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Moving Backwards in Conservation of the UK Overseas Territories:

Comments by UKOTCF on UK Government's June 2012 White Paper *The Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability (Cm 8374)*

Summary

The Coalition Government's strategy set out in the White Paper (www.fco.gov.uk/resources/en/pdf/publications/overseas-territories-white-paper-0612/ot-wp-0612) is to "re-invigorate the United Kingdom's relationship with its 14 Overseas Territories" (WP p 11). It "endorses and builds on" (p 11) the previous Labour Government's 1999 White Paper. It does so primarily through broad principles, rather than new policy commitments. There is an increased emphasis on the UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) mattering for all parts of government, with different departments leading on issues that are primarily their responsibility. This "commitment from across the UK Government" (p 5, Prime Minister's Foreword) will have consequences for departmental policies and budgets, including contingent liabilities. Neither of these is addressed in the White Paper. The central institutional development is the intention to set up a UK and UKOTs "Joint Ministerial Council" (JMC) which will report on the "priorities for action set out at the end of each chapter" (p 9) and invite "public and parliamentary scrutiny" (p 9). How the JMC develops – and how it relates to the work of the

UK Government's National Security Council – will be a key to how this White Paper builds on the 1999 one.

The environmental importance of the UKOTs is given welcome prominence: "The Territories are internationally recognised for their exceptionally rich and varied natural environments. They contain an estimated 90% of the biodiversity found within the UK and the Territories combined" (p 8, Executive Summary). Welcome also is the attention to management of the marine environment, notably in "the uninhabited territories". However, it is worrying that this phrase qualifies one of the four environmental bullet points in the Executive Summary: "The UK aims to be a world leader in the environmental management of its uninhabited territories" (p8). Why not be similarly ambitious for the inhabited territories?



The Silver Buttonwood zone of the Ramsar site at North, Middle & East Caicos. It is work by UKOTCF and its partners which achieved full sign-up by all UKOTs and Crown Dependencies to the Ramsar Convention. UKOTCF, with DEFRA support, reviewed actual and potential Ramsar Wetlands of International Importance in 2005 and, despite lack of continuing support from UK Government, continues to assist territories in the designation and management of sites. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski.

The greatest concern in the White Paper is that its fine words about working closely with civil society do not reflect the reality of the decline in this, despite the best efforts of the NGOs – and have been severely undermined by the FCO and DFID's recent decision that the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) will no longer be open to project

Left: St Helena Olive - the most recent species to go globally extinct on UK territory (photo: Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks). During the decades before extinction, few resources were available from UK for support of conservation in the UKOTs. For example, it took several months of lobbying from UKOTCF to persuade UK Government to assist the fare of a conservation botanist to St Helena, when other costs had been met.



Right: After lobbying by UKOTCF and others, UK Government introduced some funding support. The re-establishment of breeding seabirds, such as masked booby (photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski) on the main island of Ascension resulted from NGO work, supported in part by UK government grants, and helped also establish a local government conservation service on Ascension. The recent changes in grant arrangements by UK Government return matters to near the unsatisfactory situation of 20 years ago.



This article is drawn from a full document by UKOTCF, available at www.ukotcf.org/pdf/Consultations/WP2012comments.pdf

Most UKOTCF member and associate organisations are NGOs and/or UKOT or Crown Dependency bodies. However, one (Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew) is a Non-Departmental Public Body of UK Government. It would, of course, be inappropriate for such a body to comment in this medium on UK Government policy. RBGK is therefore not party to this article.

bids from environmental NGOs in the UKOTs and the UK. Lack of such support is already depriving the UKOTs of contributions which civil society can make to good environmental management, especially of projects involving local communities in the inhabited territories.

The White Paper's other chapters - on security, the economy, good government, local communities and links with the wider world - all have environmental implications. This is most obvious in "The Seven Principles of Public Life" (see the box on p 51), especially "Openness: Holders of public office should be as open as possible about all the decisions and actions that they take. They should give reasons for their actions and restrict information only when the wider public interest clearly demands."

Introduction

The long-awaited UK Government White Paper on the UK Overseas Territories was published in late June 2012, following a public consultation in late 2011.

In this article, UKOTCF reviews some aspects of the White Paper with implications for environmental conservation. This clearly relates particularly to Chapter 3 ("Cherishing the Environment"), but many aspects in other parts of the White Paper impact the environment and its conservation. Rather than a point-by-point critique of individual paragraphs of the White Paper, we focus initially on several main components.

Ministers stress that this White Paper builds on the 1999 White Paper. The main environmental achievements of that White Paper included the setting up of the Environment Charter process. In support of this, FCO strengthened and formalised into the Environment Fund for Overseas Territories, its small grant programme, and DFID promised to match this (although that was delayed for 5 years) – so, first we consider the new White Paper in the context of these.

The other main environmental step forward of the 1999 White Paper was the strengthened collaborative working by UK Government with NGOs, and particularly in the environmental NGOs (and some official bodies in the Territories) brought together in UKOTCF. Our second section addresses these areas.

Ministers stress the importance of scrutiny from the public in respect of reporting on progress. Therefore, third, we make an overview of the performance of FCO and other UK Government Departments since the 1999 White Paper against the Commitments it set itself in the Environment Charters. It is important to note that this period embraces both about a decade under the previous Administration and about two years under the present Government.

Ministers underline also the importance of the preceding public consultation in determining the priorities set in this White Paper. Therefore, in the fourth section, we review which of the 31 reasoned recommendations made by UKOTCF, on the basis of interactions with its constituent partners, especially in the UKOTs, have been addressed in the White Paper.

Finally, we address more briefly a range of other points before making some final reflections.

The Environment Charters and UK Government support for environmental work in the UKOTs

Despite the very welcome recognition of the environmental importance of the UKOTs in this White Paper, UKOTCF has a number of concerns, many of which relate to the fact that the Environment Charters, signed with such fanfare and commitment in the wake of the 1999 White Paper and forming the foundation of environmental policy since then, are not mentioned even once in this White Paper. UKOTCF and many of its partners in UKOTs and Britain believe that the Environment Charters remain a central element of the relationship between HMG and the UKOTs, and that the backward step of simply wishing them away is not an option.

As expressed clearly in both the 1999 and 2012 White Papers, the UK Government has devolved environmental issues to the UKOT governments. The UK, however, is bound by Article 4 of the 1972 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to account for the UKOTs in respect of treaty obligations. The 1999 White Paper acknowledged that there are environmental obligations that neither the UK nor the

UKOTs had lived up to, and therefore the 1999 White Paper stipulated that the Environment Charters were to be negotiated to set out who is responsible for complying with which obligations. Accordingly, the Charters are the formal mechanism by which the UK complies with its international treaty obligations, and it continues to be bound by them, as do the UKOTs whose leaders signed them. This is laid out in detail in two Special Reports of the Bermuda Ombudsman, as part of her assessment of Bermuda's obligations to implement its Charter commitments specifically in relation to environmental impact assessments and UKOTCF strongly endorses her position (see *Special Report* June 18, 2012 and *Today's Choices – Tomorrow's Costs* February 10, 2012 www.ombudsman.bm; and p 12 of this issue of *Forum News*). If the Charters do not constitute the mechanism by which the UK implements Article 4 of CBD, what is the mechanism for UK Government to meet its international obligations?

In his introduction to the 2012 White Paper, the Foreign Secretary notes that it builds on the 1999 White Paper, and once again concedes that there are environmental obligations that are not being lived up to: "It [the 2012 White Paper] is also a strategy of re-evaluation. *We have not in the past devoted enough attention to the vast and pristine environments in the lands and seas of our Territories. We are stewards of these assets for future generations.*" (p 5, italics added). Given that this is the second time that a UK White Paper has admitted that the UK's environmental programmes for the UKOTs are not achieving the desired results, one would expect in this White Paper a detailed and concrete programme for how this problem will be addressed.

So let us review the goals and the mechanisms for achieving them as laid out in the 2012 White Paper:

Goals: The paper introduces a new distinction in environmental management between the uninhabited UKOTs and the inhabited ones. The priorities for action (p 46) are:

- manage terrestrial and marine natural resources sustainably and address challenges of climate change, including by putting environmental considerations at the heart of all decision-making.
- oversee exemplary environmental management of the uninhabited Territories.
- ensure compliance with the requirements of relevant multilateral environmental agreements.
- strengthen co-operation with the Non- Governmental and scientific communities.

Most space in the environment chapter is devoted to the uninhabited UKOTs. The goal for them of 'exemplary environmental management' is sadly not offered for the inhabited UKOTs.

Mechanisms for environmental management to be provided by the UK Government to support delivery include (pp 40, 43):

1. The FCO and DFID administer the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP).
2. DEFRA, with DFID, FCO and JNCC, are responsible for the Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy.
3. DEFRA leads the Darwin Initiative and will also lead on biodiversity and climate change adaptation and through its Agencies will continue to provide technical and policy advice.
4. DFID will 'continue to engage with the OTs on wider climate, environment and natural resource issues.'
5. Dept for Energy and Climate Change will look to increase their support to UKOTs in areas of climate change collaboration and provide support on energy-related issues.
6. In the EU, the UK Government will try to ensure that UKOTs' environmental policy and funding needs are taken into account
7. The UK Government will seek to secure funding from other sources to assist UKOTs and continue to represent OT interests in the context of MEAs.

The mechanisms listed are largely aspirational and seem to step backwards from the more robust specific commitments set out in the 2001 Charters.

With regard to the first mechanism, initially the Environment Fund for Overseas Territories and later the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP), FCO and DFID have recently decided that OTEP will no longer be open to project bids from environmental NGOs, or indeed anyone under an open process. The White Paper gives the impression



Some of the stake-holders participating in one of the workshops facilitated by UKOTCF in developing, in Turks & Caicos, their strategy to implement the Environment Charter; providing the pilot model for UKOTs. UKOTCF helped several other UKOTs, as well as co-ordinating the monitoring of progress in implementation across the UKOTs. Conservationists in the UKOTs value the Charters as aids to effective conservation, and regret that current UK Government officials have abandoned their support for this important measure, originally drafted by FCO, developing a proposal to Ministers by UKOTCF. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

that OTEP is alive and well, and one of the key contributions from the UK towards environmental management in the UKOTs, but in fact we understand that it is being at best restructured, and more likely eliminated – or, at most, reduced to a programme whereby UK Government bodies tell UKOTs what they need. It certainly will not allow NGO bodies or UKOT government departments, both of which tend to have more local knowledge, to take the lead.

With regard to the second mechanism, we now understand that the interdepartmental group which developed the “Biodiversity Strategy” (actually a UK Government interdepartmental agreement, rather than a strategy in its usual sense – see *Forum News* 37: 9-11 & 38: 4; www.ukotcf.org/forumNews/index.htm) is unlikely to meet in future, so that mechanism, too, appears to be being abandoned.

This leaves the third mechanism, the Darwin Initiative programme, as the only actual funding mechanism on the list, and that, too, is under pressure to minimise support for the Overseas Territories. Only two annual rounds after DEFRA belatedly gave welcome emphasis in this programme, DFID has joined in the funding but put great pressure on DEFRA to reduce funding to UKOT projects (see below).

The issue of funding for conservation work in the UKOTs is critically important because of the basic problem that NGOs and other bodies in the UKOTs are not eligible for most international funds because they are considered to be British, and the UK Government is not stepping in to fill that gap. OTEP was the only funding stream dedicated to the UKOTs and, despite what the White Paper says, it is no longer available to bids from the UKOTs or from UK conservation NGOs working with UKOT bodies. There are problems for UKOTs accessing the Darwin Initiative as well: DFID is now funding part of the Darwin Initiative, but has its own target to contribute 0.7% of GDP to poverty alleviation – thereby causing it to try to steer the Darwin Initiative funding away from UKOTs, because grants there do not fall within this target, as defined under international agreement.

The rest of the support listed in the White Paper is hypothetical – the language ‘continue to engage’, ‘look to increase’, ‘try to secure’ and ‘seek to secure’ conveys a frightening lack of certainty to the UKOTs.

In a recent interview with VSB News in Bermuda, UK Minister for UKOTs Henry Bellingham stated that the UK expects the UKOTs “to look after the environment in the same way that we do in the UK.” In fact, the Environment Charters were signed as the mechanisms to effect the respective actions by the UK and UKOTs to achieve this. They are highly valued in the UKOTs and by NGOs and others supporting conservation. We urge UK Government to pay more regard to these important instruments which its officials drafted and to which it committed.

The White Paper is establishing a new distinction in UK’s approach as between the inhabited and uninhabited UKOTs. We perceive a strengthened commitment to management of the uninhabited UKOTs, and given their huge environmental value, we certainly applaud this (having previously criticised the legal fiction that these had separate governments from that of UK – in reality, a group of FCO officials in each case). However, at the same time, we cannot help perceiving that this is

accompanied by a desire to step back from responsibility for the inhabited UKOTs. The 1999 White Paper and the subsequent Environment Charters took a realistic look at what would really be needed to enable local UKOT governments to care for their environmental resources, and developed a complex programme of mutual commitments that would enable that to happen. Given that the UK’s obligations under the CBD require this, and that nothing has been proposed since then that would come close to meeting those obligations, we urge HMG to reaffirm its commitment to the Environment Charters.

The role of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

The UK Government has long recognised the great importance of NGOs in environmental conservation, and the 2012 White Paper lists strengthening cooperation with NGOs as one of its four goals for the UKOTs. Also, on p 16, it adds “We want to see greater engagement between the UK and the Territories. We want to foster links between individuals, companies and Non-Governmental Organisations with their counterparts in the Territories.” Locally-based NGOs serve vital functions in conservation. They educate local people and represent their concerns. They are aware of local issues and work at the grass roots level to address them. They carry out vital environmental programmes, at very low cost to all concerned. And when it happens that a local government makes a decision which would have severe environmental consequences, such as approving tourism development which would damage critical environments, they are the only force that can stand up for the environment.

