are

afoot to develop the monitoring and to use the information to adjust management plans to improve the habitat in some of Jersey's most precious ecosystems.

Piers Sangar, National Trust for Jersey  
prsangar@live.co.uk

National Trust for Jersey camera-trap shots of (left) bittern and (right) water rail with chicks



## Climate change policy progresses in UKOTs – but will UK Government provide financial support?

As the UN Conference of the Parties 17 (COP17) climate change conference concludes in Durban, South Africa, we take a look at some recent developments in the UKOTs.

*The Impact of Climate Change on Bermuda*, prepared by Dr Anne Glasspool for UKOTCF Member organisation, the Bermuda National Trust, examines the effect of climate change on Bermuda. It recommends that Bermuda develop strategies to ensure its economic, social and environmental security. The report has much wider application to other UK Overseas Territories. This was recognised by the Hon Dr Ewart F. Brown, JP, MP, Premier of Bermuda and Minister of Tourism and Transport, when the report was tabled at the National Assembly. He suggested that Bermuda could set an example for small islands by mitigating the processes of climate change.

The report looks at the impacts of climate change on infrastructure, freshwater resources, energy, human health, tourism, built heritage, agriculture, fisheries, mangroves, seagrasses, reefs, coastal habitats, plants, birds and reptiles. In terms of Bermuda's important biodiversity, the impact of sea-level rise will have a devastating impact on populations already facing extinction: "With limited suitable, undeveloped habitat remaining, Bermuda's [endangered] skink population is now relegated to the South Shore coastal zone and a few isolated islands in Castle Harbour. Sea level inundation of these will drive the skinks upwards, reducing the amount of habitat available to them."

Bermuda is unable to tackle the causes of climate change alone, but will feel its force in many areas. Adaptation to these impacts is perhaps the only realistic way it can address climate change while the global community takes action. The full report can be downloaded at: [www.bnt.bm/documents/ClimateChangeReport.pdf](http://www.bnt.bm/documents/ClimateChangeReport.pdf).

In September 2011, the Cayman Islands Government published

the final draft of their climate change policy *Achieving a Low Carbon Climate-Resilient Economy: Cayman Islands' Climate Change Policy*. Within 5 years of the adoption of the policy by the Cayman Islands Cabinet, a series of measures will be implemented focusing on: legislation and policy actions; research, monitoring and education; and environmental best management practices in the following areas: marine and coastal resources; terrestrial resources; energy security; water resources and hydrology; food security; critical infrastructure; tourism sector; and insurance and financial services. This report can be downloaded at: <http://www.doe.ky/sustainability/>.

In February 2011, the Turks and Caicos Islands produced a *Climate Change Green Paper*, and, in September 2011, a *Draft Climate Change Policy*. The Green Paper considers impacts and possible adaptation strategies. The policy document details adaptation/mitigation strategies for climate change for key sectors in the Turks and Caicos Islands, these being: Tourism, Fisheries, Biodiversity, Water Resources, Energy Security, Agriculture and Food Security, Human Health, Infrastructure. The policy will "guide the work of all government bodies, statutory, private sector, NGOs, civic entities, including academia and research institutions within the Turks and Caicos Islands." Both the Green Paper and the Draft Policy can be downloaded from [www.caribbeanclimate.bz/projects/enhancing-capacity-for-adaptation-to-climate-change-ecacc-in-the-uk-caribbean-overseas-territories-project.html](http://www.caribbeanclimate.bz/projects/enhancing-capacity-for-adaptation-to-climate-change-ecacc-in-the-uk-caribbean-overseas-territories-project.html). Papers for the other Caribbean UKOTs also can be accessed from this site.

The UK Government Office for Science recently published *International Dimensions of Climate Change* (funded by Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Energy and Climate Change). Interestingly, the report highlights the responsibility the UK Government has in terms of financial support to mitigate for and adapt to climate



change: “Responsibility arises from the fact that, due to their constitutional relationship with the UK, the Overseas Territories are unable to apply for many international funds available for small nations to support mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change effects. For example, whilst programmes under the Global Environmental Facility have been implemented in the independent Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to help planning for adaptation to climate change, the Overseas Territories have not been eligible for funding given their unique relationship with the UK”. Furthermore the report summaries that: “UK government departments do not act proactively to address adaptation in UK Overseas Territories, leaving them vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, with repercussions on the UK.” The full report is available at: [www.bis.gov.uk/assets/bispartners/foresight/docs/international-dimensions/11-1042-international-dimensions-of-climate-change.pdf](http://www.bis.gov.uk/assets/bispartners/foresight/docs/international-dimensions/11-1042-international-dimensions-of-climate-change.pdf)

The UK government has accepted that climate change is a global problem and, in December, allocated further funds to its £2.9bn International Climate Fund (ICF) accordingly. The ICF aims to help developing countries tackle climate change and adapt to the effects of global-warming.

