



UKOTCF

Southern Oceans Working Group (SOWG) e-Newsletter

June 2017

Number 12

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Contact Information: nweber@ukotcf.org

Welcome everyone to our June edition of the SOWG e-Newsletter. This is the last time that I write to you as SOWG Secretary, as I will be leaving the Forum soon to start a PhD at the University of East Anglia, researching pollinator resources. I have very much enjoyed my time as Conservation Officer with the Forum and have learnt so much about the UK's Overseas Territories and their incredible environments and biodiversity!

Having in her previous role been Head of Conservation at the Ascension Island Government Conservation Department, Dr Nicola Weber has much knowledge of the work going on in the Southern Oceans. I am therefore very pleased to be able to hand over the role of SOWG Secretary to Nicola and I look forward to keeping in touch with UKOTCF to hearing updates of all the conservation and environmental work going on in the Southern Oceans and all of the UKOTs.

Sarah Barnsley

Thank you to Sarah for the introduction, for everything that she has done to raise awareness of work in the Southern Ocean UKOTs, and to the whole of the UKOTCF for their warm welcome to the team. I have recently returned from Ascension Island where I spent a memorable 5 years, first working with the island's green turtles and then developing and implementing the first National Biodiversity Action Plan for the Island (amongst many other projects). I am happy to have the role of Conservation Officer for the UKOTCF and to remain involved with the Southern Oceans UKOTs, as well as expanding my knowledge and involvement with the Caribbean OTs. I look forward to interacting with you all through the SOWG network and, in the meantime, I hope that you enjoy reading the interesting updates in this latest edition of the SOWG Newsletter. Please do get in touch with any queries or updates to be included in the next edition.

Nicola Weber

Cross-territory

Environment Ministers meeting in Alderney

The 27th and 28th April 2017 saw the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers, or their equivalents, gather in Alderney for the second meeting of Environment Ministers. The initial meeting of the series had been hosted by Gibraltar in 2015, linked to the Conference of Conservation Practitioners jointly organised by the UKOTCF and HM Government of Gibraltar.

The focus in Alderney of the representatives from 13 of the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (UKOTs/CDs) was discussions surrounding the future of the environment in their jurisdictions. In particular, developing joint and collaborative working, as well as discussing common priorities and approaches in negotiations with UK Government, were key themes of the meeting. Representatives for Pitcairn and Tristan da Cunha were present and representatives for St Helena and the Falklands joined by Skype.

Hosted by the Government of Alderney, the meeting was chaired jointly by Victor Brownlees, Alderney's Chief Executive, and Dr John Cortés, Minister for the Environment of Gibraltar, and was co-ordinated by UKOTCF, and on-island by the Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT).

Delegates also had the opportunity to explore the island, with a barbeque at The Nunnery, an ancient Roman Fort, and trips to the to the most southerly colonies of the northern Gannet in the British Isles and the largest puffin colony remaining in the English Channel.

The full press-release from the meeting can be viewed here: www.ukotcf.org/pdf/EnvMin/UKOTCD_EnvMin_Alderney_2017.pdf and a video of the meeting can be watched here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=1s8IFL5uLyE&feature=youtu.be



The meeting in session with representatives from UKOT/ CD, including SOWG members, Mrs Michele Christian (bottom left) for Pitcairn, and Mr Chris Carnegy (third from left) for Tristan da Cunha. Photo: Catherine Wensink, UKOTCF

Ascension Island:

School children pick common names for 4 endemic plants

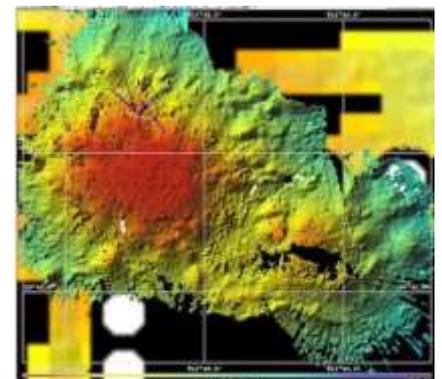
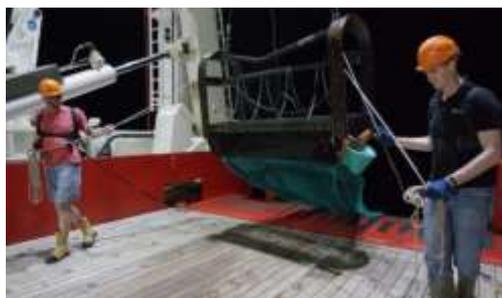
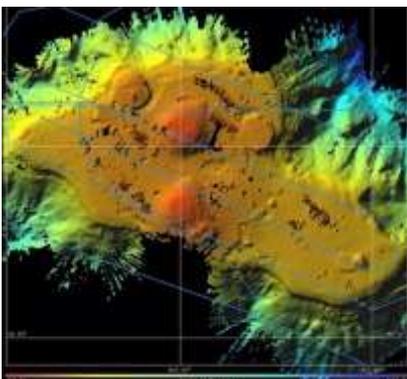
In an initiative with Two Boats School, the children had a brain-storming session with the Ascension Island Government (AIG) Conservation team to come up with common names for four of Ascension's endemic plants that did not previously have them. *Pteris adscensionis* is now locally known as the 'Feather fern', *Stenogrammatis ascensionensis* is called the 'Moss fern', *Ptisana purpurascens* the 'Purple fern' and *Sporobolus caespitosus* is commonly named the 'Hedgehog grass'.