This last point is really critical. The current UK Government strategy for conservation in the inhabited UKOTs relies almost entirely on the governments of the UKOTs. This assumes that the UKOT Governments are using best practice in their planning and decision-making procedures. The 1999 White Paper and the Charters recognise the importance of this by committing the UKOT Governments to (1) making their decisions in an open and consultative manner, (2) requiring Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) before making decisions on high-impact development, and (3) requiring that a public consultation be a part of the EIA process. But if a local government decides not to follow this best practice, and makes a high-impact decision without environmental assessment or public consultation, the UK Government no longer interferes; the only bodies who try to ensure that environmental concerns are taken into account are local NGOs.

A recent high-profile case in Bermuda illustrates this point clearly. In the case of Tuckers Point, the Bermuda Government decided that it was going to grant a Special Development Order which would allow tourism development on some of the most sensitive and environmentally valuable areas of Bermuda. Local NGOs heard rumours that this was in the pipeline and requested information from officials about it. Far from carrying out public consultation, these requests for information were either ignored or the potential SDO was outright denied until the granting of the SDO was announced as a *fait accompli*. Huge mobilisation by the Bermuda public, organised by local NGOs, resulted eventually in some of the most egregious elements of the SDO being modified. But even then there was no public consultation on the changes that were to be made.

The change in approach by UK Government overlooks also the high efficiencies and value-for-money of NGO contributions. For many years, the UK Government worked closely with local NGOs through the officers of UKOTCF, a body made up of member organisations in the UKOTs and in Britain (as well as the Crown Dependencies). UK officials and UKOTCF member organisations, together with UK representatives of UKOT governments, met regularly so that the UK officials could be made aware of issues of concern in the UKOTs, and the Forum (and through them their member organisations) could be kept up to date on policies, programmes and proposals from the UK Government. One of UKOTCF’s key roles is to keep its member organisations in contact with each other and the UK Government. It does this in three ways: 1) regional working groups (Wider Caribbean Working Group, Southern Oceans Working Group, Europe Territories Working Group) meet quarterly to discuss the issues of concern to members and to share information and resources; 2) every three years the Forum, with support from UK Government, has held conferences at which local NGOs and governmental conservation bodies could share resources and information; and 3) through its regular newsletters and e-updates, the concerns as well as the successes of conservation in the UKOTs are disseminated.

However, over the last few years, this mutually productive partnership between the UK Government and UKOTCF member bodies has been gradually phased out by officials, without consultation. We are concerned that this is part of a general movement away from support of local NGOs and moving towards conservation policy which is driven by UK officials rather than being demand-led from the UKOTs. The meetings between UK officials and UKOTCF have been dropped and officials have indicated that support for the next three-yearly conference will not be forthcoming. 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.” So the decision to drop funding for these is another way that the obligations of the Environment Charters are being abrogated.

In 2005, FCO dropped virtually all its environmental posts, claiming that other government departments would pick up this role for the UKOTs, but in practice little of this happened effectively. One might imagine that, with reduced UK Governmental capacity, the government would seek to fill the gap by encouraging work by NGOs and their umbrella body, UKOTCF, which had worked in partnership with government for two decades. However, the reverse was true from the middle of the first decade of the millennium. References to the ‘Big Society’ gave hope that the new Coalition Government would reverse this negative trend. In practice, however, the decline in UK Government’s interest in working with UKOTCF and its member bodies continued and possibly accelerated. It may be that there is a mis-match between Ministers’ intentions and the actual actions of their Departments.

As we have felt in recent years that the UK Government was distancing itself from locally based NGOs and the commitments of the Environment Charters to support them, we had a moment of revelation when DEFRA released its “United Kingdom Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy” in 2009. Although this document makes little reference to the Charters, Annex 3 laid out the UK commitments under the Charters. These were word-for-word identical to the language of the Charters except that one commitment was simply omitted: after the original language “Use UK, regional and local expertise to give advice and improved knowledge of technical and scientific issues,” the “Strategy” simply dropped the second part of that commitment which reads “This includes regular consultation with interested non-governmental organisations and networks.” It is possible that this was inadvertent, but it certainly supports our sense that regular consultation with NGOs is no longer an object for UK officials.

Indeed, in mid-2012, an internal UK Government document became available, under a Freedom of Information request on another topic. This revealed that the Overseas Territories Directorate of FCO had been trying to undermine UKOTCF since at least 2009, while simultaneously denying to UKOTCF any dissatisfaction with it – and despite the fact that UKOTCF is the body that a range of UKOT and other NGOs select to interact for them with UK Government and others.

Progress since the 1999 White Paper

A direct output of the 1999 White Paper process was the set of Environment Charters negotiated and signed between UK Government and the Governments of UKOTs. (These excluded the British Antarctic Territory, where territorial sovereignty is held in abeyance by the Antarctic Treaty 1959, the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas, and Gibraltar. Gibraltar later issued its own Environment Charter with similar provisions.) At the request of UK Government and the UKOTs, UKOTCF collated information from all parties in 2006-7 and 2009 to monitor progress on the commitments (www.ukotcf.org/pdf/charters/INDICATORS0707e.pdf www.ukotcf.org/pdf/charters/indicatorsrev0912.pdf). Bodies in UKOTs provided a good deal of progress on their work on the commitments, and were generally commendably open as to the nature of this. However, despite initiating the work and keeping good records on its fulfilling the commitments until at least 2003, UK Government felt unable to supply information on its own work in this regard at the time of these reviews.

This was also despite FCO’s responses, in early 2007, to the Inquiry on *Trade, Development and Environment: the role of the FCO* by the House of Commons Select Committee on Environmental Audit (EAC, Report 23 May 2007). When preparing supplementary evidence to address questions put to their Minister by the Committee, FCO officials asked UKOTCF about progress on its review on implementation of the Charters.

Cahow (Bermuda petrel) in its underground nest-burrow, entered and left only at night. Thought to have been exterminated by human activities centuries earlier; the tiny number



of pairs rediscovered 60 years ago have been carefully nurtured now to over 100 pairs - in a classic case of collaboration between NGO and governmental conservationists. Most successful recovery programmes have been operated or initiated by NGOs. Examples include programmes for the blue iguana in Cayman (see p 10), the restorations on Ascension (see p 1) and currently at South Georgia (see Forum News 36: 8). These work best when UK Government offers support. However, the latter’s abandoning of the only earmarked grant programme and its developing resistance to working in collaboration with NGOs severely damage prospects.

Subsequently, the FCO Minister’s supplementary memorandum to the House of Commons EAC stated (with a slightly optimistic interpretation of UKOTCF’s estimate of the timescale): “Your Committee also asked about an assessment of the Overseas Territories Environment Charters. The UKOTCF is currently gathering information on the progress in implementing the Environment Charter Commitments for each Territory (or the equivalent for those Territories without Charters). The Forum intends to publish a progress report towards the middle of this year. The FCO will use that information, in consultation with Whitehall colleagues and the governments of the Overseas Territories, to carry out a review of the Environment Charters which have now been in place for five years.”

In this context, UKOTCF put a great deal of further effort into helping and encouraging UKOTs to provide information, stressing that it was not necessary for each to answer all the questions. However, it was difficult simply to cut out some areas of the form, because of the structure of the Charters and the fact that different territories had made progress at different rates in different areas. For efficiency of collation and reporting, those territories without Charters were also invited to participate in the exercise. The information gathering forms had been designed so that, after the initial hard work in this first cycle of reporting, any subsequent updating report will not require as much effort.

UKOTCF is very pleased to note that, of the 21 entities that constitute the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies, responses were received from or on behalf of 19. In line with the Environment Charters themselves, responses were welcomed from both governmental and non-governmental bodies and, in several cases, the responses were integrated. UKOTCF did not receive information from HMG in respect of the UK Commitments in the Environment Charters, nor from those UKOTs which are directly administered by UK Government: British Indian Ocean Territory, British Antarctic Territory, and the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas. The first of these has an Environment Charter, and the other two do not. A few months later, FCO reported that, although it had no problem in principle with the indicators, HMG did not have the resources to report on the implementation of its own Commitments. UKOTCF was surprised by this, because HMG had drafted the Environment Charters, had been one of those originally asking UKOTCF to develop a report on their implementation, had reported nothing wrong with the draft indicators published in early 2006, and had (around the same time as indicating that it could not find the time to respond) reported to Parliament that it was awaiting UKOTCF’s report. UKOTCF (despite its much smaller resources) continued to collate any available information on implementation of the Charters, and updated its review in 2009.

In June 2008, The House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee’s report on Overseas Territories concluded:

“295. We agree with the Environmental Audit Committee that the Government does not appear to have carried out any kind of strategic assessment of Overseas Territories’ funding requirements for conservation and ecosystem management. We conclude that given the vulnerability of Overseas Territories’ species and ecosystems, this lack of action by the Government is highly negligent. The environmental funding currently being provided by the UK to the Overseas Territories appears grossly

inadequate and we recommend that it should be increased. While DEFRA is the lead Whitehall department responsible for environmental issues, the FCO cannot abdicate responsibility for setting levels of funding given its knowledge of Overseas Territories' capacity and resources. The FCO must work with other government departments to press for a proper assessment of current needs and the level of the current funding gap and then ensure increased funding by the Government through DEFRA, DFID or other government departments is targeted appropriately."

In October 2008, the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee concluded, in its report on Halting Biodiversity Loss:

"46. The Government has a clear moral and legal duty to help protect the biodiversity of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, where it is the eleventh hour for many species. We are extremely concerned that recommendations that we have made in the past that would have helped to protect the environment of the Overseas Territories have been ignored. The Government must:








- adopt a truly joined-up approach to environmental protection the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies, by bringing together all relevant departments including the FCO, MoJ, DfID, Defra, DCMS and MoD, and the governments of the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies;
- make better use of the Inter-Departmental Group on biodiversity to provide more oversight and support for the development and





implementation of effective environmental protection policy in the UKOTs, and expand the Group to include other relevant departments;

- have Defra assume joint responsibility for the UKOTs, and reflect this in future spending settlements; and
- address the dire lack of funds and information for environmental protection in the UKOTs. An ecosystem assessment should be conducted in partnership with each UKOT in order to provide the baseline environmental data required and to outline the effective response options needed to halt biodiversity loss.

47. With leadership, and a relatively small sum of money, the incredible biodiversity found in our overseas territories can be safeguarded into the future. One of the most important contributions that the Government could make to slowing the catastrophic global biodiversity loss currently occurring would be to accept its responsibilities and to provide more support for the UK Overseas Territories in this area."

Therefore, we have tried to give below an overview of some main points of progress or otherwise in relation to UK Government's Commitments under its Environment Charters. Clearly, given the non-participation by UK Government officials, this cannot be comprehensive. UK Government bodies like "milestones". Therefore, we have illustrated generally positive progress by UK Government with a milestone and negative or no movement by a tombstone.

| | The government of the UK will: | Progress | Milestones/ tombstones on UK Govt performance |
|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Help build capacity to support and implement integrated environmental management which is consistent with the Territories' own plans for sustainable development. | FCO supported UKOTCF facilitating UKOT Governments, with NGOs, in an open process developing strategies to implement the Environment Charters (as required by the Charters). However, FCO lost interest and stopped this support after the first few. After several years, it seems that FCO has restarted, in a few UKOTs, a similar process, but not openly and without reference to the Environment Charters, thereby re-inventing the wheel. |  |
| 2. | Assist the Territories in reviewing and updating environmental legislation. | Some work has been done in certain territories with UKG support. |  |
| 3. | Facilitate the extension of the UK's ratification of Multilateral Environmental Agreements of benefit to the Territories and which each Territory has the capacity to implement (and a desire to adopt). | A great deal of work was done by UKOTCF (with encouragement from FCO) in the 1990s in securing a full sign-up to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands. However, in recent years, UK Government departments have become extra hurdles to overcome, rather than helpful agencies, for UKOTs and Crown Dependencies seeking to join UK's ratification of e.g. the Convention on Biological Diversity, recently delaying the process for 1½ years from the initial, fully supported and justified request in one case. |  |
| 4. | Keep the Territories informed regarding new developments in relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements and invite the Territories to participate where appropriate in the UK's delegation to international environmental negotiations and conferences. | UKOTCF initiated this with UKG in the 1990s, initially with both NGO & Government involvement from the UKOTs. After a gap, UKG has restarted this, but with only UKOT Government involvement, not NGOs. |  |
| 5. | Help each Territory to ensure it has the legislation, institutional capacity and mechanisms it needs to meet international obligations. | A good positive example was the Defra-supported review by UKOTCF of actual and potential Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, in 2005. However, since then, helping Territories take this forward has been left largely to UKOTCF, without UKG support. See also Commitment 3 re CBD. |  |
| 6. | Promote better cooperation and the sharing of experience and expertise between and among the Overseas Territories and with other small island states and communities which face similar environmental problems. | The most effective means of going this has been via the working conferences organised by UKOTCF, with UKG support, since 2000. In 2011, after 2 years of prevarication since the last conference in 2009, UKG announced that it would no longer support the conferences. |  |
| 7. | Use UK, regional and local expertise to give advice and improve knowledge of technical and scientific issues. This includes regular consultation with interested non-governmental organisations and networks. | FCO ended, without consultation, almost all its environmental posts (which dealt mainly with UKOTs) in 2005. FCO unilaterally, and without consultation, terminated the twice-yearly joint meetings between UKG departments and NGOs, jointly chaired by UKOTCF and FCO. This occurred over 2007-9, but was hidden at first because FCO claimed that it wished to continue the meetings but that practical considerations kept intervening. In 2009, in relation to its "Strategy" of that year, UKG set up an Inter-Departmental Group for Biodiversity (and promoted it as a one-stop shop, which never actually worked); FCO indicated in 2012 that this was now redundant and there were no plans for the group to meet again. |  |