“We promised we’d be the greenest government ever both at home and abroad and passing the £1bn milestone shows the UK’s commitment to helping developing countries tackle and cope with the effects of global warming.” announced UK Energy and Climate Change Secretary Chris Huhne. “Climate change is the greatest challenge of the 21st century so we have a moral responsibility to help the poorest countries respond. This not only benefits the most vulnerable but also helps all of us move towards a safer and cleaner future.”

The UKOTs are some of the most vulnerable to climate change (most being small low-lying islands, as well as others losing glaciers) and so it will be interesting to see if the advice given by the UK Governments Science Office is heeded. The message from the UK Government is clear. They see climate change as a major global challenge separate from other environment issues. Especially in the context of UK Government reneging on its earlier commitments to provide even small grants to support environmental conservation in the UKOTs (see *Forum News* 38: 6-7), will there be funds for the UKOTs in the ICF?

## New UKOTCF Council Members elected at the AGM

### Alison Debney



Alison Debney works at the Zoological Society of London (ZSL) where she is the Programme Manager for the Marine & Freshwater Conservation Programme – UK, UKOT & Europe, and ZSL’s representative to UKOTCF. Alison joined ZSL in 2003 and has been responsible for building and managing a coherent set of conservation projects around the world in countries including Brazil, Philippines, British Indian Ocean Territory, and

Mozambique, as well as in the UK. Alison was deputy Director of Conservation before taking maternity leave in 2009 and returning to work part-time.

Alison has been working to achieve sustainable natural resource management for over 13 years. Prior to ZSL, she worked for environmental consultancies as a marine ecologist. Her work took her to many fascinating countries including the Middle East (Qatar, Dubai, Oman, Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Bahrain), Georgia, Chile and Jamaica. She has also spent time living on the beach in East Africa, ruing the fact that tidetables weren’t consulted when building staff accommodation. Her approach to work is collaborative and she enjoys working as part of a multidisciplinary team bringing together government, communities, industry and other non-governmental organisations to deliver effective conservation of wildlife.

Alison has been on the committee of the UK’s Institute of Fishery Management (IFM) London and Southern Branch since 2004 and was the Secretary of Chartered Institute of Water and Environmental Management South East Branch 1998-2002.

Both at work and in her leisure time, Alison enjoys spending as much time near or in water as possible.

### Rob Thomas



Rob Thomas is Conservation and Research Manager for the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, with a particular focus on UK native species and UK Overseas Territories. He has worked in UK zoos for over 25 years, with

the last 18 based in Edinburgh. Since 2003, he has overseen the development of an international conservation programme on behalf of RZSS and has encouraged a number of collaborations with Scottish universities and other institutions to boost the level of academic research conducted at its living collections as well as effective conservation action on the ground.

Rob is co-Chair of the Southern Oceans Working Group for UKOTCF and is Chair of the Field Programmes Committee for the British and Irish Association of Zoos and Aquaria (BIAZA). Through various partnerships and while UK-based, he has worked on conservation initiatives in the Falkland Islands, Tristan da Cunha and, most recently, Henderson Island in the Pitcairn Group. He attended the two most recent UKOTCF conferences in Jersey and Grand Cayman and has developed both a respect and a passion for the UKOTs, their people and cultures, environments and rich biodiversity.

Rob contributes to two MSc programmes at the University of Edinburgh on Animal Behaviour and Welfare, and Ecosystem Health, respectively. He studied for his first degree with the Open University, specialising in biological sciences and systems management, and received an MSc from Edinburgh Napier University in Wildlife Biology and Conservation.

He enjoys walking his exuberant dogs and quiet holidays in remote parts of Scotland, the Lake District and Cornwall, while trying to join the ranks of middle-aged triathletes around the world.

# New UKOTCF Associate: the United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust

UKOTCF welcomes UK Antarctic Heritage Trust as an Associate, the first one focusing on work in the British Antarctic Territory.

The United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust is a charity, registered in 1993. It was inspired by a keen awareness not only of the relevance of Antarctica to issues of global importance but also the need to recognise Britain's long and distinguished part in Antarctic exploration and scientific research.