Photos: AIG Conservation

Marine Expeditions Underway

Marine expeditions in Ascension's waters are currently underway with representatives from the AIG Conservation team, members of the National Geographic Pristine Seas team and other affiliated scientists (University of Exeter, British Antarctic Survey [BAS], and others) onboard the RRS *James Clark Ross* and another contracted vessel. This work is part of the BEST project "An ecological assessment of Ascension Island's shallow-water seamounts as candidate Marine Protected Areas" and Darwin Initiative project "The Ascension Island Ocean Sanctuary (planning for the Atlantic's largest marine reserve)". There are updates on the AIG Conservation Facebook page, and the National Geographic Pristine Seas blog: <http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/blog/pristine-seas> including the first accurate maps of the seamounts and fantastic footage captured by drop-down cameras.



Ascension's seamounts, Harris (left) and Grattan (right) mapped and surveyed in detail for the first time. Work included the deployment of acoustic arrays, CTDs (conductivity, temperature, depth), plankton nets, (centre) pelagic and drop cameras, camera lander, trawls, shark and tuna tagging and bio-acoustics (Images: Paul Rose)

British Antarctic Territory:

Shrewsbury Antarctica Exhibition

From 5th June 2017, Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery will be holding an exhibition on Antarctica. Developed in collaboration with the British Antarctic Survey, the exhibition will feature Antarctic history of science and exploration and an example of a BAS field camp. Visitors will also have the opportunity to visit the educational website: <http://discoveringantarctica.org.uk/>

The exhibition will run until the 17th September 2017.



Deployment of Boaty McBoatface

An Autosub Long Range submersible, named 'Boaty McBoatface', has been deployed in the Antarctic for the first time. Boaty is an unmanned vehicle operated by the National Oceanography Centre (NOC). For its first dive on 4th April 2017, near the South Orkney Islands, Boaty was underwater for almost 30 hours, before being retrieved for fine-tuning by a team of engineers.

In future dives, Boaty will be used in researching the flow of deep water masses through the submarine Orkney Passage. Data gathered will contribute towards scientists' understanding of how winds over the Southern Oceans influence the warming of deep water masses.

More information and a video of Boaty's deployment can be viewed via the following link: www.bas.ac.uk/media-post/first-dive-boaty-mcboatface/