| | The government of the UK will: | Progress | Milestones/ tombstones on UK Govt performance |
|-----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 8. | Use the existing Environment Fund for the Overseas Territories, and promote access to other sources of public funding, for projects of lasting benefit to the Territories' environment. | Only a year after drafting and signing this Commitment, FCO absent-mindedly terminated EFOT. After much effort by UKOTCF and UKOTs, an interim grant fund was put in place a year later, and subsequently this was combined with matching funding (5 years later than promised) from DFID, to create OTEP. OTEP was closed as a grant-fund allowing open process and application from users in 2011. It is perhaps indicative of UK Government's delivery of its commitments that it has killed off the means of fulfilling this long-term commitment twice in a decade. The widening of the Darwin Initiative to include UKOT focus in 2009 is already threatened by 2012. |  |
| 9. | Help each of the Territories identify further funding partners for environmental projects, such as donors, the private sector or non-governmental organisations. | UKOTCF had undertaken this role for many years and welcomed inclusion of this Commitment in the Environment Charters. For some years after the Charters, UKOTCF pressed UKG to deliver this Commitment. Eventually, in 2008, UKG commissioned its agency JNCC to fulfil this role (although it later transpired that this was in only a very limited range of potential funders). JNCC opted to do this without consulting NGO partners, and UKOTCF ended its online assistance in this area, to avoid duplication. Within 3 years, JNCC ended this service, so that, after much loss of momentum, UKOTCF is trying to restart its assistance to UKOTs (NGOs and governments) in this regard, but sadly without UKG assistance. |  |
| 10. | Recognise the diversity of the challenges facing Overseas Territories in very different socio-economic and geographical situations. | The White Paper's clear indications, confirmed by discussions with FCO officials, of its declining interest in inhabited UKOTs is a very negative step. |  |
| 11. | Abide by the principles set out in the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development and work towards meeting International Development Targets on the environment. | A globally unique species (and, indeed, genus), the St Helena Olive, went extinct on British territory in 2003. |  |

UK Government treatment of UKOTCF recommendations in the prior consultation

UK Government held a consultation in later 2011, prior to preparing the White Paper. UKOTCF, on the basis of its interactions with its member organisations and other partner bodies, especially in the UKOTs, supplied a reasoned set of recommendations in December 2011. A full copy was made available on line (www.ukotcf.org/pdf/Consultations/submission.pdf), and is still available. The 31 main recommendations were brought together in a summary (published in *Forum News* 39: 1-2).

In summary, only 1 (item a) of UKOTCF 31 recommendations has been taken up, and this was generally accepted already. Of the others, 24 have clearly not been acted upon or even moved in a negative direction (b-e, g-k, m, o, p, r-u, w, y, z, aa-ae). For the remaining 6 (f, l, n, q, v, x), the wording is so vague and lacking in specific commitments and measurable targets make clear conclusions difficult, and so can hardly be considered supportive.

Some other points

Maps and geography

There are some problems with some maps in the White Paper. For example, it appears to include copies of the maps from the first (rather than the corrected) edition of the 1999 White Paper. As a consequence, the map for Anguilla on page 90 again includes French and Netherlands territory in St Martin and St Barthélemy as British (as extensions to Anguilla). In 1999, FCO apologised to the French and Netherlands Governments for doing this and corrected the maps in the reprinted edition.

There are oddities too on the map of all UK Overseas Territories on p 10. This refers to the World Heritage Site (WHS) in Tristan da Cunha as only Gough Island, rather than Gough and Inaccessible Islands. It refers also to the WHS at Henderson Island, Pitcairn Islands, but not to the WHS in Bermuda.

It seems that some attention needs to be paid in FCO both to corporate memory and mapping skills.

Constitutional Relationships

The White Paper brings together some useful words on constitutional relationships. Such as "The UK, the Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies form one undivided Realm, which is distinct from the other States of which Her Majesty The Queen is monarch. Each Territory has its own Constitution and its own Government and has its own local laws. As a matter of constitutional law the UK Parliament has unlimited power to legislate for the Territories." The document also notes the status of the Crown Dependencies. It is a pity that the opportunity was not taken to draw them more into this document which, although led by FCO (which does not lead for the Crown Dependencies), makes a point that all government departments are partners in it. For UKOTCF's part, its work includes Crown Dependencies at their request, given the many parallels with UKOTs.

It is encouraging also that the White Paper recognises the reality that Tristan da Cunha, Ascension and St Helena are separate entities with separate governance systems and different situations, warranting separate chapters, despite FCO's treating them (against the advice of some of its constitutional advisers) as one territory – thereby creating unnecessary problems in sourcing some external grants for environmental (and other) work.

It is also unfortunate, including for environmental conservation reasons, that the White Paper maintains the legal fiction that Ascension has no permanent population – and even that other legal fiction that the evicted inhabitants of BIOT were "contract workers", rather than residents.

The White Paper recalls also (p 13) that "The reasonable assistance needs of the Territories are a first call on the UK's international development budget." This is not normally shouted loudly by DFID.

Shipwreck at Tristan da Cunha, and future disaster-handling arrangements by UK Government here and for other UKOTs

The White Paper notes (at p 71): "On 16 March 2011 the bulk carrier *MS Oliva* ran aground on Nightingale Island, Tristan da Cunha. Although no lives were lost, the vessel quickly broke up, releasing heavy fuel oil and its soya bean cargo. Nightingale is the home of internationally protected bird species, nearby Inaccessible Island is a World Heritage Site and both

form part of the lobster fishing grounds on which the Territory depends. Faced with potential economic and ecological disaster the islanders showed exceptional resilience and cohesion as they worked together with professional teams in dealing with the aftermath. Tristan islanders were involved in rescuing and sheltering the ship's crew and threw themselves into salvage efforts, the environmental clean-up operation and attempts to rehabilitate nearly 4000 oiled penguins rescued from the scene."

UKOTCF fully shares in commending the islanders for their work. However, it must note the difficulty that it and other bodies have had in extracting any information from UK Government on the action that it is taking against the ship-owners and the captain (who it will not even identify), what actions it is taking to monitor the impacts on wildlife or fisheries (the mainstay of Tristan's economy), or the lessons that it has learnt and actions to be taken to ensure more rapid and effective assistance to Tristan (and other UKOTs) for any future disasters.

World Heritage Sites

On p 75, the White Paper notes that "The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is responsible for the UK's compliance with the UNESCO World Heritage Convention, which the UK ratified in 1984. The UK currently has 25 World Heritage Sites: an additional three are in Overseas Territories: the Town of St George and related fortifications in Bermuda; Gough and Inaccessible Islands (Tristan da Cunha); and Henderson Island (Pitcairn).

"Every six years, the signatories to the Convention are invited to submit a report to UNESCO covering the state of conservation of the World Heritage properties located on its territories. The Department submits these on behalf of world heritage sites in the Overseas Territories and represents them at meetings of the World Heritage Committee.

"The Department is also responsible for nominating sites for world heritage status. Governments put forward new sites from a Tentative List of Future Nominations. Each Tentative List is expected to last for approximately ten years. Following a public consultation and review process, the Department announced the new UK Tentative List in March 2011. There were eleven sites on the list, three of them in Overseas Territories:

- Gorham's Cave Complex, Gibraltar – This complex is of international importance because of the long sequence of occupation and the evidence for the end of Neanderthal humans, and the arrival of modern humans.
- The Island of St Helena – This site has a high number of endemic species and genera and a range of habitats, from cloud forest to desert, representing a biome of great age which exists nowhere else on earth.
- Turks and Caicos Islands – The islands have a high number of endemic species and others of international importance, partially dependent on the conditions created by the oldest established salt-pan development in the Caribbean.

"The Expert Panel that reviewed the List also suggested that the Fountain Cavern in Anguilla could be considered for the UK Tentative List in the future as part of a possible transnational nomination."

The White Paper does not, however, report that UK Government officials put huge and improper pressure on bodies in the UKOTs to withdraw their nominations for sites in the UKOTs. This took place before, during



and even after the recommendations of the Expert Panel had been made.

Reflections

There are some very good words in this White Paper. However, the words do not seem to be a close match to reality.

On p 86, the Conclusion states:

"We have set out in this Paper the Coalition Government's overall approach to the UK's Overseas Territories. The Government is determined to live up to its responsibilities towards all the Territories. We have demonstrated our commitment through our actions over the past two years..."

"We have made good progress, but much remains to be done."

"The Government is both ambitious and optimistic for the future of our Territories. We believe the UK is important to the future of the Territories and that the Territories are an important part of the future of the UK."

UKOTCF's analysis above certainly raises questions about the degree of progress, and identifies some serious backward steps. The claim that: "We have demonstrated our commitment through our actions over the past two years" may be true, but perhaps not always in the way that the drafter probably intended to indicate.

It is worth quoting the words of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs in his Foreword (p 6; emphasis added):

"The Coalition Government has a vision for the Territories: of flourishing communities, proudly retaining aspects of their British identity and creating new opportunities for young and future generations; of natural environments protected and managed to the highest international standards.

"We and Territory Governments share significant challenges: building more diverse and resilient economies; cutting public sector deficits; regulating finance businesses effectively; and protecting biodiversity and natural resources. In many respects the Territories are more vulnerable than the UK. ***We have a broad responsibility to support them*** and to ensure their security and good governance.

"The strategy set out in ***this White Paper*** is designed to meet these challenges and deliver the vision. It is a strategy of re-engagement. It ***builds on the 1999 White Paper*** (Partnership for Progress and Prosperity).

"It is also a strategy of re-evaluation. ***We have not in the past devoted enough attention to the vast and pristine environments in the lands and seas of our Territories. We are stewards of these assets for future generations.***

"And it doesn't stop with Government. ***The strategy aims to support coalitions and partnerships across and between the private sector, professional bodies and civil society in the UK and in the Territories. I particularly welcome the growing partnerships between the Territories and local authorities and with the NGO community on environmental and other issues.***

"***The White Paper*** is broad ranging, but does not pretend to be comprehensive. It ***focuses on*** the security of the Territories, their economic development and ***their natural environment***. It looks at how we can foster high standards of governance and build strong communities. It promotes the development of wider partnerships for the Territories.

"***The Government has taken care to consult widely in preparing this White Paper.*** Our dialogue with Territory Governments and the international ***public consultation*** we ran from September 2011 to January 2012 have ***helped us to identify priorities.***

"***We have set these priorities out clearly in the Paper.*** This is an

UKOTCF and its partners have pioneered much work on environmental education in UKOTs, both in school curricula (see p13) and via the development of interpreted trails and other means, many later copied elsewhere. Both types of education have proven important in conserving wildlife sites and providing a base for local economic activity. The capacity for such work has already suffered by UK Government's reneging on its Environment Charter Commitments. In the picture, high-school students test one of UKOTCF's trails. Photo: Ann Pienkowski.

ambitious and broad agenda. ***The test of the commitment of all concerned will be delivery against this agenda.*** We plan to upgrade engagement between UK Ministers and Territory Governments into a Joint Ministerial Council tasked with monitoring and driving forward work to realise our vision.

“We will report regularly on progress and welcome scrutiny from the public and parliaments.”

In the Introduction to the environment chapter (p 39), Richard Benyon, Minister for the Natural Environment and Fisheries, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, says:

“The United Kingdom’s Overseas Territories play host to some of our most precious environmental assets, many of which would be irreplaceable if lost. We recognise that environmental challenges are increasingly threatening the future security and safety of our Territories and in particular the people and the biodiversity that they support. We are committed to working in partnership - across government, with the Territories themselves, and with non-government organisations – using funding mechanisms such as the Darwin Initiative, to ensure that these highly valuable natural resources are protected for the future.”

In meetings with Ministers, we find their attitudes positive, supporting and apparently sincere. Their words are similarly warm and positive here also – but they seem to be based on a picture of the actual situation and of the actions of their officials which bear little relation to reality. We can only suppose that serious inaccuracies occur in the information that they receive.

For example, and as indicated in the analysis above:

Whilst it is claimed that the “White Paper ... builds on the 1999 White Paper”, what was one of the most important environmental initiatives emerging from that process, the Environment Charters, receives not a single mention in the 2012 White Paper. When asked on 5th July 2012 by VSB Television in Bermuda to comment on the important adjudication by the Bermuda Ombudsman that the Environment Charters make legally binding commitments, the FCO Minister of State said “I don’t really want to talk about the previous White Paper.” To be fair to the Minister, he was probably not briefed. In a meeting on 26th June, UKOTCF had discovered that the FCO Director of Overseas Territories and his environmental officer were unaware of the Bermuda Ombudsman’s report, even though this had been the most prominent environmental issue in Bermuda for several months, and one of the highest profile governance issues there also.

Both Mr Hague and Mr Benyon stress their commitment to support partnerships with the NGO community on environmental and other issues, and Mr Hague refers to it growing. As our analysis above demonstrates, this has declined over several years, due to the unilateral decision of officials and despite the best efforts of NGOs.

Mr Benyon stresses also the commitment to support NGOs in environmental conservation work for the UKOTs, using funding mechanisms such as the Darwin Initiative. However, the ability to apply for small grants under FCO/DFID’s Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) was ended in 2011, and the Darwin Initiative is under pressure from its new co-funders, DFID, to reduce funding for UKOT work, only two years after such funding was boosted.