The United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust exists to preserve Antarctica's historic past now and in the future. The Trust needs help to:

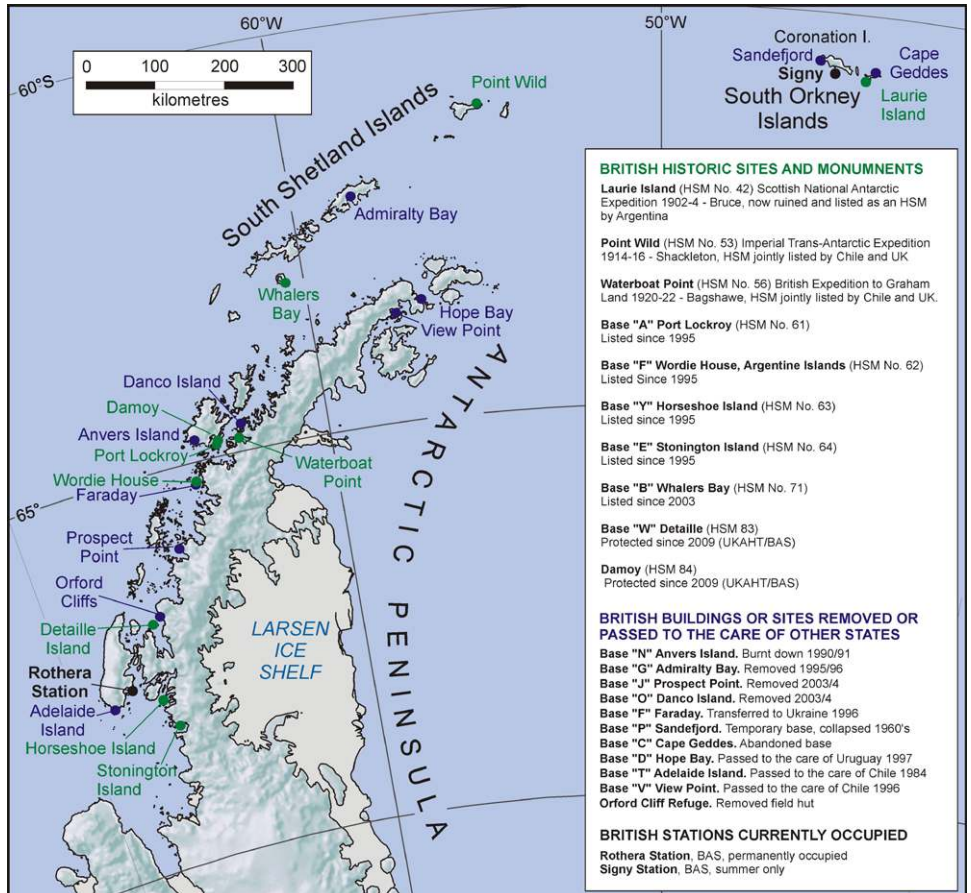
- conserve selected buildings on and around the Antarctic continent for the education and enjoyment of visitors.
- help with the acquisition and preservation of Antarctic historical artefacts.
- promote educational initiatives, stimulate interest in the scientific and human history of Antarctica and their relevance to the modern world.
- run a Friends of Antarctica membership organisation and maintain good liaison with kindred organisations.

A century ago Shackleton in 1908 and then, in 1912, the survivors of Scott's last expedition left the huts they had built on Ross Island in Antarctica. Over the years the huts filled with snow which turned to ice. The huts were, literally, preserved in the freezer. When fifty years ago, the New Zealand Antarctic expedition started 'excavation' of the huts, they found the hut interiors had been totally, and eerily, preserved: the remnants of the last meal on the table, blankets on the bunks, ashes in the stove. One of Ponting's famous photographs portrayed Scott writing his diary in the Cape Evans hut in 1911 – what was found in 1955 was almost as if Scott had just walked out of the picture.

In these challenging times, the huts are icons of enduring significance. But preserving them needs help. They are amongst the oldest remnants of human habitation in Antarctica. The relevance of Antarctic science to the earth's future is becoming ever more apparent. This is where some of that science began.

After the 'heroic era' of Antarctic exploration, British activity transferred to the Antarctic Peninsula where there are a number of associated historic sites. In particular the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust looks after four historic huts: Port Lockroy, Damoy Hut, Wordie House and Detaille Island.

Port Lockroy, built in 1944, operated as a science research base until it was closed in 1962. Port Lockroy was restored in 1996 to its original condition, and now opens to visitors during the summer months acting as a museum, post office and shop. Proceeds from the post office and shop pay for its maintenance



while any surplus goes to support other historic sites in Antarctica as well as other evidence of Antarctic Heritage in the UK.

The Trust works closely with the Scott Polar Research Institute, British Antarctic Survey, the NZ Antarctic Heritage Trust (which leads on activities in that sector of the Antarctic), the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other Antarctic-related organisations to achieve the above objectives.

