



# UKOTCF

## Southern Oceans Working Group (SOWG) e-Newsletter

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### Britain's Treasure Islands

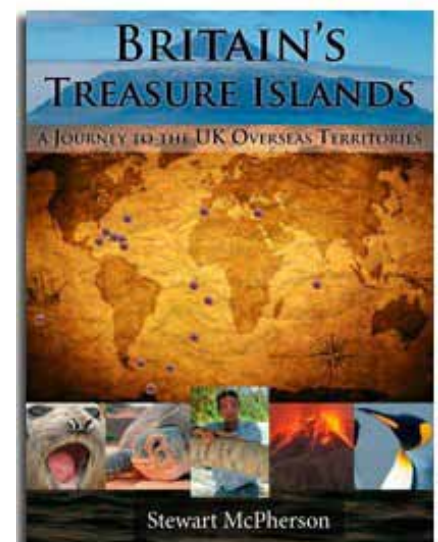
Stewart McPherson's *Britain's Treasure Islands* TV documentary series has recently aired on BBC 4 and around the World. If you have not done so already, this series which showcases the incredible wildlife, history and cultures of the UK's Overseas Territories, is definitely worth a watch! If you have not yet had the opportunity to view each episode at broadcast or iPlayer, watch out for a possible repeat in coming months.

Explorer and naturalist Stewart McPherson spent three years journeying across vast distances to discover the unique natural and cultural heritage of each of these little-known parts of Britain. In addition to the main documentary series, 42 "mini-documentaries" were created using the remaining footage not used in the main broadcast series, plus extra material by others to fill gaps in coverage; for example some of the bird video is by UKOTCF's Ann Pienkowski. Catherine Wensink of UKOTCF helped raise the funding for the professional editing of these shorts. A link to the shorts will soon be available from [www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org).

To accompany the TV documentary series, the 704 page book *Britain's Treasure Islands* is filled with facts and exciting accounts of Stewart's adventures. This is in addition to the 17 gatefold maps outlining the geography of each Territory and more than 1000 full-colour images (by Stewart's team and donated by UKOTCF personnel and others). If you are interested in finding out more about the book, visit [www.ukotcf.org/treasureislands/](http://www.ukotcf.org/treasureislands/) where you can also pre-order your copy for delivery on publication in June!

Stewart's lecture (organised jointly with UKOTCF) at the Royal Geographical Society on 24 March was also a huge success. Participants had the fantastic opportunity to listen to Stewart's experiences over the past three years, hear more about the incredible wildlife of the UK's Overseas Territories, and browse the variety of stalls representing some of the organisations working with the Territories.

*Stewart's Britain's Treasure Islands book  
(Image from UKOTCF website)*



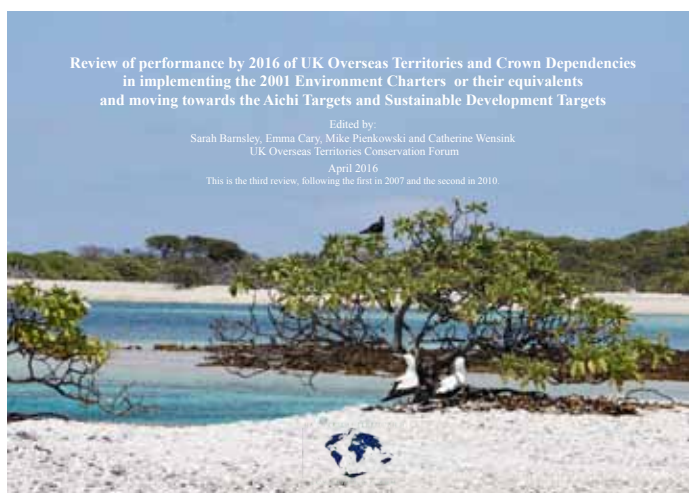
## Progress in Environment Charter Implementation

Many of the UK Overseas Territories signed Environment Charter agreements with UK Government in 2001. These summarise key points from international multilateral environmental agreements that apply to the UKOTs, and list the Commitments that each Territory entered into, in addition to the supporting Commitments that UK Government entered into. While some of the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies (CDs) either do not have an Environment Charter, or entered into one via different means, the different elements of the Charters ultimately apply to each UKOT and CD, because of their origins in other international agreements.

The aim of the project that UKOTCF personnel have been working on for the last year was to collate information from the UKOTs and CDs on progress towards implementing the Charters (or the equivalent international commitments for those Territories without Charters). Simultaneously, an attempt was made to assess progress towards the Aichi Targets which were internationally agreed by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity and other Conventions. The UN Sustainability Goals became accessible later in the information gathering process. An attempt was therefore made to relate the relevant ones of these to aspects of the report as well.