Mr Hague indicates that the Government has used the results of the public consultation to help identify priorities. Whilst no organisation would expect all its recommendations to be incorporated, one out of 31 recommendations from a body bringing together the conservation NGOs (and some governmental bodies) in the UKOTs seems remarkably low – especially as we now know that other environmental bodies made largely similar recommendations.

Mr Hague reports also that the priorities are set out clearly in the White Paper, and the test of commitment will be delivery against this agenda. UKOTCF agrees on the importance of testing, but notes that the priorities do not lend themselves to measurement. Indeed, if such general targets were included in a grant application to one of UK Government’s own funds (when they existed), the application would probably have been rejected for these reasons.

UKOTCF welcomes the comment that “We will report regularly on progress and welcome scrutiny from the public and parliaments.” Recalling that, after a good start for a couple of years after the

Environment Charters were initiated, UK Government officials declined to report in the following years, UKOTCF trusts that officials will stay with this commitment this time.

The Prime Minister, in his Foreword (p 5) said: “We see an important opportunity to set world standards in our stewardship of the extraordinary natural environments we have inherited.”

The present White Paper, by itself, fails to seize that opportunity. However, UKOTCF still stands ready to work with Government and others to correct this.

How UKOTCF plans to help

Over 25 years, UKOTCF and its members in both Britain and the territories have invested a huge amount of voluntary resources into conservation in the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies, building up the largest body of expertise in this area. UKOTCF wishes to build on this, and to overcome the reluctance, developed over the past half decade, by UK Government officials to collaborate – in contrast to earlier valuable collaborations.

UKOTCF will continue to raise public and parliamentary interest in these matters. In the short term, UKOTCF will, in early October, host in London, courtesy of a UKOT Government, a technical seminar to start examining how some of the many gaps in the White Paper can be addressed. This will build on the seminars on biodiversity strategies in the UKOT and Crown Dependencies organised by UKOTCF in 2010 and 2011 (*Forum News* 37: 9-11; 38:4; www.ukotcf.org/pdf/fNews/BodivWorkshop1106.pdf).

W(h)ither BEST? UKOTs written out of future funding?

Readers of *Forum News* (e.g. 38: 8) may recall mention of BEST – one of the rare sources of potential funding for UKOTs. BEST, or more correctly *Preparatory Action (Voluntary scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of the EU Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries and Territories) ‘BEST’*, was established by an initiative of the European Parliament, in collaboration with DG (Directorate-General) Environment, utilising funds from DG Development Cooperation. There have been two tranches of €2 million, with grants from the latest one still to be decided. UKOTCF, with Netherlands and French partners, applied for the first round, and was unsuccessful. This consortium has applied again for the second tranche, and is awaiting the outcome.

Somewhat strangely, the European Commission hosted a meeting in Brussels in April, after the deadline for applications, to discuss the future of BEST. This involved something of a post-mortem on the results of the first round (this was reported in *Forum News* 39: 8, December 2011), followed by a brainstorm on BEST’s future. It had been assumed, and certainly as was the case at the start of that day, that the plan was a permanent fund arising out of this preparatory action, with the current BEST results proving the need for it. Unfortunately, at the start of the afternoon session, we were disabused by a senior official from DG Environment, who stated that the policy was now that establishing such a budget-line would be impossible and, even if it were, DG ENV was not a funding agency. The policy now is to access existing EU budget-lines to fund environmental projects, and so we are now looking at moving from a pre-BEST to a virtual-BEST. This, however, causes major problems for the UKOTs since, aside from the likelihood of access to LIFE + for the UKOTs, there are virtually no European Union funds that are accessible to them. There is a need for considerable lobbying on the part of the UK Government to change this situation. On past experience, this seems unlikely but, at a meeting of UKOTCF with senior officials at the FCO, there was a hint that the government was looking to challenge existing rules on EU funding in favour of the OTs. The Forum will also be taking this up with DEFRA officials in the autumn. UKOT Governments would be well advised to take this up with UK Government also.

It may have been a matter of waiting for when the European Commission will run out of French projects to fund under BEST before the UK had a chance but, under present circumstances, it will not have the possibility under a virtual BEST. Coupled with the loss of OTEP, the funding situation for environmental projects for the UKOTs does not look good.

DEFRA's contribution to the White Paper process

UK's Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is to be congratulated on being one of the few UK Government departments that actually produced its inputs to the UKOT White Paper process (pp 1-8) on time. UKOTCF is less enthusiastic about how DEFRA undertook the exercise.

In 2011, UKOTCF received a request to complete a consultation by DEFRA. A strong reply had been submitted before the 29th September deadline. The DEFRA questionnaire referred to 'reducing the burden of UKOTs on UK', phrasing to which UKOTCF lodged objection. As this consultation came just after the announcement that FCO and DIFD were cancelling the 2012 OTEP bid at short notice, this was an opportunity to refer to the lack of support for conservation in UKOTs. This would be the first year since at least the 1990s that support from FCO for applications for environmental conservation work in the UKOTs had not been available. FCO/DIFD had claimed they were waiting for a strategic review, although this seemed in conflict with what DEFRA had claimed at the UKOTCF seminar held in June, where they said that they thought it inappropriate for UK Government to be involved in developing strategies for biodiversity conservation in the UKOTs.

Following UKOTCF's response, DEFRA had written to UKOTCF to say that they had sent a copy of the questionnaire also to the South Georgia Heritage Trust, Falklands Conservation, and St Helena National Trust, and asked if there were other UKOT NGOs(!). They added that they would like to send it to as many UKOT NGOs as possible. As they did not have

contact details for them (presumably not having looked at UKOTCF's website), they asked if UKOTCF would circulate the questionnaire to other NGOs. UKOTCF had responded that the consultation period was short, but UKOTCF would endeavour to do this on condition that a new deadline was set, the initial one having expired. DEFRA responded a few days later, with a new deadline of only a week away. Despite this, UKOTCF circulated. It is clear that DEFRA officials have little idea of the realities of the situations in UKOTs.

In January 2012, DEFRA's website announced "Following recommendations made by the Government's National Security Council in 2011 DEFRA has produced a paper on the advice and support available to the UKOTs in areas of its competency." DEFRA published *The Environment in the United Kingdom's Overseas Territories: UK Government and Civil Society Support* (www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13686-overseas-territory-environment.pdf). UKOTCF notes that, although it was consulted at a late stage and supplied some comments, it is in no way associated with the final DEFRA paper, which appears to include numerous errors and omissions. In particular, the title is rather odd, in that most of the contents relate to governmental aspects, even though UKOTCF's comments seem to have resulted in a few mentions of civil society. Had DEFRA indicated earlier to UKOTCF that it wanted to include an appendix of NGOs involved, UKOTCF could have made that more complete. Indeed, if DEFRA had bothered to look at UKOTCF's website, it could have collated readily from there much of the information that it needed.

Environmental initiatives by Gibraltar's new Government

Forum News 39 (p 6) reported the election of UKOTCF Council member, Dr John Cortés to Gibraltar's Parliament at his first attempt, and his appointment as Minister for Health and Environment. Many attribute the victory of the Alliance between Gibraltar Socialist Labour Party and the Gibraltar Liberal Party in part to John's popularity with the electorate, which affectionately dubbed him 'the Gardener' in reference to his former role as Director of the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens. The reaction from those in Gibraltar with biological interests and environmental concerns has, of course, been positive and there are strong expectations that John will address many of Gibraltar's environmental problems and conservation issues effectively. This is a new and exciting challenge for John, who certainly has the necessary knowledge and energy to make a real difference to Gibraltar's environment.

The new Government has made a number of environmental commitments in its manifesto, such as:

- "Green" port services
- To reduce Gibraltar's carbon footprint with an aim to making the territory carbon neutral
- An environmental filter on all Government decisions, to be conducted by the Department of the Environment
- A stronger tree planting and protection programme
- Regulation of fishing and diving activities
- A review of policy documents relating to environmental issues and the publication of a management plan for the Upper Rock Nature Reserve.

It is also committed to extending openness and transparency in government and has already, for example, made public the meetings of the Development and Planning Commission and the Gibraltar Health Authority, on both of which John Cortés sits.

Dolphins are an important component of the rich marine ecosystem in Gibraltar's waters.
Photo: Eric Shaw



Addressing Gibraltar fisheries

As part of its environmental commitments the government of Gibraltar has rescinded an illegal "understanding" from 1999 between the previous administration and Spanish fishermen whereby there was no enforcement under a 1991 Act. Serious incursions by Spanish fishermen in early 2012, accompanied by the Guardia Civil in armed vessels led to a difficult political situation. A Memorandum of Understanding was agreed between the Gibraltar Chief Minister and some of the Spanish fishermen, following which the Gibraltar Government has established an independent advisory committee of experts, which forms the Gibraltar element to a Joint Working Group with the Spanish, to look into the situation and come up with recommendations for a solution consistent with Gibraltar's legislation and conservation aims. Some illegal fishing practices were and are still being used by Spanish fisherman on regular incursions into Gibraltar's waters, and some of these are legal under EU law, but not under Gibraltar law. Members of the committee include Eric Shaw from GONHS, a member of the Gibraltar Federation of Sea Anglers, and one of the Environment Ministry's officials as secretary. In order to have robustness and credibility, one or two experts from outside were needed, and the Minister sought UKOTCF officers' advice on possible candidates as experts on marine conservation and fisheries. In addition, the Minister asked whether UKOTCF's Chairman or Honorary Executive Director would be prepared to be the second outside nominee. It was agreed that the Chairman would take on this role, and he was subsequently asked to chair both the Committee and Joint Working Group. In addition, Indrani Lutchman (a very experienced fisheries conservation expert originally from Trinidad, but with experience as one of the first fisheries inspectors around Falklands, work for WWF-UK and IEEP, and of drafting recent EU Common Fisheries Policy revisions) has been appointed, retained via UKOTCF.

At the time of writing, Dr Chris Tydeman has already visited Gibraltar four times in seven weeks, to chair the committee as well as meeting with the Chief Minister, Environment Minister, Governor, Royal Navy, Head of Marine Police, Head of Defence Police and Head of the Maritime Administration. Indrani has met with Spanish fishermen, and had a brief discussion by phone with a senior Spanish government fisheries official, with whom she had worked on previous issues. Her involvement has thus been viewed by the Spanish fishermen and their representatives reporting to Madrid as a serious commitment to the project by Gibraltar. There has been significant coverage in the national media, both in Gibraltar and Spain, but not so far in the UK – which is a serious issue as the main UK government response seems to be "it's a little local difficulty and we mustn't upset the Spanish" – rather different to the situation in the Falklands.

The importance and vulnerability of woody species and habitats in the UK Overseas Territories



View across Montserrat's Centre Hills, towards their highest peak (Katy Hill); forest types grade from Mesic-Wet-Elfin with increasing elevation.
Photo: Dr Colin Clubbe, RBG Kew.

Part of the UK's sovereign territory, the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) are mostly small islands or island groups, widely dispersed around the world. Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands (BVI), the Cayman Islands, Montserrat and the Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI) are located in the Caribbean, with Bermuda nearby in the North Atlantic. Ascension Island, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha, the Falkland Islands, South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands and British Antarctic Territory are dispersed across the South Atlantic, from latitudes near the equator to those in the polar region. British Indian Ocean Territory (the Chagos Archipelago) is located in the Indian Ocean, and the Pitcairn Islands in the Pacific. Gibraltar and the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas, in Europe, complete the set of UKOTs. The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), which exists to promote the conservation of biodiversity across the UKOTs, also works closely with the Crown Dependencies (the Isle of Man, Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark).

Collectively, the UKOTs support much more globally important biodiversity than the metropolitan UK, including substantial numbers of endemic species - at least 60 birds, 50 reptiles and amphibians, 200 plants and 500 invertebrates with this or similar status. The global importance of the UKOTs is not restricted to endemic species. For example, huge numbers of seabirds (including about half the world's breeding albatrosses) depend on UKOTs in the South Atlantic, and the c.6 million km² of marine areas associated with the UKOTs include some of the most pristine coral reefs in the world.

As a result of their wide geographical distribution, and differences in local geology, climate and topography, the UKOTs support a very broad range of habitat and ecosystem types. Habitats dominated by large, woody plants are naturally absent or rare in some Territories. For example, their southerly location renders South Georgia and the Falklands climatically unsuitable for the development of natural tree-cover. Even the native scrubland that occurs in the Falklands is limited in its extent, reflecting overgrazing as well as natural constraints on distribution, although invasive species like *Ulex europaeus* have gained an unwelcome foothold in some areas. Although much closer to the equator, Ascension (a relatively young volcanic island, where arid conditions prevail across the lowland plains) mostly comprises a naturally barren landscape, notwithstanding the introduced Mexican thorn *Prosopis juliflora* that is now spreading across large areas. However, the upper slopes of Green Mountain, Ascension's one major peak, support a combination of dense forest and scrub, a mixture of native (including some endemic) ferns and introduced woody species.

Woody habitats would, however, have provided extensive land cover in many other UKOTs historically, even if the modern landscape does not reflect this (following years of over-exploitation, habitat destruction and the impacts of introduced invasive species). In a number of cases,

woodland clearance would have been particularly intense in the years following the first arrival of European settlers, as the most desirable timber was extracted for various purposes and land was opened up for agriculture. In BIOT, specifically, native forests were felled on many islands to plant the coconut palm *Cocos nucifera*. The range of surviving habitats, trees and other woody species, their traditional uses, the threats they face and conservation measures being undertaken, is so broad that only a few examples can be described here, to provide a flavour of the diversity that exists across the UKOTs.