*The United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust depends on the support and generosity of all to make a difference. For more information, or to join, go to [www.ukaht.org](http://www.ukaht.org) or contact the Director, Rachel Morgan, The United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust, Kingcoed Farm, Usk, Monmouthshire NP1 5 IDS, UK; Tel/fax: 01291 690305; Email: [info@ukaht.org](mailto:info@ukaht.org)*



*Clockwise from far left: Port Lockroy Station from the sea; Bransfield House, Port Lockroy, with nesting gentoo penguins; some 50+ year-old state-of-the-art equipment; essential supplies from this period.*

*Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski*



# A visit to the Falklands, South Georgia and Antarctica

*As many will know, a bus-man's holiday is when one takes a vacation in the same subject area as one's day-to-day activities. Ann and Mike Pienkowski chose to do this in November 2011, but in the markedly different geographical location of Antarctica and the far South Atlantic.*

We joined *MV Plancius* early in its second full Antarctic season, to visit the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and British Antarctic Territory. Oceanwide Expeditions has a long history of sustainable tourism by small expeditions in Arctic and Antarctic areas, and is one of UKOTCF's corporate supporters. Some years ago, we had travelled on the *MV Professor Molchanov*, one of the 50-passenger Russian vessels which Oceanwide Expeditions used to charter. They replaced these with the 114-passenger *Plancius*, named after the Dutch astronomer, cartographer, geologist and vicar Petrus Plancius (1552-1622). The 89m-long ship, then named *Hr. Ms. Tydeman* (no relative, as far as we know, to UKOTCF's current Chairman), was an oceanographic research vessel of the Royal Dutch Navy from 1976 to 2004; she was purchased by Oceanwide in 2006 and completely refitted in 2009. *Plancius*'s smooth diesel-electric engines were a very clear change from the old days, with no detectable engine vibration or noise as we headed off from Ushuaia, at the southern tip of Argentina.

We were lucky with the weather for the 1½ days as we headed north-east for the Falkland Islands, with much time spent out on deck, watching the many seabirds, especially the flocks of lovely cape petrels with which we were rarely without throughout the voyage, as well as the huge giant petrels and the black-browed albatrosses. The excellent conditions also undoubtedly helped us get our sea-legs. After taking anti-sea-sickness pills for the first few days (and having enough in reserve for the entire trip!), we stopped taking these after 2 days and did not suffer from sea-sickness during the rest of the voyage – despite some impressive weather later. A recognised – and effective – way of avoiding sea-sickness is to keep eating. This has a great advantage when the meals are as good as they were on *Plancius*, but the disadvantage that remedial action is required after the trip to fit into one's clothing.

We were delighted to discover that one of the guide/lecturers was Ali Little from the Falkland Islands and UK, with whom Ann had worked previously on environmental education matters in the UKOTs. Other members of the team included a French team-leader, a British deputy, a Canadian whale expert, a British geologist, an Irish bird-man, and a Pole who led expeditions repeating the efforts of the early explorers. The Russian captain had great Arctic/Antarctic experience and was supported by Dutch officers and a crew mainly from Russia and the Philippines. The excellent international accommodation/catering team was led by an American-resident Brit, supported by a deputy from Austria (coping rather well in a ship that moved rather more energetically than his previous Danube river boats) and a head chef from Germany. Passengers were from, amongst elsewhere, UK, Netherlands, Switzerland, other European countries, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Venezuela, and a group from Taiwan, with a young interpreter who did an excellent job, most announcements and presentations being in English, but with translation into German for the substantial numbers whose language that was.



*MV Plancius in Errera Channel, Antarctic Peninsula.  
Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski*

We awoke very early on 3rd November to seabirds milling about the ship as we passed through the Woolly Gut between West Point Island and West Falkland mainland. Landings by Zodiac rigid inflatable boats were made that morning and afternoon at Carcass and Saunders Islands. At the former, those undertaking a 5-km walk were rewarded with sights of a pair of Magellanic oystercatchers brooding chicks, tussock birds searching the drying kelp on the beach for amphipods and insects, Falkland Islands flightless steamer ducks, turkey vultures, colonies of Magellanic and gentoo penguins, meadowlarks, austral thrushes, upland, ruddy-headed and kelp geese, crested ducks, and striated caracaras on nests, amongst much other wildlife – followed by a traditional offering of tea and a mountain of cakes and biscuits at the settlement. (Good to see these British traditions being maintained, by the excellent Chilean staff!) A walk from the afternoon landing at The Neck on Saunders Island took us to the largest gentoo penguin colony in the Falkland with 12,000 pairs, spread over many sub-colonies, mainly on the crests of small hills. A small colony of king penguins had one well-grown chick, and Magellanic and a macaroni penguin were also present. Up the hill took us to nesting blue-eyed shags, rockhopper penguins and black-browed albatrosses – all in warm sunshine.