The process of linking the Environment Charters and UN goals through a review serves to demonstrate the achievements made already, and also to help assess priorities and resource needs to meet remaining Commitments, as the Territories and UK Governments move forward in their shared interest to protect and preserve global biodiversity. After much hard work by UKOTCF personnel and consultees in Territory, this project is now complete. This report has been widely welcomed, for example a conservation research leader in one of the Southern Ocean Territories said “Thanks! What a tremendous document – well done.” The link to the report is on the UKOTCF website at

[www.ukotcf.org/charters/progress.htm](http://www.ukotcf.org/charters/progress.htm).



*Front cover of the Environmental Charter Review (Cover Image: Ducie Island, by Dr Mike Pienkowski)*

## Big-Ocean Commitments in the UK Overseas Territories



*Bounty Bay Pitcairn, with the Island's longboat shed and ramp (Image by Andrew Christian, from the ZSL website)*

The Zoological Society of London (ZSL) hosted an event on 10 May, looking at the UK's role in marine conservation in the UK Overseas Territories.

Thanks to the Overseas Territories, the UK is responsible for 6.8 million km<sup>2</sup> of ocean which hosts important biodiversity and ranges from tropical waters to the poles. The *Big-Ocean Commitments in the UK Overseas Territories* event therefore aims to demonstrate actions that the UK is taking to protect these waters and their ecosystem diversity. The talk covered the UK's next steps for becoming the world leader in marine stewardship.

More information about the talk, including talk abstracts, can be found via the following link:

[www.zsl.org/science/whats-on/big-ocean-commitments-in-the-uk-overseas-territories](http://www.zsl.org/science/whats-on/big-ocean-commitments-in-the-uk-overseas-territories)

## British Antarctic Territory

### South Orkneys – State of the Antarctic Ecosystem Expedition

In conjunction with scientists from the Scientific Committee for Antarctic Research (SCAR) AntEco research programme, the British Antarctic survey (BAS) is currently leading a research expedition entitled SO-AntEco (South Orkneys – State of the Antarctic Ecosystem). The project commenced in August 2015 and is due to end in August 2016, with the expedition itself recently completed, having taken place in early 2016. It took place on board BAS research ship *RRS James Ross Clark*, and involved researching the biodiversity both within and outside the South Orkney Islands Southern Shelf Marine Protected Area (SOISS MPA).

The South Orkney Islands lie in the Southern Ocean, 375 miles from the tip of the Antarctic Peninsula. The surrounding sea-floor has been shown to be incredibly biodiversity-rich and, in 2009, the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR) established the SOISS MPA.

With participants coming from 16 different institutes across 9 countries, the expedition seeks to gain a better understanding of sea-floor communities in terms of their composition and distribution around islands.

As an example, knowledge of where animals that are vulnerable to various human impacts live, would aid in the management of natural resources in this area. The results of SO-AntEco will also help in determining the effectiveness of the MPA, and how its management could be improved.

For more information on this project, visit [www.bas.ac.uk/project/so-anteco/](http://www.bas.ac.uk/project/so-anteco/). Official reports will also be produced based on the data collected during the expedition. These will be made available on the SCAR biodiversity data portal - [www.biodiversity.aq](http://www.biodiversity.aq).



*Various species from SO-AntEco sampling (Image by C. Waller, H. Wiklund, B. Danis and C. Moreau)*

### Antarctic Thresholds – Ecosystem Resilience and Adaptation (AnT - ERA)

Due to some Antarctic ecosystems experiencing rapid environmental changes, while others seem to remain relatively stable, there is a need to understand how biological systems function. There is also a need to identify thresholds and predict future ecosystem services. Information such as this will provide the opportunity to include the Antarctic in wider ecological discussion about changes across the globe.

Antarctic Thresholds - Ecosystem Resilience and Adaption (AnT – ERA) is a programme by the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research. It is a platform allowing knowledge exchange and support for research on biological processes at ecological time scales. In particular, it applies to research related to environmental change. Aims of AnT – ERA include, as an example, interdisciplinary cooperation with other Antarctic-specific programmes and projects which are ecologically relevant globally.



Research into biological processes will study three levels of biological organisation – physiological/biomolecular performance, populations, and ecosystems. It will also allow a flow of information between these different levels.

If you are interested in learning more about the platform and would like to read the implementation plan, visit [www.scar.org/antera/antera-about](http://www.scar.org/antera/antera-about).