The southern part of Montserrat has been devastated by volcanic activity in recent years, but much of the Centre Hills area further north (although affected) has escaped the worst impacts. Although much is secondary growth, following historic timber extraction and clearance for agriculture, the forested habitat of the Centre Hills has been a particular focus of study and conservation efforts. It supports a wealth of biodiversity, including the endemic Montserrat gallwasp *Diploglossus montisserrati* (a very elusive lizard), the highly threatened mountain chicken *Leptodactylus fallax* (a large frog, now found only on Montserrat and neighbouring Dominica), and the spectacular Montserrat oriole *Icterus oberi* (a bird endemic to the island). As in the few other UKOTs where woody habitats provide a reasonable degree of cover on upland areas (notably St Helena, and Pitcairn also), the Centre Hills forest plays an important role in regulating the hydrology of this important watershed, effectively acting as the island's reservoir. Significant ecosystem services are provided by other types of woody habitats elsewhere in the UKOTs. For example, mangroves provide nursery grounds for economically important fishery species, as well as coastal protection against the impacts of hurricanes and storm surges. In the Caribbean UKOTs in particular, however, pressures of coastal development have resulted in the loss of much of this important habitat.

Another habitat which has been much reduced in extent across the lower-lying Caribbean UKOTs in particular is coastal tropical dry forest. This varies in form, according to local conditions and the degree of its slow recovery from clearance, from a dwarf shrub community to a habitat which supports much taller trees. Endemic woody plants occur within this habitat, such as *Acacia anegadensis* in BVI and *Rondeletia anguillensis* in Anguilla. Even where it is relatively low-growing (and often dismissed as "scrub") this xeric woodland provides the natural habitat for species such as the endemic blue iguana *Cyclura lewisii* on Grand Cayman. On the same island, the few surviving pockets of taller growth, including parts of the Mastic Reserve and, closer to George Town, the Ironwood Forest, are home to species including the endemic ghost orchid *Dendrophylax fawcettii*. Recently threatened by a proposed road development, protection of the Ironwood Forest became a cause célèbre amongst local residents, increasingly sensitive to the loss of their natural heritage. UKOTCF is currently engaged with partners in BVI, TCI and the Cayman Islands in a part EU-funded project to enhance protection of these tropical dry forest habitats, through the implementation of integrated management plans (see front page story in *Forum News* 37, www.ukotcf.org). On the most elevated areas of BVI (Sage Mountain, on Tortola), the greater rainfall results in xeric woodland grading into moist forest containing many tree species including West Indian mahogany *Swietenia mahogany* and bulletwood *Manilkara bidentata*.

In addition to clearance of wooded habitats for development and agriculture, introduced insect pests have had a devastating impact in a number of cases. The following three examples all relate to the designated national tree in their respective UKOTs. The endemic



The Blue Iguana *Cyclura lewisii*, endemic Grand Cayman; this individual has been colour tagged, as part of a very successful, locally based captive breeding programme.
Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF.

Bermuda cedar *Juniperus bermudiana* was once dominant across much of Bermuda's landscape, and provided an important source of timber for a range of uses – indeed, the demands of ship building reduced the cedar population substantially before its recovery in the late nineteenth century. However, the accidental introduction of the scale insects *Carulaspis minima* and *Lepidosaphes newsteadi* in the 1940s resulted in losses of around 95%, and surviving mature trees are now very sparsely distributed. On St Helena, the accidentally introduced scale insect *Orthezia insignis* threatened the endemic gumwood *Commidendrum robustum* with extinction in the 1990s, until the release of the ladybird *Hyperaspis pantherina* brought the pest under control. Extensive gumwood restoration work is now underway, under the auspices of the St Helena National Trust's *Millennium Forest* project. More recently, the arrival in TCI of yet another scale insect, *Toumeyella parvicornis*, has devastated the local variety of the Caribbean pine *Pinus caribaea* var. *bahamensis*, stands of which provide a distinctive type of woodland habitat, only found on islands of the Bahamas archipelago. It is suspected that this pest was introduced accidentally from the USA with commercially grown Christmas trees.

The perilous status of some of the UKOTs' indigenous tree species is exemplified by the situation on St Helena, which retains some reasonably extensive wooded areas, although these are much modified by historic habitat loss and incursions by introduced species. The St Helena olive *Nesiota elliptica* (once common in parts of the island) had been thought extinct, until a single plant was rediscovered in the wild in 1977. Desperate attempts to propagate from this individual brought some success, but its death in 1994 was followed by the loss of the last progeny in cultivation (and hence the extinction of this endemic, single-species genus) in 2003. In 1982, a single individual of another tree thought to be long extinct, the bastard gumwood *Commidendrum rotundifolium*, was discovered on an inaccessible cliff. This individual died just four years later, but attempts to maintain and propagate from its progeny (currently one mature plant) continue, and the recent discovery of another, single wild individual in a remote location has improved the outlook for this species. Several other species, once common, are highly vulnerable to extinction, with just a few individuals remaining, or (where propagation has been more successful) with a very narrow genetic base. These include the following, all members of endemic genera (and, in the first two cases, the only representative species): the he cabbage *Pladaroxylon leucadendron* (severely threatened by competition from invasive plants); St Helena boxwood *Melissia begoniifolia* (unknown for 100 years, until rediscovered in 1998); St Helena ebony *Trochetiopsis ebenus* (once thought to have been grazed to extinction by introduced goats, until the rediscovery of two individuals on a remote undercliff). Whilst the "resurrection" of species thought



Part of the trail through the Mastic Reserve (Grand Cayman), which includes important pockets of tropical dry forest, the increasingly threatened and fragmented habitat of the Blue Iguana and other notable species.

Photo: Dr Oliver Cheesman, UKOTCF

lost is a cause for celebration, their continued survival relies on the considerable efforts of local conservationists, and collaborators from institutions such as the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, which has been particularly active in support of plant conservation across the UKOTs. Trees and other woody plants provide materials with a range of traditional uses in a number of UKOTs. For example, Caicos Islanders benefited for many years from trade with Haiti, using locally produced

sloops. These were traditionally made from locally harvested West Indian mahogany *Swietenia mahogani* (for the outer keel), locust *Lysiloma latisiliquum* (the contorted limbs of which could be harvested to make the curved ribs, without the need to fell the tree), and lighter woods for the planking to cover the ribs. Being exceptionally hard and durable, holy lignum vitae *Guaiacum sanctum* was used for making pulleys and blocks, and was so prized that it was once exported to Jamaica on a significant scale.

Smaller versions of these sloops are still made by a dwindling number of boat builders in the Caicos Islands today, and (on an even smaller scale) model boats are carved, traditionally from gum elemi *Bursera simaruba*.

Certain tree species are associated with local crafts such as furniture making, including *Trochetiopsis ebenus* on St Helena, and yellow wood *Zanthoxylum flavum* on Bermuda (this species was nearly extirpated by early settlers, as its wood was so highly prized). On Pitcairn, a range of curios are carved, particularly from the wood of miro *Thespesia populnea*, toa *Cordia subcordata* and man fern *Cyathea medullaris*, and fruit trees provide an important local source of food. Elsewhere, species provide the traditional source of materials for a wide range of woven and plaited products, such as baskets, mats, ropes and hats (as well for thatch roofing). In TCI, these include white top palm *Sabal palmetto*, silver top palm *Coccolobus* spp and buffalo top palm *Thrinax* spp, the fronds of which may be used in combination with the leaves of other plants, such as fanner grass, in the production of some items. In addition, folk medicine in a number of UKOTs draws on plants including local (native or introduced) trees and shrubs. On Middle Caicos, for example, the most commonly used medicinal plants include lignum vitae *Guaiacum officinale*, berry bush *Eugenia axillaris*, pawpaw *Carica papaya* and strongback *Bourreria ovata*.

As the above, extremely summarised, account indicates, forestry (by its generally recognised meaning) is practiced in very few UKOTs, and on only a very small scale. However, the importance of woody habitats in a broad sense is considerable in many UKOTs, not least in terms of biodiversity value. This, in turn, underpins economic value, either through ecosystem services or as a basis for ecotourism - which provides a more sustainable model for development than has been embraced in the past, notably in the Caribbean region. In many cases, the maintenance (or realisation) of these values for wooded habitats relies on considerable conservation effort, directed at particular, highly vulnerable species, or through habitat restoration and protection measures. This, in itself, represents a particular challenge in the UKOTs, as their status excludes them from many international funding mechanisms, whilst resources for conservation provided by the UK Government are very limited. As it has responsibility for the UKOTs under international agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, it would be good to see greater commitment from the UK Government – in this, the International Year of Forests - to protecting such valuable natural resources across all the Territories.

Dr Oliver D. Cheesman first published this article for UKOTCF in Commonwealth Forestry Association Newsletter, in 2011.



Mr Headley Forbes, one of the few remaining boat builders on Middle Caicos (TCI), shaping locally harvested wood for a traditional design of sloop. Photo: Neil Saxton

Bermuda Ombudsman underlines that Environment Charters are binding, confirming that Bermuda Government acted unlawfully

Forum News 38 (p 9) reported the local and international concerns that an environmentally damaging development was being allowed at Tucker's Point, an area of pristine hills and endangered woodland over a network of caves holding endemic species and listed as a proposed Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Local reports allege that a great pressure for the development related to profits of the bank HSBC, rather than the national interest.

Bermuda's Ombudsman, Arlene Brock, has concluded that the Bermudan Government had acted unlawfully by failing to require an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) prior to sending the draft Tuckers Point Special Development Order (SDO) to the House of Assembly: "With respect to the Tucker's Point SDO application, there was no proper process to gather information; the data available to inform analysis and decision-making was inadequate. The failure of a proper public consultation process resulted in *ad hoc*, adversarial arising of public concerns. Pertinent data was sidelined because the messengers were dismissed as tree huggers, the usual voices and alarmists".

The report analyses past Privy Council decisions, as well as international best practices and standards for public consultation and data gathering and analysis. It recognises the significance of the Environment Charter, which was signed by the Government of Bermuda and the UK Government in 2001 (for background see www.ukotcf.org/charters/index.htm), as "more than just a statement of good intentions" and "while there is no annual reporting requirement, several of the other OTs voluntarily report to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on their adherence to the letter and spirit of the UK Charter." UKOTCF undertook a report on progress on the Charters at the request of UK and UKOT Government in 2007 and repeated the exercise in 2009 (see *Measures of progress in implementing the Environment Charter 2009* (see link in next column)). The Ombudsman's report acknowledges that protecting the natural environment in the UKOTs as set out in the Environment Charters is not merely "a national priority but is of international importance".

The report highlights the importance of EIAs which are considered as international best practice for all development proposals. In Bermuda, an EIA would "identify the true and domino costs of economic activities today that could adversely affect the environment for generations to come; guard against approval of development that cannot realistically be carried out; promote transparency and public trust; mute suspicions that information is deliberately withheld and that the grant of SDOs benefits the interests of a few rather than Bermuda as a whole; ultimately secure inter-generational justice through the principles and practices of sustainable development" the report concludes.

Another of the Ombudsman's recommendations is to update the Ramsar Convention list for Bermuda to include Mangrove Lake and Trott's Pond at Tucker's Point and other wetlands throughout Bermuda. In 2005, at the request of UK Government and in consultation with Bermuda Government and NGOs, UKOTCF undertook a review of the Ramsar sites in the UKOTs. This included the sites at Tuckers Point as proposed Wetlands of International Importance (see *Review of existing and potential Ramsar sites in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies* – www.ukotcf.org/pubs/ramsarReview.htm). Therefore, UKOTCF welcomes the report as an important focus, not for only Bermuda, but for other UKOTs on a number of issues relating to the protection of natural resources in light of pressure from developers.

The full report (*Today's Choices Tomorrow's Costs*) can be found at:

<http://www.ombudsman.bm/images/pdfs/systemicreports/BdaOmb.SDO.12.pdf>

In May, the Bermuda Government responded by saying that the 2001 UK Environment Charter is not legally binding; that the EIA procedure is not needed; and there is no need for action on most of the Ombudsman's Recommendations. The Ombudsman rejected these comments, concluding:

"I find the continued challenge to my jurisdiction inappropriate and many of the responses to the Recommendations inadequate or even unresponsive".

"With respect to the Government's denial that the UK Environment Charter is a legally binding agreement, this Special Report sets out basic

principles of international law on agreements between governments. Further, it details the genesis of the Charter as well as statements and actions of the Bermuda and UK Governments that prove that the commitments were intended to be implemented."

"Certainly, there was never any expectation that – eleven years down the road – any signatory would try to claim that the commitments are only 'aspirational'."

The Ombudsman points out that the UK has conducted two formal reviews to monitor compliance with the Charter (in 2007 and 2009 – both conducted by UKOTCF: *Measures of performance by 2007 of UKOTs and UK Government in implementing the 2001 Environment Charters or their equivalents*; and *Measures of performance by 2009 of UK Overseas Territories (& Crown Dependencies) and UK Government in implementing the 2001 Environment Charters* - available at www.ukotcf.org/charters/progress.htm).

"The ultimate question is whether Bermuda will join the rest of the modern world in making Environmental Impact Assessment a requirement – prior to approval – for all proposed developments that are 'major' or 'likely to cause significant adverse impact on the environment'".

"Several of the Government's responses referred to Guidance Note 106. This is irrelevant to SDO applications which do not go to the Development Applications Board for in-principle approval."

"I set out my jurisdiction very clearly in Appendix I of the SDO Report. Today's Special Report adds a decision of the Privy Council that supports Bermuda's Ombudsman Act. The words of the Ombudsman Act are crystal clear. You just cannot substitute your own words and claim that is what the Act is saying".