The following morning found us approaching Stanley, where we took a day off from vacation, having arranged meetings with people based in Stanley. We were able to catch up on a range of issues with His Excellency Nigel Haywood, Governor of the Falkland Islands and Commissioner of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (as well as M.Sc. in butterfly conservation!). At Government House, we dropped in on the Government of SGSSI and had discussions with Darren Christie, about to move from Environmental Officer there to join Falkland Islands Government in a public information role. Current work on dealing with invasive species, international environmental conventions, research needs and conservation collaboration were some of the matters addressed. Later, we met Nick Rendall, a Falkland Islander who had been FI Government Environmental Officer for some two years. As well as putting faces to each other, having previously communicated remotely, we were able to discuss such matters as the biodiversity strategy, Ramsar sites, marine conservation, invasive species and future cooperation. Finally, we were able to visit Falklands Conversation at Jubilee Villas to meet and discuss a range of matters with their new Director, Dr James Fenton.

Back on holiday, we headed SE towards South Georgia, 2½ - 3 days away. The winds and seas remained light but clear skies (with good bird watching) alternated frequently with thick fog banks. As we crossed the Antarctic Convergence, new species such as blue petrel appeared, as well as a rare sighting of strap-toothed whales. A break from sea-watching was taken for the mandatory vacuuming of all our outer gear ready for landing in South Georgia. The government of South Georgia is very conscious of the threat of invasive species in the form of plants and seeds and quite rightly insists that international travellers vacuum their kit to remove any seeds which may drop out and germinate. Walking through disinfectant buckets before and after landings was a feature throughout the Antarctic.

A return to fog banks gave superbly atmospheric conditions as we approached the outlying Shag Rocks (240 km W of the main island of South Georgia and about 1000 km from the Falkland Islands) on the evening of 6th November. The main entertainment began with humpbacked whales and with assorted seabirds, climaxing with large flocks of South Georgia shags flying close past the ship to roosting and nesting sites on the Rocks.

The following morning found us at Elsehul, near the NW tip of the main island. We spent four days working our way along the north-eastern side of South Georgia, usually landing at two locations per day. At Elsehul, we had superb views of nesting light-mantled sooty and grey-headed albatrosses, as well as fur seals establishing their territories among the rocks and tussac grass, elephant seals, giant petrels, skuas and macaroni penguins emerging from the sea and scrambling over the slippery kelp-covered rocks. That afternoon we landed at Right Whale Bay, with large elephant seal harems and king penguin colony, with large creches of the “woolly” chicks.

The following day took us to the Bay of Isles, with a morning landing at Salisbury Plain. Jostling for space on the beach were thousands of king penguins, fur seals, elephant seals and giant petrels. At the





king penguin colony (estimated 60,000 pairs), thousands of whistling chicks and trumpeting adults crowded together, with chicks begging food and adults occasionally providing a meal of partially digested fish. The parents recognise their offspring by their calls and ignore the attempts by other chicks to stimulate a feeding response.

In the afternoon, we crossed the Bay to Prion Island. To keep numbers on the island at a non-disturbing level, different parties visited at varying times, staggered in time with zodiac cruises. Since we last visited this island, a wooden walkway has been built from the shore up the hill to the albatross and giant petrel nesting areas. Although controversial at the time, we feel that this is sensible, not just to make the walk up the peaty gully easier, but also to reduce erosion, and manage the areas of access. Despite deteriorating weather into drizzle and reduced visibility, good views were had of almost fully grown wandering albatross chicks, as well as giant petrels, brown skuas, South Georgia pintail ducks resting on the boardwalk and, particularly well seen among the shore rocks from the zodiacs, South Georgia pipits. This endemic species is the world's most southerly songbird. It is abundant on Prion Island due to the absence of rats, of benefit also to other birds.

A landing the following morning at Stromness, once a bustling hive of industry with the busiest ship-repair yard in the southern hemisphere but now a dilapidated ruin. In case of flying debris and air-borne asbestos, approach closer than 200m is forbidden. A walk up the valley gave good views of nesting Antarctic terns and of reindeer. The latter were introduced a century ago, as a source of food for the whalers. Although attractive, they are in the wrong place and have severely damaged the natural vegetation. Fortunately, after a wide public consultation, the Government of SGSSI has decided to remove the reindeer, and is investigating the best methods.