## South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

### Reclaiming South Georgia



**Reclaiming South Georgia by Tony Martin and Team Rat (Photo from SGHT website)**

The South Georgia Heritage Trust (SGHT) Habitat Restoration Project involved fieldwork carried out in three phases to remove rodents from the island. The fieldwork involved baiting every area of land on the island that was infested by rodents. Much work is still needed over the coming years to guarantee that every rodent has definitely gone. In light of this, the new book *Reclaiming South Georgia, The defeat of furry invaders on a sub-Antarctic island* has been written by Project Director Professor Tony Martin, with every photo taken by one of his Team Rat members.

The story covers the challenges faced and also the successes achieved in ridding South

Georgia of rodents. Book sales will allow funds to be raised for the upcoming monitoring phase of the project. *Reclaiming South Georgia* can therefore be purchased from the SGHT online shop. This can be accessed via the following link:

[www.sghtonline.gs/Reclaiming-South-Georgia](http://www.sghtonline.gs/Reclaiming-South-Georgia)

The SGHT has been awarded a Darwin Plus grant of £87,000 over two years for the post-baiting phase of the Habitat Restoration Project.

### Island Invasives Conference 2017

The South Georgia Heritage Trust (SGHT) will be hosting the Island Invasives Conference 2017 in partnership with the University of Dundee. Following conferences held in Auckland, New Zealand in 2001 and 2010, this will be the third in a series of international conferences focusing upon the impact and management of invasive alien species on islands.

While the issue of invasive alien species is expanding rapidly, awareness of the impacts that these species have upon local fauna and flora is also increasing. Invasive species have led to the extinction of many endemic species. However, islands do have the huge advantage of being able to maintain a long-term refuge if such invaders can be completely eradicated or at least controlled effectively.

The Conference is to be held at the University of Dundee from Monday 10 July to Friday 14 July 2017. Further information can be found via the following link:

[www.sght.org/island-invasives-conference-2017](http://www.sght.org/island-invasives-conference-2017)

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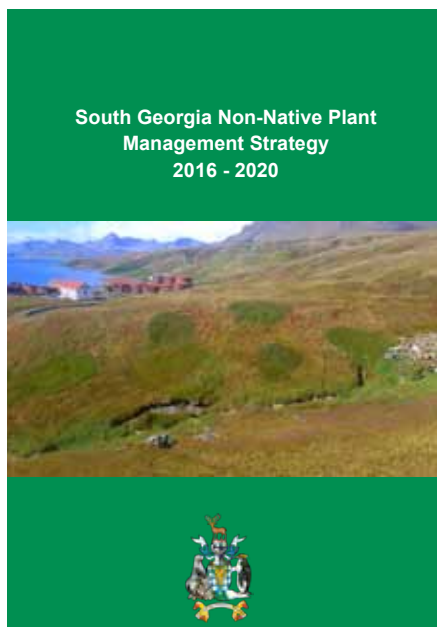


*The organisers and their associates for the Island Invasives Conference 2017 (Image from SGHT website)*

In Association with:



## New Non-Native Plant Management Strategy



*The cover of the South Georgia Non-native Plant Management Strategy*

21 March 2016 saw the launch, by the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI), of the South Georgia Non-Native Plant Management Strategy 2016-2020. Developing the strategy was possible thanks to the successful application by GSGSSI in 2014 to the Darwin Plus Initiative.

The strategy will allow progress to continue in the management of non-native species, an area of high priority for South Georgia which has recently seen huge advances through the eradication of rodents and reindeer. Delivery of the strategy should mean that 33 out of 41 non-native plants are managed to zero population density, or completely eradicated, by 2020. Along with the continued implementation of strict biosecurity measures, and capacity building for a quick response upon the detection of new species, the strategy will be enormously beneficial for ecosystems on South Georgia. A minimum amount of £200,000 has been dedicated towards the cost of staff and logistics over the next five years.

The strategy itself can be found on the GSGSSI website:

[www.gov.gs/non-native-plant-management-strategy-for-south-georgia/](http://www.gov.gs/non-native-plant-management-strategy-for-south-georgia/)

## Falkland Islands

### SAERI Marine Spatial Planning Update

The US-IALE (International Association for Landscape Ecology) 2016 Annual Meeting was held from 3-7 April in Asheville, North Carolina, USA. Veronica Frans, Research Assistant for SAERI's Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) for the Falkland Islands project, had the opportunity to attend this conference and present her research.