The Ombudsman's full response can be found at: <http://www.ombudsman.bm/images/pdfs/systemicreports/SpecialReport.6.1.12.pdf>

UKOTCF welcomes these clear and well founded conclusions by the Bermuda Ombudsman. Many of these conclusions are significant also to other UKOTs.

Endangered sharks protected

Endangered sharks will be given greater protection following UK, with Bermuda, the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, British Indian Ocean Territory and the Isle of Man, becoming in June the 24th signatory to the Memorandum of Understanding on shark conservation agreed under the Convention on Migratory Species. This will help develop management measures to protect threatened species such as basking, longfin mako and whale sharks.

Signing the agreement, UK DEFRA Minister, Richard Benyon said: "We must do all we can to protect these vulnerable species before they are lost forever. The UK is already pushing the EU to tighten controls on the wasteful and barbaric practice of shark finning, and this agreement further demonstrates our determination to ensure they do have a future. We will continue to lead the way on shark conservation internationally and will push for improvements wherever they're needed."

Under the Agreement, work will focus on improving fisheries data for threatened shark species to help inform conservation and management actions. It will see better co-ordination of shark management and conservation measures at regional and international levels, including proposals to limit the catch or trade in endangered species of shark.

Invasive Species Control

The South Georgia Government has presented two reports on possible invasive species control. The first report was produced by RSPB on field trials for the eradication of house mice from South Georgia. This can be downloaded at: http://www.sgisland.gs/download/RSPB%20Research%20Report%20No%2048%20South_Georgia_Fieldwork_Report_March_2012_Final.pdf

The second was conducted by the Norwegian Nature Inspectorate, Directorate for Nature Management and details a reconnaissance in January 2012 regarding eradication of reindeer on South Georgia. The report can be downloaded at: <http://www.sgisland.gs/download/SNO%20Report%202012-1a.pdf>

UKOTCF/TCI “Wonderful Water” curriculum and courses in place in Turks & Caicos schools

The Turks and Caicos Islands have a wonderful natural environment. Older generations know very well how to live sustainably in this environment, using and conserving its rich resources. In particular, in these low-lying limestone islands, safeguarding the natural water resources, and the importance of water conservation and rainwater harvesting were critically important for the subsistence agriculture which people relied on, until near the end of the last century.

No-one would wish to turn the clock back 40 years, but the importance of conserving the natural resources of TCI has not changed; it has actually increased, but awareness may be less. The quality of life of residents and the crucially important tourism industry both depend on the environment. In 2008 the Turks and Caicos Deputy Director of Education (now Director), being concerned that young people were not aware of the importance of water resources in the Turks and Caicos Islands, had the idea of developing a curriculum-linked environmental education programme for school students to teach them about water resources in TCI. Partnering with UKOTCF, a successful application to OTEP provided some funding to develop the Wonderful Water environmental education programme. The OTEP-funded phase of this project finished in March, but UKOTCF is continuing with the project on a voluntary basis while seeking additional funding.

The project is developing a curriculum-linked teaching programme on wetlands and water in TCI, aimed primarily at the upper primary pupils and the first years of high school. However, these materials can readily be adapted for wider use. They have already been used by Ms Cordelia Creese, the local inspirational teacher who helped greatly in project development, in bringing up-to-speed college students who had not previously studied ecology.

Workshops for teachers, education department staff and other stakeholders were held in TCI in February 2011 to introduce the curriculum framework and the first teaching resources produced. These workshops also identified the need for teaching materials about mangrove ecosystems and their importance. Teaching materials about mangroves have therefore been included in the Wonderful Water project. All materials produced have been made available in electronic format, so that they can be readily updated, and made widely available in a cost-effective way.

Resources for pupils and teachers already developed about Wetland Ecosystems in TCI are:

- An introduction to wetland ecosystems in TCI
- Mangrove ecosystems and their importance
- Adaptations of mangrove species
- Feeding relationships in a mangrove ecosystem



South Wells, Grand Turk, is important for water-birds and live-stock. The historic well structures include, in the foreground one of the ramped wells, which allowed donkeys to drink, whatever the level of the water-table, when these were left for months when Grand Turk was inhabited only seasonally to gather salt for the Bermuda fish trade.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski



Participants at the Wonderful Water workshop in Grand Turk try out some practical tasks. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

- Threats to mangrove ecosystems
- Climate change and mangroves
- Caring for mangroves
- Classification of organisms in a mangrove ecosystem.

Another set of workshops for teachers, education department staff, and other stakeholders were held in TCI in February 2012 to begin development of the Vital Water theme. This theme will cover:

- Water Sources in TCI (historical and current). These materials will include: background re climate and weather; landform in TCI; how the historical source of water influenced settlement and development; current sources of water (transport); costs, water treatment and water for life and health.
- The water cycle
- Sustainable use of water. These materials will cover water conservation, agriculture, leisure and transport, development and planning for water use.

These workshops involved presentations by experts, teachers trying out practical activities and developing teaching ideas. Mr David Bowen, Director of Culture, gave a presentation at both workshops on the historical sources of water and their cultural importance. He enlivened proceedings with a song telling the story of his young days getting water from the well. In Providenciales, Mr Robert Hall, Director of Provo Water Company, spoke about current water production in Provo, and highlighted the importance of checking for leaks, especially from toilet cisterns. Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR) staff shared their projects and experiences with workshop participants. Mrs Lormeka Williams, Curator of the National Environmental Centre (NEC), spoke about the water conservation measures at the NEC. Mr Bryan Naqqi Manco gave a presentation about the North Caicos Nursery, whilst Dr Eric Salamanca demonstrated the importance of the native plant rescue project, and how the use of native plants in landscaping cut down garden water requirements.

In Grand Turk, in addition to Mr David Bowen, the Water Engineer, Mr Zaheer Mohamed, spoke eloquently about the challenges of water provision in Grand Turk, and again highlighted the importance of water conservation. Mrs Patricia Saxton, Director of the Turks and Caicos National Museum, gave a very interesting presentation about the water supply at the National Museum, which is supplied totally via rainwater harvesting, their developing garden, and the importance of growing native plants which are adapted to the different climatic conditions found in TCI.

Participants valued the project highly, and the Education Department is committed to rolling this curriculum out in schools this year.

The Director of Education commented: “the relevance of the project is in sync with the realities of life in the TCI and small island states. In addition, I am pleased that teachers, other stake-holders and private sector partners are engaging with the curriculum materials as they are being developed, and are providing critical feedback to move the work along. This will definitely help to ensure that the notion of conservation and sustainability become entrenched in the attitude and behaviour of children and the people of TCI.”

If you have any questions about the project, or would like to receive any of the materials produced to date, please contact the project manager, Mrs Ann Pienkowski (UKOTCF Environment Education Co-ordinator) at apienkowski@ukotcf.org

Isle of Man conservation volunteers win award

A team of volunteers meet twice a week and muck-in to support to the Manx Wildlife Trust's nature reserves. Ageing from 22 to a sprightly 83, the "Midweek Muckers" work alongside the Trust's Reserves Officer Tricia Sayle, who commented: "The Muckers work with a smile throughout the year, week-in-week-out, and undertake the physical work needed to manage the Trust's reserves. Most years, they complete over 2000 hours of work. Without them, the Trust would not be able to protect its 255 acres of wildlife habitat and rich biodiversity for future generations."

Val Crane, the longest serving Mucker, has been working on the reserves for the last 20 years. She said: "I enjoy working outdoors and it certainly keeps you fit, at any age! Where else could you find such great company, spending a morning with like-minded people, helping the environment and the Trust, and getting to know the reserves up close all year round."

The Muckers' first project was at Close Sartfield Nature Reserve, where five acres of gorse were transformed into a wildflower meadow. The field now contains over 100 species of wildflower, including six species of protected orchid. The volunteers also manage three other nature reserves, all of which form part of an Area of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI), which also forms part of the island's Ramsar Convention Wetland of International Importance, the Ballaugh Curragh.

The Manx Muckers received this year's Blue Turtle Award from the the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. Last year's award was to St Helena for the Millennium Forest.



*The Midweek Muckers clearing hay off Close e Quayle.
© Manx Wildlife Trust*

Funds needed for purchase of important area in Jersey

The National Trust for Jersey, UKOTCF associate organisation, has been campaigning for the last 14 years to convince its government, The States of Jersey, to acquire the former Pontin's holiday camp at Plémont. Situated on the north-west coast of the Island, the site is 39,471 sq metres in size and lies in an immensely, sensitive coastal location surrounded by historic field patterns, rich archaeology and important coastal bird life. The existing buildings are in an increasingly derelict condition and the site has been threatened with numerous residential development schemes over the years, including the latest proposal for 28 substantial houses. The National Trust believes that such re-development would be to the severe detriment of the Island's coastline and that every effort must be made to secure the site for the benefit of the Island. UKOTCF is currently assisting the Trust in fundraising for land purchase at this site.

New whale sanctuaries in the Caribbean

Before the end of 2012, the Netherlands will set up a marine mammal sanctuary for whales and dolphins in the Dutch Caribbean waters. This is one of the outcomes of a meeting with the neighbouring countries of the Dutch Islands in the Caribbean, the French Islands, the USA, the Dominican Republic and Venezuela, about the cooperation between whale sanctuaries. Whales, like the humpback whale, often migrate thousands of kilometres from cold northern waters in summer to the tropical Caribbean Sea in winter, so that cooperation is necessary for effective protection.

The participants agreed also to examine the possibilities of setting up a regional network of underwater microphones. This will help to map the sounds made by whales and dolphins, and can register noise from, among others, ships and speed-boats. Noise pollution from ships and speed-boats disturbs the possibilities for whales to communicate with each other. The sound equipment aids making the whales visible to tourists in a responsible way. The French 'Agoa' marine mammal sanctuary and the Dutch Caribbean Islands had already been doing research on the marine mammals around the French and Dutch Windward Islands. This collaboration will be continued.

As part of this, joint surveys will be conducted in which a group of researchers will observe, in a structured manner, the locations and numbers of cetaceans, such as humpback whales, sperm whales and orcas. This will take place around both the Windward and Leeward Islands. The meeting, organized by the Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation (EL&I), took place on 4-5 June on St. Maarten. The purpose of the meeting was the development of joint initiatives and programmes for research and protection of whales and dolphins. The initiative builds on the marine mammal action plan of the regional protocol for the protection of species and areas, the SPAW Protocol. The workshop was a direct outcome of the Declaration of Intent for regional cooperation signed at a meeting in Martinique last year by France's "Agoa" Sanctuary, the Netherlands Sanctuary initiative, the Dominican Republic Sanctuary, the US Stellwagen Bank Sanctuary, and the Regional Activity Centre (RAC) of the SPAW (Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife) Protocol.

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World Water Forum

UKOTCF Chairman, Dr Chris Tydeman, attended the World Water Forum in Marseille in March 2012, as part of the EU delegation. There was a session on water management in the Outermost Regions and Overseas Countries & Territories, yet there was no UK presence other than him out of 200 participants. The lead on the topic of this session was Martinique; there was a predominantly French presence, including their Minister for Outermost Regions, plus a few from Spanish and Portuguese regions on the panel. The equivalent of a river basins forum for the Overseas Countries & Territories and the Outermost Regions was announced, and an invitation made to join through signing a draft charter; this will support the establishment of water management organisations where they do not exist and increase capacity where they do. The Martinique Water Office will lead the initiative "the basin islands network" together with key partners as co-founders. The network will be an organisational basis on which to develop and improve the exchange of knowledge and good practices before carrying out ambitious projects between island basins

This development potentially links with the work already being done by UKOTCF in several territories, notably the Turks & Caicos Islands (see p 13). However, lack of UK Government support does not help.

The Convention on Biological Diversity and the Isle of Man

On 6th August 2012, the CBD was extended to the Isle of Man, marking the first island to be added under the UK's signature since the original tranche in 1994 with UK itself, shortly after the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992. The original territories included Jersey, Gibraltar, the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha.

This marks the culmination of a long series of events which started in the 1990s when the Home Office was responsible for the Crown Dependencies and there was regular correspondence about the Isle of Man embracing the Convention. On file are various attempts to cost the work required. However, the failure to reach a decision on the CBD did not prevent progress to map the island's habitats, to employ two full-time conservation officers in 1998, and launch an agri-environment scheme in 2002. Terrestrial site designation gathered momentum in the 2000s. Schedules of protected species were revised and reckless damage or disturbance of wildlife and habitats became an offence (rather than having to prove intention). In 2004, at the suggestion of DEFRA, an assessment was undertaken of progress in meeting the Convention's articles. Alastair Taylor, working for the World Conservation Monitoring Centre, gathered this evidence in a lengthy exercise with all stakeholders. A weighty report identified successes and strengths, areas for further work and obstacles to fully embracing the Convention. A public consultation on the CBD was undertaken in 2010 by the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, which in April 2010 became the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture in a government re-organisation. There was a 94% positive response to having the Convention extended to the Island. Those opposed couldn't see the need, while the majority were concerned that it had taken this long to make a decision.

In the autumn of 2010 the Island submitted an up-dated assessment of how the articles of the Convention are being met. Shortly afterwards

Crown Dependencies Legislation Meeting, March 2012

It all started in October 2011 at a bowls club in Jersey, at the annual Inter-island meeting, with a presentation by Lindsey Napton about Jersey's legislative review (of their Planning and Environment Act). It was an excellent event attended, by Liz Charter from the Isle of Man and Mike Pienkowski, representing UKOTCF (*Forum News* 39: 9). The Isle of Man has the Wildlife Act 1990, which has been amended over the years. The discussion about revising legislation gave rise to the idea of holding a workshop on the Isle of Man in March 2012. This was organised by Liz Charter, who was also successful in getting a grant from JNCC to cover the travel and accommodation for the people from the Channel Islands, Guernsey and Alderney as well as Jersey. We expected five people from the Channel Islands and a range of people from the Isle of Man: Ian Scott, the Manx Police Wildlife Crime Officer; Kate Hawkins and Andrew Foxon, from Manx National Heritage; Claire Barnett, from Manx Birdlife; and various Biodiversity officers from the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (Isle of Man Government). To add an additional jurisdiction's perspective, Bob Brown, from Northern Ireland (ex-RSPB and now a consultant), was able to attend, being already on the Isle of Man.