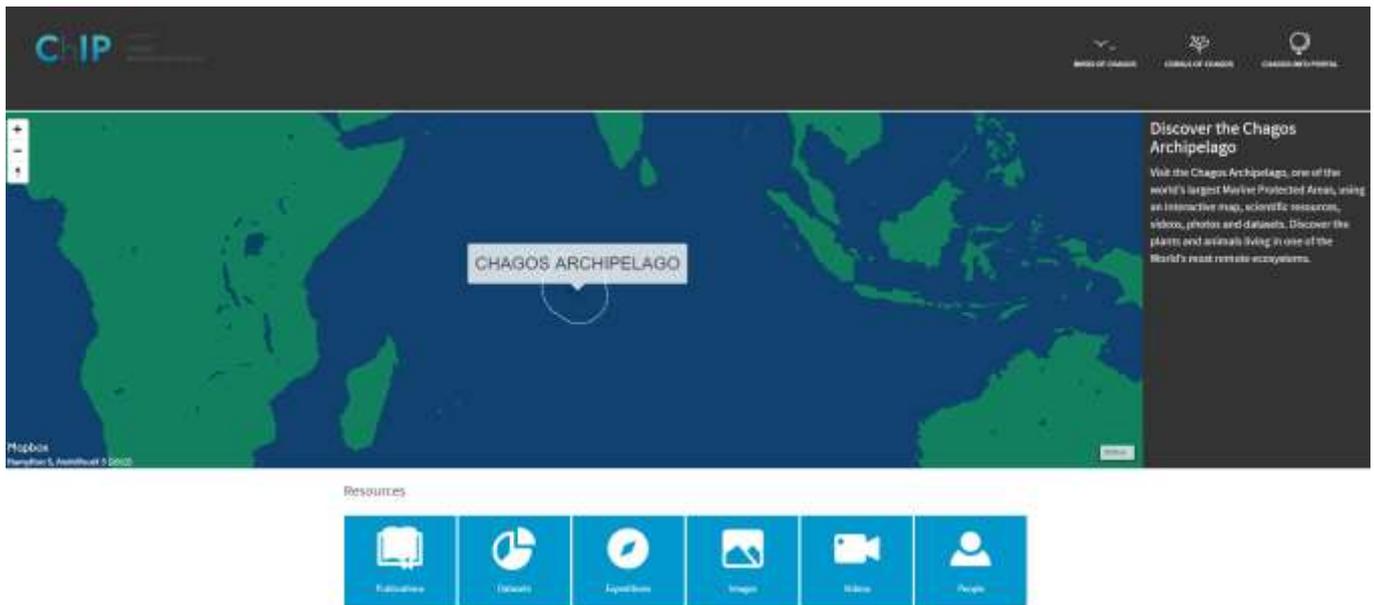


Boaty McBoatface (Autosub Long Range) during its first Antarctic deployment into the Weddell Sea off RRS James Clark Ross
(Photo: British Antarctic Survey)

British Indian Ocean Territory:

Chagos Information Portal

The Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) have developed and launched the Chagos Information Portal (ChIP) to provide various scientific resources, datasets and information on the Chagos archipelago. Funded by the John Ellerman Foundation, ChIP includes compilations for the Birds of Chagos and for the Corals of Chagos. An interactive map allows visitors to the platform to discover the different islands of the British Indian Ocean Territory. The portal can be accessed here: <http://chagosinformationportal.org/>



Urgent Chagos Expedition

April 2017 saw a team of researchers carry out a two week expedition to the Chagos archipelago, to investigate the success of the Chagos Conservation Trust's rat eradication project and to carry out an assessment of the corals following last year's bleaching event. Professor John Turner from Bangor University and CCT Trustee was team leader and joined also by CCT Trustee Pete Carr.

Healthy corals have microalgae living within them that enable them to photosynthesize. Coral bleaching is caused by warm sea temperatures which lead to corals expelling these microalgae, which can result in the death of the coral and leaves behind a white coral skeleton. The expedition team discovered that nearly all corals around the 3 atolls that were surveyed had sadly died above 15m depth. Corals at a deeper depth were found to be surviving and will hopefully provide for new generations of coral and allow the reefs to recover. Funded by the Bertarelli Foundation, Professor Turner and his team have received a grant that will allow them to carry out further investigations into coral bleaching and its impacts and the recovery potential of the reefs.

Positive news from the expedition is that Chagos Conservation Trust's invasive black rat eradication project on Ile Vache Marine was found to be successful. Trustee Pete Carr and biodiversity restoration specialist, Dr Grant Harper, found no evidence of black rats during the expedition and, indeed, found increased seabird numbers. Congratulations to CCT on this conservation success story!

For more information visit <http://chagos-trust.org/news/news-first-successful-invasive-rat-eradication-in-the-chagos-archipelago> and www.bangor.ac.uk/doctorschool/news/urgency-scientific-expedition-to-assess-climate-induced-death-of-coral-reefs-32202

Falkland Islands:

Natural Capital Assessment Project

The South Atlantic Environment Research Institute has recently launched this new project funded by Defra, through the UK's Joint Nature Conservation Committee, to undertake Natural Capital Assessments for the South Atlantic Overseas Territories. The project aims to assess the value of the OT's natural capital, establish the distribution of these assets, and develop procedures for monitoring changes to this natural capital over time using appropriate metrics.



See also the recently updated web page for the Darwin Initiative-funded Dolphins of the Kelp project with more information and results: <http://south-atlantic-research.org/research/current-research/dolphins-of-the-kelp>

Pitcairn:

Pitcairn Environment Group Meeting

8th May 2017 saw UKOTCF representatives participate in the 9th meeting of the Pitcairn Environment Group at The Pew Charitable Trust's office in London. It was wonderful to have Michele Christian, who is Divisional Manager, Environmental, Conservation & Natural Resources, of the Government of Pitcairn, present in person at the meeting and to hear her updates from the island.