Since August 2015, Veronica has been working on baleen whale historical distribution and sighting numbers in the Falkland Islands in addition to using a species distribution modelling (SDM) technique in order to identify suitable baleen whale habitat around the Islands. Veronica's abstract for the US-IALE conference outlines why



*Veronica presenting at the US-IALE conference  
(Photo from SAERI blog page)*

it is so important to carry out this work: “With possible oil and gas exploitation in the near future, it is vital to map key habitats for whales in order to mitigate the risks to this potentially recovering population.”

The modelling work is being carried out in collaboration with German scientists Jan Engler, from the Zoological Research Museum Alexander Koenig, and Hendrik Edelhoff, from the Department of Wildlife Sciences, Georg-August-University, Göttingen. The results of the research will feed in to the Marine Spatial Planning process. The aim of the 2-year Darwin Plus funded MSP project is to prepare data, tools and analyses in order to start the MSP process, and work towards an MSP framework for the Falkland Islands.

Also forming part of the MSP project process, a Marine Spatial Planning workshop was held on 5-7 April, bringing together marine stakeholders of the Falkland Islands. The third workshop of the project, it was also the last, as the project is due to end in July 2016. Following submission to the Executive Council in December 2015 by the MSP project team, of a paper outlining why MSP would be beneficial to the Islands, Executive Council agreed to development of an MSP plan based on a fine-scale framework. With local stakeholders and international experts present, the workshop enabled discussion for defining this fine-scale framework.

For more information on the baleen whale research and the MSP workshop, visit the following link: [www.south-atlantic-research.org/blog/](http://www.south-atlantic-research.org/blog/). The full abstract for Veronica’s US-IALE presentation can be found here: [www.usiale.org/asheville2016/presentation-details/18414](http://www.usiale.org/asheville2016/presentation-details/18414)

## **Tristan da Cunha**

### **Benefits of Gaining UNESCO World Heritage Designation**

20 April 2016 saw Chris Carnegy, UK Representative of Tristan da Cunha, participating in a UNESCO event in London to mark the commencement of a new study assessing the benefits of receiving UNESCO designation.



*Juvenile Tristan Albatross (Photo by James Glass – from the Tristan da Cunha website)*

Gough and Inaccessible Islands, two uninhabited and relatively undisturbed oceanic islands, are internationally important for their colonies of 22 different seabird species. In addition, they are home to various endemic and sub-species of land birds, such as the Gough bunting (endemic to Gough Island), Inaccessible rail (endemic to Inaccessible Island), and 40 plant species endemic to the Tristan archipelago. While Gough Island and surrounding waters to 3 nautical miles was first declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995, the site was extended to include Inaccessible and their surrounding waters to 12 nautical miles in 2004.

Unfortunately, as is the case with many island ecosystems globally, invasive alien species pose an immediate threat to the ecology of Gough and Inaccessible Islands. While Inaccessible Island is one of the only oceanic islands with no introduced mammals, Gough Island has not been as fortunate. House mice were introduced to Gough Island in the 1800s. These have hugely adverse impacts on both terrestrial and marine birds on the Island. As an example, through attacking albatross chicks, they have placed these several species in critical danger.

Thankfully, work is being done through the RSPB to develop a plan for restoring Gough Island to its naturally pristine state. Support from UNESCO and the UK Government, among others, will be essential for the success of

this restoration, and UKOTCF has responded positively to RSPB's request for help.

We look forward to hearing more about Gough Island restoration in the future and the outcome of the study looking at the benefits of UNESCO designation. If you would like to find out more about the Gough and Inaccessible Islands World Heritage Site, visit <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/740>

## Endemic Species Fact-file: Great Shearwater

The great shearwater *Puffinus gravis*, is known in Tristan da Cunha as the mutton bird. With a wingspan of up to 118cm and weight of up to 1.1kg, the species breeds only on Nightingale, Inaccessible and Gough Islands. There is also a record of a pair breeding on the Falkland Islands.

*Puffinus gravis* can be recognised by its brown upper body and white lower body, long beak with a hooked tip and its black cap. This species consumes mainly squid and fish, either caught on the water surface or by shallow plunging.

With approximately 2-3 million pairs on Nightingale, 2 million on Inaccessible and 1 million on Gough Island, great shearwaters are not threatened (except by the very restricted breeding range, and it is possible that, like other species, they suffer losses of chicks to the introduced and predatory house mice on Gough Island). Following an annual migration to the North Atlantic, adult birds return to the Tristan Islands around late August – September. *Puffinus gravis* lays one egg in a burrow dug out of soft soil beneath tussock grass. The birds lay an egg in late October/November which hatches in late December/January. The chick then fledges by May and the adults leave the Tristan Islands in April/May for another migration.