The day of the workshop did not start well, with a phone call saying the flight which was to have carried 4 out of 5 of the Channels Islands attendees was cancelled, without any warning or explanation. But island folk are used to these things! Luckily the two from Jersey, Lindsey Napton and John Pinel, were able to take a different flight. Sadly it was more difficult for the representatives of the State of Alderney and Alderney Wildlife Trust, who could not make alternative arrangements. The State of Guernsey officer, Andrew McCutcheon's journey was not affected.

The two-day event, covered the Biodiversity Duty, from Northern Ireland's perspective, species protection, habitat protection including coverage of the first Manx Marine Nature Reserve, wildlife crime issues and cases, European legislation and trade in endangered species (CITES) legislation. Everyone agreed this was a very useful opportunity to compare notes and evaluate the effectiveness of current statutes. All the papers and presentations were fired off to the folk in Alderney after the meeting. JNCC's support was particularly appreciated.

JNCC endorsed the request to have the Convention extended to the Isle of Man, having looked at the evidence. There followed a long silence, despite follow-up enquiries to UK Government. Eventually, in November 2011, it was agreed that DEFRA would trust that the island was compliant (as they had not been able to allocate the necessary legal officer time to read and assess the report). For a while it looked as if the island's government might have to complete a new DEFRA proforma, assessing how each article is met – which would have been a massive duplication of effort! Finally, in May 2012, it was announced that the Foreign Secretary had signed the paperwork, and the official document had been lodged with the UN. After waiting the requisite, 90 days it is finally possible to say the Isle of Man is included in the UK's ratification of the CBD.

This comes at a difficult time when resources for biodiversity are under threat, the scope of Biodiversity Officer posts is being widened to include other department and government responsibilities, and all talk is about emphasis on economic development and reaching a "sustainable" population. A figure of at least 100,000 people is being quoted as necessary for financial sustainability. Currently the population is 84,000. However, the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan are being written and, since 2010, the emphasis is on the Aichi Goals and targets, rather than the original articles of the Convention. Mainstreaming biodiversity across government and the private sector is as much a challenge as ever. Watch this space!

This has been a valuable experience and one which may assist other territories on this lengthy and often tortuous path to Rio!

UKOTCF entertains UKOT Government Representatives



UKOTCF Council held a reception for UKOT Government London-based Representatives in January, kindly hosted by Bill Samuel in the Gallery at Foyles Bookshop. From left: Janice Panton (Montserrat), Bruce Dinwiddy (UKOTCF), Kedell Warboys (St Helena), Mike Pienkowski (UKOTCF), Kedrick Malone (BVI), Kimberly Durrant (Bermuda); others out of view. Photo: Catherine Wensink

Congratulations to Sarita Francis

Montserrat's Deputy Governor Sarita Francis was awarded the OBE (Order of the British Empire) in the Queen's New Year's Honours list for her public service to the Government and people of Montserrat. UKOTCF personnel greatly enjoyed working with her during the periods when she served as Acting Director and President of the Montserrat National Trust. Her formidable organisational skills were in great demand when she was recalled to Government service after the volcano - to head the most challenging role of restoring housing. Ms Francis received her award at Buckingham Palace in May, from HRH the Princess Royal.



South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands Marine Protected Area

In February 2012, the Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands announced the establishment of a large sustainable use Marine Protected Area (MPA) covering over 1 million km² of the South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) Maritime Zone.

Nigel Haywood, Commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, who formally signed the legislation, stated: "The waters around South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands are among the most productive in the Southern Ocean, with very high biodiversity. We remain committed to the highest standards of environmental management in this unique and globally important UK Overseas Territory. Whilst today's MPA announcement represents a hugely significant step in our management of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, we will not rest on our laurels and will continually strive to improve our already excellent management of the Territory."

The MPA declaration enshrines in law much of the existing marine protection policy, and creates one of the largest MPAs on the planet. Within the MPA, all commercial bottom-trawling will be prohibited and commercial bottom-fishing (primarily long-lining) will be restricted to depths greater than 700 m. The ban on bottom-trawling protects the benthic marine environment from the damaging effects of bottom-trawling, whilst the 700 m depth minima for bottom-fishing protects juvenile toothfish.

The MPA includes significant areas of no-take zone (IUCN Category I) around the coast of each island. These no-take zones (over 20,000 km² in total, equivalent to the total area of Wales) will protect the foraging grounds of many of the Territory's land-based marine predators such

as penguins, seals and seabirds and protect the spawning areas of many demersal fish species.

SGSSI will continue to licence fisheries for toothfish, icefish and krill in the MPA (outside of the no-take zones) and use the revenue to patrol the region to prevent illegal fishing and undertake research and monitoring. These fisheries are extremely carefully managed, with both the icefish and toothfish fisheries certified as sustainably managed by the Marine Stewardship Council.

Further information: Dr Martin Collins, Chief Executive, Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. E-mail: ceo@gov.gs; Tel: +500 28214



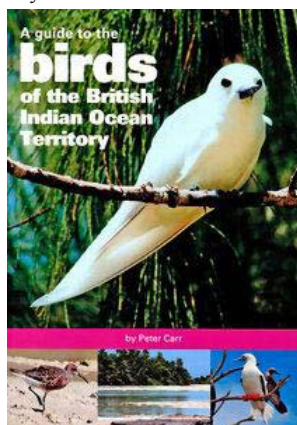
Humpback Whale approaches as it starts its dive, in South Georgia waters. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

UKOTCF visits to BVI, Montserrat, TCI and Cayman

In January-February, work related to the Net-BIOME project (see *Forum News* 39: 7) allowed the UKOTCF Chairman and Honorary Executive Director to hold a series of useful meetings and site visits in the Virgin Islands. Some related to the MPASSE project (see *Forum News* 39: 7), in which UKOTCF and the National Parks Trust are partners (along with National Trusts in Cayman and Turks & Caicos). The CD interactive environmental atlas, developed several years ago by the National Parks Trust and the Conservation and Fisheries Department was also discussed, and ways to make this more widely accessible considered. Meetings were held also with the Conservation and Fisheries Department, the Virgin Islands Environmental Council, and the Governor and his staff officer. All meetings had been constructive and positive, with the Governor in particular demonstrating a very positive attitude.

The visit included also Montserrat. As well as meetings with the Director and the Board of the Montserrat National Trust, they met the Minister of the Environment and the Director, and the Governor. Clearly, development of the new capital at Little Bay, being funded by DFID, was a major focus for the Montserrat Government and Governor. It was to be hoped that environmental aspects would be taken into account during this major development, and UKOTCF's Chairman is writing on this matter to the Governor and DFID.

While in TCI in March-April to run the *Wonderful Water* workshops (see p 11), UKOTCF officers took opportunities to meet with other stakeholders. These included many of the new officials, the Governor, the Chief Executive Officer, the new Permanent Secretary for the Environment, the Director of Agriculture, Tourist Board officials, existing partners in the Education Department, the Department of Environment, the National Museum, the Permanent Secretary Finance and the technical assistant for the MPASSE project. As well as meetings related to the MPASSE project, which was presenting a variety of challenges to all partners, future collaborative projects were explored with several partners. These matters were followed up in June, when the Executive Director was in the region for an MPASSE Steering Committee meeting in Cayman. While in Cayman, the Executive Director explored with the Cayman Islands National Trust topics in which the latter would welcome assistance. UKOTCF is following up on these and other matters arising from the visits.



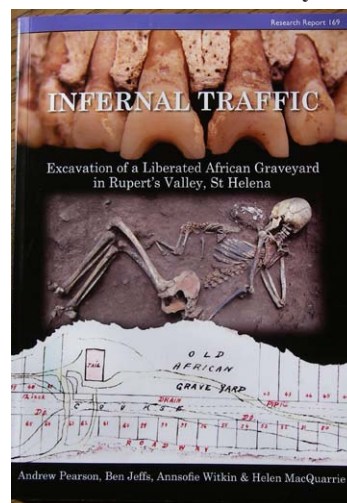
New books

Infernal Traffic: Excavation of a Liberated African Graveyard in Rupert's Valley, St Helena

Andrew Pearson, Ben Jeffs, Annsofie Witkin & Helen MacQuarrie, Council for British Archaeology Research Report 169, 2011, 178+xxii pages, ISBN: 978-1-902771-89-2 £30

The graveyards relate to Britain's efforts to abolish the transatlantic slave trade after Britain declared it illegal. Between 1840 and 1972, a Vice-Admiralty court on St Helena dealt with cases of slave ships captured by the Royal Navy's West Africa Squadron. The slaves on these ships were brought ashore on St Helena. The slave vessels arrived with corpses on board, and many other people died shortly after landing on St Helena. It has been estimated that around 8000 Africans were buried in graveyards, most in Rupert's valley.

The work described in this report is unique: no other known burial ground contains solely the bodies of first generation Africans who died as a result of their transportation. On a cultural level too, the site has a huge resonance, providing a stark physical reminder of the human consequences of the slave trade.



A Guide to Birds of the British Indian Ocean Territory

by Peter Carr; Pisces Publications, 2011, 110 pages
ISBN: 978 1 874357 47 6 £15

Peter Carr must know more about the birds of the Chagos than anyone else, having been one of the Royal Marine officers representing UK Government at Diego Garcia, and now the Environmental Manager there. The book includes background information on geography, human impact, conservation, birdwatching (restricted!), species accounts with photographs, and a seasonal checklist.

New Associate: Anguilla Archaeological and Historical Society

The Anguilla Archaeological and Historical Society has recently joined UKOTCF as an associate organisation. The Society works closely with Anguilla National Trust (also an associate organisation of the Forum). The Society's aims are to protect and preserve Anguilla's shared cultural heritage; document and record findings of archeological or historical significance on Anguilla; encourage reports of discoveries or research of an archeological or historical nature on Anguilla; encourage the passing of supportive legislation on Anguilla; do all such other things as will promote the aims of the society. The Society is made up of a group of dedicated volunteers. Current projects include the erection of signs at historical sites, planning for the long awaited Anguilla Museum project, identification of Anguilla shipwreck sites for future protection, and the recording of the historical events in Anguilla's past. The Society is also arranging for a small archaeological expedition to explore possible Amerindian sites on the West End of Anguilla. Recently, specialist archeologists from the University of Southampton conducted an underwater survey of shipwreck sites. Artifacts and features of interest were surveyed and mapped *in situ*. Their locations were plotted using handheld GPS units, and data were given to the AAHS. For more information on the Society visit:

www.aahsanguilla.com/membership.html
Contact details: contact@aahsanguilla.com

Remains of the old phosphate refinery on Sombrero Island. Mining operation began in 1870 and yielded 3000 tons of phosphate of lime or seabird guano a year; by 1890, the phosphate reserves had been exhausted. Sombrero Island is 55km off the coast of Anguilla and is uninhabited. Sombrero is home to important numbers of seabirds, including: masked and brown boobies, brown noddies, bridled and sooty terns.



The endemic black lizard and recently discovered dwarf gecko, which may also be endemic, are present. Recently a new species of bee has been described. Photo: Anguilla Archaeological and Historical Society

New UKOTCF Council Member

UKOTCF Council has co-opted Pat Saxton to fill the vacancy on Council created when Karen Varnham stood down to concentrate on the challenges of both being a new mother and completing her PhD thesis. Both Karen and Council plan that she will continue to work with UKOTCF on various matters.

Patricia Saxton

Patricia Penrod Saxton is the Director of the Turks and Caicos National Museum (TCNM). She was appointed in September, 2010.

Patricia moved to Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos, in 1998, from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania USA, where she was a sales and advertising executive for over twenty years. Upon arriving in Grand Turk, she realized the need for pure drinking water, and started a business: Island Pure Water. Within two years, she handed the reins of the profitable company over to her husband, Neil. This allowed her to pursue a new career in helping local businesses become more profitable. She also started volunteering as a fund-raiser for the Turks and Caicos National Museum, was instrumental in establishing Rotary in Grand Turk, and was a first responder with the Red Cross. She is a contributing writer for the *Astrolabe* series in the *Times of the Islands Magazine*.

Business management is Patricia's background, with an emphasis on fund-raising for non-profit organisations. Evaluating non-profits and helping them to become self-sufficient is a challenge in which she thrives. In the USA, she was involved with Rotary International as a fund-raiser, and volunteered with United Way and the Red Cross in fund-raising efforts.



Under her role as Director of the Turks and Caicos National Museum, the Museum has been able to work with the UKOTCF in establishing some of the most innovative bird-trails in the Caribbean, and to create the Cultural and Botanical Gardens in Grand Turk, TCI.

In less than two years, she was able to cut spending and increase revenue through grants, outright donations and new tours, so the TCNM would be on track for her goal, to be self-sufficient within three years. Hiring the right people, enlisting volunteers, renting out the Museum's own facilities, and launching new self-sustaining tours have helped get the Museum back on its feet. It was a bold decision by the

Board of Trustee's to enlist a "business team" to run the Museum.