It is a busy time for Pitcairn, with a long-term monitoring plan for Pitcairn's marine reserve having commenced in January 2017. The results from January to March 2017 appear to be positive, with no evidence of illegal activity detected in Pitcairn's EEZ. A Darwin Initiative project ended in March, one output being a draft Marine and Fisheries Management Plan which would undergo a public consultation, and for which regulations would be developed. Other activities include work by ZSL to enhance Pitcairn's tourism opportunities, with leaflets being produced with an environmental focus and a series of self-guided walks. The RSPB's Henderson rat eradication programme continues with researchers gaining a better understanding of why the previous eradication attempt wasn't successful. UKOTCF's Dr Mike Pienkowski also presented discussions taking place between the Forum and Michele Christian regarding further collaboration with Pitcairn in terms of the designation of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Discussions to advance designations for the atolls Ducie and Oeno, as well as Henderson, are ongoing, and will, of course, depend on decisions by the Island Council.

Plastic Problem

A recently published study by researchers at the University of Tasmania estimated that more than 37 million pieces of plastic debris have accumulated on the uninhabited Henderson Island. This is the highest density of debris reported anywhere in the world and poses a threat to the local biodiversity, for example sea turtles and seabirds.



As the island is uninhabited, it is thought that ocean currents bring a steady stream of plastic debris from around the world, from rubbish swept into drains and debris dropped off fishing boats. The authors note that some of the world's most remote and otherwise pristine islands "have become reservoirs for the world's waste", with the study highlighting the effect that plastic debris is having on the environment on a global scale.

South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands:

South Georgia once hidden by ice cap

Approximately 20,000 years ago, South Georgia was covered by an ice-cap. This discovery was made by a team of International Researchers who travelled to South Georgia in 2012 and 2013, aboard the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) research vessel, the RRS *James Ross Clark*, and the German RV *Polarstern* respectively. These visits allowed the team to use sonar mapping technology, in addition to collecting sediment samples using weighted gravity corers.

The data gathered unveiled historical patterns of glacial expansion and melting, revealing in fact that the ice covered South Georgia's continental shelf. These glaciation patterns would have greatly influenced biodiversity, as stated on the BAS website which quotes Dr Alastair Graham of the University of Exeter: "The survival of ocean ecosystems is linked heavily to patterns of glaciation, so it is very interesting to know where and how sea-bed creatures lived through the ice age, and how the cycles of ice-cap change have influenced the biodiversity. Life must have really only survived at the edges, at and beyond the ice margins"

"Our work also provides a key data point for ice sheet and climate models, which will now need to simulate a large ice field on South Georgia during the last ice age if they are to have confidence in their outputs."

St Helena:

Commercial Air Services to St Helena: Preferred Bidder Announced

On the 9th June 2017, St Helena Government (SHG) announced that SA Airlink has been chosen as the preferred bidder for the provision of a scheduled commercial air service to St Helena.

SA Airlink is a privately owned airline registered in South Africa. It is a franchisee to South African Airways. SA Airlink is a member of the International Air Transport Association ("IATA") and as such is IATA Operational Safety Audit ("IOSA") accredited. SA Airlink is a well-established airline operating on a scheduled network with domestic and regional passenger and cargo services.

SHG will now enter into a period of contractual negotiations with SA Airlink. It is anticipated that a formal announcement will be made in the coming weeks on the completion of negotiations and contract signing. It is at this point that SHG will be able to confirm details such as the commencement date, frequency, aircraft type, the international hub and connecting airports. Details on the cost of fares and sales distribution will be released shortly after contract signing.

Source: St Helena Government website

Tristan da Cunha:

Ocean Pledge

11 year old Tristan islander Kieran Glass flew to New York at the start of June to attend an important UNESCO event to mark World Ocean Day. Kieran is one of 27 young people, aged 8-21 who represented a World Heritage Site at the event and was the only representative from the UK or any UK Overseas Territories. You can view his 'Ocean Pledge' here: www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sYCKVPXWKY

Camogli Healthcare Centre Opens



A ceremony to open the recently constructed Healthcare Centre was held on the 9th June when the ribbon was cut by the eldest islander 'Aunt' Ellen Rogers who will be 99 years old later this year. The new healthcare centre for the people of Tristan da Cunha was funded by UK Aid from the UK Government, designed by Hugh Broughton Architects and Top Housing AB with construction by Galliford Try International. More photos can be viewed here: www.tristandc.com

For more information about the UK Overseas Territories, work being carried out by various organisations working to research and protect the unique biodiversity of these special places, and the role that the UKOTCF plays, please visit our website: www.ukotcf.org which has many freely available resources.

For more information about the SOWG, comments, or contributions to the newsletter, please contact Conservation Officer, Nicola Weber: nweber@ukotcf.org