Our afternoon landing at Grytviken provided a closer look at an old whaling station, as well as the traditional drink to the memory of Sir Ernest Shackleton at his memorial in the cemetery – and excellent views of pintails and other wildlife nearby. The museum provided an insight into the hard working life and ingenious social life of the whaling men, as well as the natural environment. We took the opportunity also for chats with SGSSI Government Officer, Pat Lurcock, as well as his wife, Sarah, who is the local representative of the South Georgia Heritage Trust, which is conducting the current rat-eradication project (see *Forum News* 36: 8). That evening, these and their colleagues from the Trust and staff



A line of South Georgian shags fly back to Shag Rocks in a foggy sunset.  
Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski



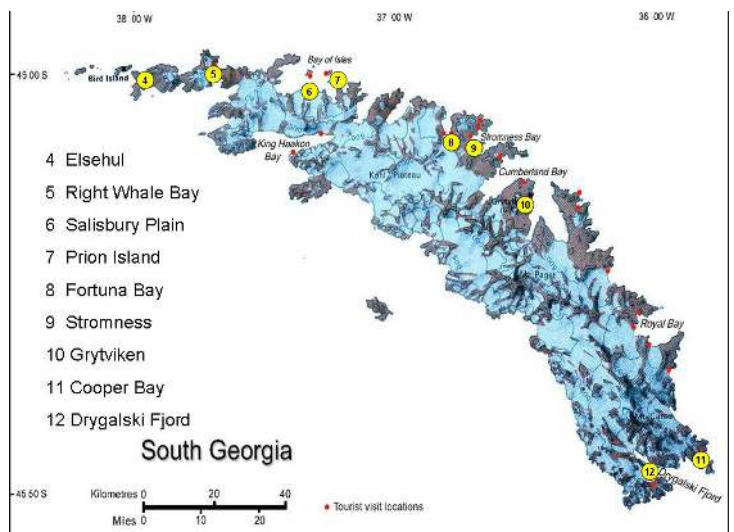
Clockwise from top left: Striated caracara brings food to its mate on the nest; Cobb's wren; Magellanic penguin; blackish oystercatcher (all on Carcass Island); incubating black-browed albatrosses, Saunders Island. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

from the British Antarctic Survey station at King Edward Point joined the ship for a barbeque dinner.

Our final morning at South Georgia started at the south-eastern tip, Cooper Bay, where chinstrap penguins, a new species for the trip, joined gentoos and macaronis. A landing and climb which took some of us to a macaroni colony amongst the tussac, was followed by a zodiac cruise. At the main beach, where there were a number of large elephant seal harems with 'beachmasters' bellowing their dominance over the bay, king penguins could be seen carefully walking between these huge seals to reach their small colony at the back of the beach. From here we went around the headland to a beach of chinstraps, and superb rafts of cape petrels on the sea.

Our South Georgia visit ended with a ship's cruise up the 14-km-long Drygalski Fjord. Its sheer sides are the oldest rocks in South Georgia, hard granite remnants of the super continent of Gondwana. Great views of the hanging glaciers also gave clear signs of the retreat of these due to global warming.

The weather began to change markedly, and we were grateful for how lucky we had been so far. Satellite information revealed that the sea-ice was still thick around the South Orkney Islands so that, rather than trying to call briefly there, we took a more northerly route towards the





South Sandwich Islands, towards Elephant Island, at the eastern end of that chain. In doing this, we were effectively doing Shackleton's famous emergency boat trip in reverse. As if in tribute to the weather conditions he endured, the wind increased to storm. A visit to the bridge to look at the weather forecast maps obtained over the internet showed a whole series of storms approaching us over several forthcoming days through the Drake Passage. Emailed messages from ships already at the Antarctic Peninsula indicated most landings as unusable due to late ice. Not looking good!

With three sea days ahead of us in the Scotia Sea, it was time for some wildlife watching, including numerous fin whales, before the sea became too rough – or, for some, downloading and sorting photos, catching up on reading, or sleep. With winds at storm force and waves reaching 10m, on the second day of this rough ride, Mike found himself lecturing on UKOT/CD conservation and UKOTCF to the passengers and some crew – in fact, a remarkably full room despite the conditions. It was the first time that he had lectured while clinging with one arm to a pillar.

Three days after leaving South Georgia, Clarence Island was spotted, indistinct and away to our port side, followed by the 240m tower of Cornwallis Island to starboard, and then Elephant Island, lit by shafts of hazy sunlight. This was home to the men of Shackleton's *Endurance* expedition for 4½ months, after shipwreck, haul over ice and a long boat trip. They lived under upturned boats on a diet of penguins while 'The Boss' and a few companions went by small boat to South Georgia for help. Having just crossed the same seas in a modern ship, we were even more impressed by their achievements in 1916.