Business is not the only passion Patricia has. She has always been keen on environmental issues, conservation and volunteering. Raising two sons, she instilled this mindset to both of her children. Her older son, Bryan (Naqqi) Manco, is a botanist and naturalist working for Turks and Caicos Islands Government, and her younger son, Brad Manco, is in the US Air Force in the Explosive Ordnance Division.

Patricia lives on Grand Turk, Turks and Caicos, with her beloved and patient husband, Neil, and their four active large dogs. She enjoys travelling, writing, gardening, and visiting her grandchild, Mya in Tampa Florida.

Congratulations to Richard and Dace Ground

Sir Richard Ground received his knighthood in the Queen's Birthday Honours, in June 2012. The award is mainly in respect of his distinguished legal career as Chief Justice in Bermuda until retirement this year, and previously as Chief Justice in TCI, and Attorney General in Cayman. To conservationists, he is perhaps better known as an outstanding wildlife photographer. His photos are published in *Creator's Glory: Photographs of the Wildlife of Grand Cayman Island* (1989), *The Birds of the Turks and Caicos Islands* (2001), and *Birds of Bermuda* (2004). His wife, Lady Ground (Dace to most of us), has made major contributions of effort in support of conservation in Cayman, TCI and Bermuda (including the layout of Richard's books), and is a Council member of UKOTCF. With their retirement to Derbyshire, they have departed Bermuda, where in 2011, the Bermuda National Trust gave Dace the Silver Palmetto Award, the Trust's highest honour, for her many years of exemplary service there. However, we know that her work for both the Bermuda National Trust and UKOTCF will continue from strength to strength.



Pitcairn suffers highest monthly rainfall ever – in just 2 days

On 2-3 February 2012, a record-breaking 623 mm of rain fell on Pitcairn, part of 775 mm for the whole of February. Both totals break the record (619 mm in December 1984) for any month since at least 1954, when records began. In all, an average 6 months' worth of rain fell over a 36-hour period with devastating effects.

Islanders reported that the rain began early on the Thursday afternoon and rained non-stop for 25 hours. About 298mm fell in 24 hours. This rain produced a mayor slip on the corner of the road above the boatshed, partly destroying the toilet. Another major slip was seen at the very bottom of the road at Tedside, blocking off access to the sandier part of the beach. The rain stopped for a brief moment on Friday afternoon, but then it started falling again and continued for at least 14 hours non-stop. Over 300mm fell during this time. The heaviest rain came during the early hours of Saturday morning. It was not until daylight Saturday morning that Islanders realised the full extent of the damage.

The road to the Landing was completely blocked from just below the Edge all the way to the bottom. Mayor slips had fallen in at least four places along this road, with smaller slips along the way. The result of these slips destroyed every single power pole besides one. The main power line and telephone cable ended up wrapped around coconuts and extended all the way down the hill to the water's edge. The corner of the boat shed next to the road was severely damaged, and Islanders considered themselves lucky not to lose the main boat-winch which was partially filled, with water and silt inside the engine. The engine was cleaned up and is running normally. A part of the roof on the canoe shed collapsed after trees fell on the roof, damaging one or two canoes. The bay itself was partially filled with silt, rock and debris. The jetty was covered with between 300mm and 600mm of silt, mud and rocks.

On the other side of town, a major slip occurred just above the road leading to the school, in which a couple of large rocks, along with debris and a massive force of water came down and destroyed a power pole. The road was partially blocked and power to the school cut off. One house was cut off until repairs could be made.

The slip at Tedside became bigger, with more mud and trees coming down. Another slip a few metres higher also blocked the road. Another slip on the road to Brown's Water completely blocked the road, and another slip just above the batching plant at the rock-crusher fell down, hitting the batching plant and capsizing it.

Work commenced as soon as possible on Saturday clearing the road to the Landing, cleaning up debris in the harbour, and restoring power to the school. The bulldozer and excavator were used to push away 6 metres of mud at the Landing, where a small cluster of coconut trees had been washed down on to the landing – and looked as if it been neatly placed there. Work continued all day Sunday, clearing the road and jetty at the Landing and cleaning out the Longboat shed, which had some mud and rocks inside. It took all day and well into the night to clean up the longboat winch and restore it to running order. All the following day was spent dredging the harbour at Bounty Bay.

The islanders were under a lot of pressure to clear the Landing, especially the harbour, as the cruise ship Saga Ruby was due the following day, sales to passengers forming a major part of the Island's economy. A final safety check of the harbour was made in the morning before the ship's arrival. The roads overall will need a lot of maintenance. Fortunately, no one was hurt and loss of personal property was minimal.

Major land slides have taken out valleys, leaving those areas bare. The landing and main road was hit extremely hard with massive land-slides throughout the whole area, blocking the road and leaving bare sheer cliffs which once had trees. Technical assistance is needed on retaining such areas (mainly the Landing and main road) where further land-slides will happen if there is another downpour. The Division Manager for Operations has already identified a major safety issue and it now looks like a safety guard rail will be needed along the road down the Landing. Power-lines along the Landing road were taken out and the power poles are nowhere to be seen. The bridge at Pulau has been washed away, leaving a steel beam in the storm drain. A landslide underneath Flatland took out power lines and broke power poles in half.

Many thanks to the Islanders for taking the trouble to keep us informed while also volunteering their time and energy in cleaning up the Landing, the road, and restoring power to the school.

An Islander comments that climate-change is alive and kicking: "During 2010-2011, we experienced the worst drought and minimal rainfall; during winter 2012 we have experienced a monsoon summer and a natural disaster. We are currently seeking technical assistance from DFID and SPC/SOPAC; if anyone could further assist with advice, we would be more than grateful."

UKOTCF volunteers: Duncan & Sally Hutt - and Fraser

The winter of 2010 and into 2011 saw us on Middle Caicos undertaking some voluntary work for the Turks and Caicos National Trust, an associate of UKOTCF. The work included practical work and advice on management of their sites on Middle and North Caicos. The Christmas holidays gave us a chance to visit Grand Turk, where we assisted UKOTCF associate organisation, the Turks and Caicos National Museum, with a project to record the old Anglican churchyard there. The trip was a family event, with Sally and I volunteering, and Fraser (then 8 years old) going to the great little school on Middle Caicos. We even managed a visit from my mother (and a friend of hers), who were also set to work when the opportunity arose.

Returning to the UK, we quickly realised how little is known of the Turks and Caicos Islands, and the UK overseas territories in general - and of the wildlife, even less. I work for Northumberland Wildlife Trust, and this means I am frequently asked to give talks to local wildlife groups. This presented me with a chance to talk about the trip, the work, and the wildlife of the islands. It also presented the ideal opportunity to play a small part in informing the audiences about the existence of the UKOTs. The challenges to protect wildlife in places like the TCI cannot be underestimated. Those reading this will already know that, but it is the wider public that really need to learn a bit more about this challenging area of UK wildlife conservation. It is encouraging that Fraser, now 10, chose to talk about the TCI when he had to do a presentation to his class at school (and did it twice!). It may be a small thing, but every talk that is given on the UKOTs must help to educate and inform more people about these largely unknown territories.

Anyone interested in our work with TCNT and TC National Museum can find out more on huttstwork.wordpress.com (look at the Turks and Caicos index page or the Turks and Caicos category).

Duncan Hutt



Those interested in volunteering work with UKOTCF should contact Catherine Wensink (cwensink@ukotcf.org)

Duncan describes, to an audience in NE England, some of the work - including Sally and Fraser on one of the trails designed by UKOTCF (Photos: Sally & Duncan Hutt).



Friends of the UK Overseas Territories

Four good reasons to become a Friend:

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

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

OR: I wish my company to be a Corporate Friend of the UK Overseas Territories at annual level: £150 £500 £1,000 £.....

Name of individual Friend or contact person for Corporate Friend:

Company name of Corporate Friend (if relevant) :

Address:

Telephone: Fax: Email:

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

1. **UK cheque:** I enclose my UK cheque made out to UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum for this amount.

2. **Standing Order form:** To: The Manager, Bank Name: Branch Sort-code

Bank address: Bank postcode:

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

My account number: Name

Address: Postcode:

Signature: Date:

3. **Standing Order instructions sent:** I confirm that I have sent instructions directly to my bank for a standing order as per option 2 above.

4. **Credit or charge card:** Please charge the amount indicated above to my card now *and thereafter on this date annually. [Delete the words after * if you wish to make only a single payment] (If you are based in another country, your card company will handle the exchange and include the equivalent in your own currency in your regular statement.)

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

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

If used: Start date: / If used: Issue number: Signature: Date:

5. **UK taxpayers** are requested to sign the following section to allow UKOTCF to recover tax paid:

I want this charity to treat all donations that I make from the date of this declaration until I notify you otherwise as Gift Aid donations.

Signature: Date:

**Send to UKOTCF, Icknield Court, Back Street, Wendover, Bucks. HP22 6EB, UK;
if using options 3 or 4, you can fax to +44 2080 207217**

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum is a non-profit organisation registered as a limited company in England & Wales No 3216892 and a Registered Charity No 1058483. Registered Office: Icknield Court, Back Street, Wendover, Bucks. HP22 6EB *This blank form may be copied for others to use.*

UKOTCF Virtual Tours now online

The first of the long-planned Virtual Tours of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies are now available on www.ukotcf.org, by popular demand.

UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) are important parts of the UK, not foreign countries. Although small in size, they support far more endemic taxa and other globally important biodiversity than does Great Britain and Northern Ireland. They are also important for their historical and cultural heritage, both in their own right, and their historical links for Britain.

However, there is little public awareness, either within other UKOTs or in mainland UK, of the biodiversity and cultural importance of each UKOT, and the challenges it faces. UKOTCF uses every opportunity to make people aware of the value and special nature of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (CDs), which face similar challenges and issues. It does this, for example, at conferences, meetings, through its publications and at the British Bird Watching Fair. People who are made aware of the value of the UKOTs are amazed that they are not better known. Young people in particular have expressed surprise that education in the UK does not include learning about the UKOTs, and that individual UKOTs and Crown Dependencies do not learn much, if anything, about each other.

The idea for developing online virtual tours of the UKOTs came about through such discussions, to widen awareness of the UKOTs and CDs and increase understanding of their importance. The virtual tours draw attention to the biodiversity and cultural value, and highlight the challenges they face and the opportunities to protect and conserve their important features. Links are provided to some organisations based in the UKOTs and CDs.

To access the tours, please go to www.ukotcf.org and choose Territories and Tours from the left hand sidebar, and select the Virtual Tour option. The introduction page opens, and below this is the access map (you might have to scroll down). (At present you can also get the Virtual Tour page from the "What's New" virtual tour item on the top right-hand side.) Select whichever tour you wish to view. As well as choosing the complete tour, you can also choose to access a particular section only. The Virtual Tours currently available are the British Virgin Islands, Montserrat, Pitcairn and the Turks & Caicos Islands.

Not all the tours are ready yet, and the development process is ongoing. Those which are live are indicated in green on the access map, and when new tours become available they will be announced in the "What's New" section of the UKOTCF home page. Even the ones that are done will be updated and extended from time to time. We hope that the virtual tours will provide an interesting way of making the UKOTs and CDs better known.

Comments, suggestions on content and updates are welcome, and should be sent to the UKOTCF Environmental Education Co-ordinator, Ann Pienkowski, at apienkowski@ukotcf.org

UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM
Virtual Tours: British Virgin Islands

Features of Other Interest, including Cultural

Like many Caribbean Islands, the first inhabitants were Amerindians. Columbus sighted the islands in 1493. The islands were once a haven for pirates. The Dutch were the first Europeans to make permanent settlement, but in 1672 BVI was annexed by Britain.

Top left: Belmont Mound is an important Taino site. Bottom Left: Excavations at Belmont discovered Taino petroglyphs (photo Dr Peter Brewetti). Top right: A reconstruction of one of Columbus' ships. Bottom right: the British Warship HMS Boreas, at BVI, depicted in a commemorative stamp.

(Features of Other Interest, including Cultural, 1 of 7 - Slide ref: 525)

UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM
Virtual Tours: Pitcairn Islands

Opportunities

The Pitcairn Islanders produce some of the best honey in the world (which can be purchased online or from Fortnum and Mason's, in London). They also have a thriving arts and crafts industry, selling on cruise ships and through their websites.

The renowned Pitcairn honey, and examples of wooden carvings.

© Dr Mike Pienkowski (Opportunities, 1 of 3 - Slide ref: 482)

UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM
Virtual Tours: Montserrat

Projects / Conservation Actions

The Mountain Chicken Recovery Programme is a partnership between Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Zoological Society of London, North of England Zoological Society, Chester Zoo, Parkian Zoo and the Governments of Montserrat and Dominica. To safeguard the species, mountain chickens are being bred in captivity, and are now being re-released in Montserrat. Some are fitted with radio transmitters, so that their progress can be followed. Updates about the project, and an informational poster and leaflet, are available to download from their website.

Some of the public awareness raising materials, available to download from the mountain chicken project website.

© Montserrat Department of Environment (Projects / Conservation Actions, 2 of 7 - Slide ref: 504)

UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM
Virtual Tours: Turks & Caicos Islands

Projects / Conservation Actions

Two Bird Watching Trails, a walking trail and a driving trail, developed by UKOTCF and implemented with funding obtained by the Turks and Caicos National Museum showcase the value and great bird-watching opportunities of the Grand Turk Salinas.

Students on the bird walk, one of the trail signs, close encounters with flamingos.

© Dr Mike Pienkowski (Projects / Conservation Actions, 8 of 15 - Slide ref: 404)

Screenshots showing examples of a single screen from each of (from the top): one of the sections on Features of Other Interest, including Cultural (from the BVI tour in this case); one of the Opportunities sections (from Pitcairn); and two of the sections on Projects/Conservation Actions (TCI on the left and Montserrat on the right).