We woke very early the next day, 14th November, to a calm sea with large icebergs and birds – and, grabbing clothes and cameras, dashed out on deck. We were in the Antarctic Sound, the first opening between the Drake Passage/Bransfield Strait and the Weddell Sea. Slightly to everyone's surprise, as we entered the Weddell Sea, the ship was able to find a way through the ice to Paulet Island, so that we may have been the first ship to land there this season – and under spring sunshine and blue sky. Paulet Island is home to nearly 100,000 breeding pairs of Adélie penguins and, even before we had put the zodiacs in the water, we could see, hear and smell the birds in the colony. Our landing was a little delayed as an iceberg headed straight towards the ship and got caught up in the anchor chain making both the anchorage and the gangway to the zodiacs unsafe. After some careful winching of the chain we were able to relocate. All along the shore, Adélie penguins were busily going about their business travelling from the sea to the colony, where birds were incubating their eggs in shallow nests of pebbles – the latter the objects of much stealing, transporting in beaks and careful positioning. There were many shags flying with nest building materials, sheathbills, and Weddell seals, including one young seal with its mother.

We then sailed carefully back through ice, which had moved position since our arrival a few hours earlier, past postcard-perfect mountain scenery and icebergs. By late afternoon we were back at Antarctic Sound

and anchored off the impressive rock escarpment of Brown Bluff, a 750m rust-coloured cliff which overlooks the penguin colony below and from which the Antarctic continent stretches south to the pole. We landed on the Antarctic continent and viewed the small colonies of gentoo penguins scattered along the length of the beach leading to the main Adélie penguin colony at the far end from the landing site. Cape petrels could be heard chattering on their nests high up on the cliffs and Wilson's storm petrels were making their way back to their rocky burrows after a day spent feeding at sea.

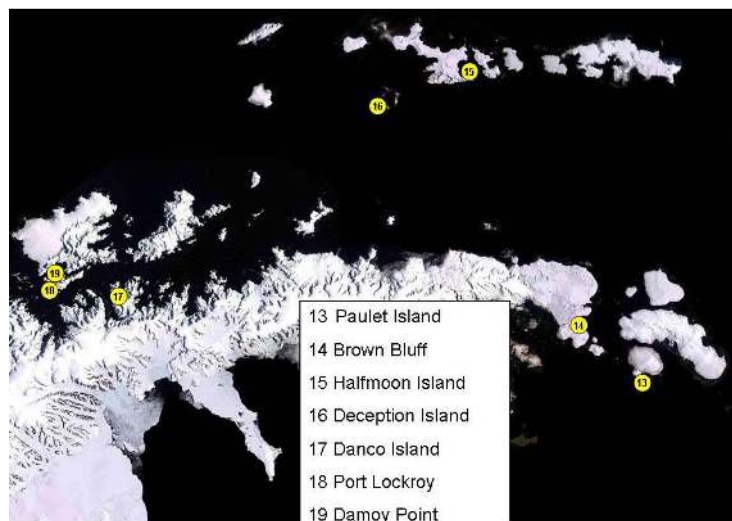
Travelling overnight across Bransfield Strait to the western South Shetland Islands, we approached Half Moon Island early in the morning of the 15th, a light snow fell on a wind-free sea. The entire island was snow-covered. We walked past several Weddell Seals, one of which was working through its incredible repertoire of sounds; this species is the most vocal of seals. We reached a superb colony of chinstrap penguins, establishing their nest-site territories and mating at the start of the breeding season, as snow cleared from patches of rock. We were amazed at these birds walking hundreds of metres up steep snow-covered slopes carrying rocks from the shore to make their nests.

About five hours of sailing took us to Neptune's Bellows, which is the spectacular entrance to the hidden flooded caldera of Deception Island. It is a very narrow passage made even narrower by a dangerous submerged rock pinnacle that has scraped the bottom of more than one unwary ship over the years. The island is about 15 km in diameter, and the inside is large enough to have had an airstrip when the British established a base during the Second World War. This, and the bases of Argentina and Chile, were abandoned when the sea inside the caldera started boiling in an eruption in the 1960s. Steam was rising from the water, which was a little warmer than freezing and had a distinct odour of sulphur. However, we did not join those of our fellow passengers who decided to swim. The ship's doctor and a zodiac were on stand-by to whisk them back to the ship. Our faithful companions, the cape petrels were feeding actively right at the water's edge, and nesting on the cliffs above. A kelp gull repeatedly plunge-dived to catch starfish. Skuas rested and bathed in a fresh-water pool. Weddell seals slept on the shore. Gentoo penguins bathed in the sea. The remnants of the whaling station and the British base, including the hangar were visible. A remarkable and peaceful place – at least at present.

The following morning was magical. At 06:00, the ship was working its way south in the Gerlache Strait, between the west coast of the Peninsula and large offshore islands, in a startlingly beautiful land- and sea-scape. A pod of rarely seen Arnoux's beaked whales briefly came near to the ship before diving under it. Following breakfast, *Plancius* was carefully manoeuvred through much ice to stop (without anchoring to avoid flocs snagging the chain) in the Errera Channel, near Danco Island. One of the great advantages of this ship is that it has enough zodiacs to carry all the passengers at the same time. At 09:00 all ten zodiacs set off for a two-hour cruise. Crab-eater seals, gentoo penguins porpoising and leaping out of the water to their colonies, snow petrels and sheathbills on and over ice, ice-bergs, perfect reflections of towering mountains, an avalanche, sparkling sun on blue ice; it all added up to the most perfect morning imaginable.

A ship's cruise through narrow channels finally led us through Neumayer Channel to Port Lockroy, another of the British bases established in the Second World War. We visited the historic base with its shop and post office, and took a short walk on neighbouring Jougla island amidst the gentoo penguins and Antarctic shags. The three Lockroy ladies along with Michael, the carpenter, joined us back on board for dinner (and a late zodiac trip back for them with ice forming on the sea). We bid farewell to Rachel Morgan, Executive Director of the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust, who was joining her team. We had enjoyed many discussions on board with Rachel, and are very pleased that UKAHT has since joined UKOTCF as an Associate (see p. 12 of this issue).

After anchoring overnight, a very early start was rewarded with fine weather and a zodiac ride through the ice to nearby Damoy. Here, we fitted snowshoes to walk to the old hut and around the gentoo colonies. This cabin was used from 1975-1990 by the British Antarctic Survey as



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a transit station. Often, ice would prevent the supplies and scientists from getting south to their research stations until late in the season. Therefore at Damoy, people and luggage would be transferred to planes for onward journeys south. These aircraft, normally De Havilland Twin-Otters, would be ski-equipped for a rather exciting landing on the glacial ridge behind the cabin.

We returned to the ship for breakfast as the Captain began to steer us towards the Drake Passage. Several of us had hoped that we would use the Gerlache Strait route in the hope of more wildlife sightings. However, we headed off towards the open sea around the south of Anvers Island, only to make a 180 degree turn as that route was blocked by ice. Therefore, we enjoyed an extra ship cruise, after all, back through the sunny Neumayer Channel and Gerlache Strait. Ann spotted the Arnoux's beaked whales again in the distance, but they headed off rapidly – possibly because of the two killer whales (orcas) which we sighted a few minutes later.

We had nearly 3 days of sailing across the Drake Channel back to Ushuaia, and the Channel lived up to its reputation. In the middle of the journey, there were gusts up to 67 knots with waves up to 12

metres in size. Mike, trying to catch up with some UKOTCF tasks, found that he had to lie on the cabin floor to work, to prevent him and the computer being thrown there. The catering staff coped well with their produce, and sometimes themselves, being tossed to the floor – and the excellent food kept coming.

Despite the two periods of rough seas, we enjoyed great weather for all the key stages, and were looked after very well. This is the second time that we have joined Oceanwide Expeditions, having a few years ago, on the *Molchanov*, done the end-of-season Atlantic Odyssey: Ushuaia – Antarctic Peninsula – South Georgia – Tristan da Cunha – St Helena – Ascension. Both were superb experiences, and we heartily recommend them. If anyone would like to enquire more about these, do please contact us, initially by email: [m@pienkowski.org](mailto:m@pienkowski.org) and [apienkowski@clara.co.uk](mailto:apienkowski@clara.co.uk). Remember that, if you decide to undertake one of [Oceanwide's trips](#) and you enquire initially through UKOTCF, conservation work by UKOTCF will benefit financially at no extra cost to yourself. Have a great and unique (all trips are different) experience and benefit conservation at the same time!



*Clockwise from upper left: light-mantled sooty albatross near nest, Elsehul, South Georgia; pair of upland geese with goslings, Carcass I., Falklands; king penguins march past elephant and fur seals, Salisbury Plain, South Georgia; cape petrels follow Plancius, Scotia Sea; Antarctic shag carries nesting material; Adélie penguins drink by eating snow; young Weddell seal takes a break from suckling (last three at Paulet I., Weddell Sea); snow petrel feeds by ice-floe; gentoo penguins porpoise towards colony (last two at Errera Channel, Antarctic Peninsula); Arnoux's beaked whales, Gerlache Strait; kelp gull eats starfish caught by plunge-diving, Deception I.; chinstrap penguins carry pebbles from the shore uphill to their nest sites, Half Moon I., South Sandwich Is.*

*Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski*