*Great shearwater (Photo by Paul Tyler and Alison Rothwell)*

If you are interested in finding out more about this species, visit the following links:

[www.tristandc.com/wildgreatshearwater.php](http://www.tristandc.com/wildgreatshearwater.php) and [www.ukotcf.org/pdf/TristanFactsheets.pdf](http://www.ukotcf.org/pdf/TristanFactsheets.pdf)

## St Helena

### Whale Shark Research

December 2015 saw four team members from Georgia Aquarium in the USA set out on a whale shark research expedition to St Helena. The main goal of the four-week expedition was to gain a better understanding of how and where whale sharks mate, how they use the waters of the Island of St Helena, and where they go when they leave the Island.

Georgia Aquarium has been working with the St Helena Government over the last few years in order to increase knowledge of the newest whale shark site known in the scientific world. There have been some interesting results already. For example, while most places have solely giant females or aggregations of mostly male juveniles, St Helena has 50% male and 50% female adult whale sharks.

The expedition team consisted of Dr Al Dove, Director of Research and Conservation at Georgia Aquarium, collaborator Rafael de la Parra, Georgia Aquarium project coordinator, Harry Web, curator of the Ocean Voyager



Exhibit, Chris Schreiber, and Jeff Reid, dive safety officer. They worked closely with a St Helena Government team led by Elizabeth Clingham.

Various techniques were used by the team to characterise the whale sharks, including computer-aided photographic identification and different tracking tags. More than 50 tags were placed, including satellite, live data and acoustic tags, and acoustic receivers were deployed in various locations around the Island. Data will be used to inform environmental management decisions for St Helena.

Georgia Aquarium produced a 'Whale Sharks in St Helena' Expedition Week blog series in March 2016 which provides a good account of the experiences of the team. Day 1 of the blog series can be found by following this link:

<http://georgiaaquariumblog.org/georgia-aquarium-blog/2016/3/1/expedition-week-whale-shark-research-in-st-helena-al-dove.html>



*Whale Shark (Image from the Georgia Aquarium blog website)*

## New Bugs Discovery

*Bugs on the Brink* Educational Officer Liza Fowler recently made the discovery of ten invertebrate species new to the Island of St Helena. These included two new insect families, the scaly bark flies, and the scentless plant bugs, in addition to several invertebrate species not seen on the Island for many years.

International invertebrate expert Dr Roger Key studied photographs taken by Liza and confirmed that they were indeed new species to the Island. At the time, he had been working on a new invertebrate guide for St Helena as part of the *Bugs on the Brink* project. This project is a partnership between Buglife, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, St Helena Government and St Helena National Trust, and is funded by the Darwin Initiative.

The most exciting discoveries were the rediscovery of Basilewsky's crane fly and Lelup's centipede, both of which are endemic species to the High Peaks, and neither of which had been seen for 45 years!



*Lelup's centipede (Image by Liza Fowler, from the Buglife website)*

However, the discovery of the majority of the bugs is not very good news as they are invasive species, non-native to St Helena. While there is the possibility that they may have adverse effects on native bugs or flora, the positive side is that their presence on the Island is now known. Furthermore, the discoveries have aided the 'Bugs on the Brink' project achieve a better understanding of the incredible invertebrate fauna of St Helena.

More information on the new bug discoveries can be found at:

<http://buglife-newsroom.prgloo.com/news/new-bugs-discovered-on-remote-atlantic-island>

## Historic Aircraft Landing

18 April 2016 was a momentous occasion for the Island of St Helena. This day saw the first large passenger jet aircraft land at St Helena's new Airport shortly after midday. The aircraft in question, a Boeing 737-800 (ZS-ZWG), is the aircraft that will itself probably provide the service between St Helena and Johannesburg.

The purpose of this 'Implementation Flight' was, among other objectives, to assess the route, passenger and



cargo handling, training and various safety aspects at St Helena Airport. Since this flight, St Helena Government confirmed that additional safety and operational work is needed prior to the Airport opening. This means that the official opening, which was due to be held on 21 May 2016 will be postponed until a later date.

Various environmental considerations were addressed through the Airport project, which drove the establishment of management practices on the Island that include positive environmental considerations. See the previous edition of our SOWG e-Newsletter for further information regarding the environmental aspects covered through the St Helena Airport project.



**Large passenger jet aircraft (Comair Boeing 737 in British Airways livery) over St Helena Airport (Photo from the St Helena Airport Project website)**

## Ascension Island

### Species Recovery Statistics

There are some very exciting endemic species recovery statistics for Ascension Island. Two years ago, the Ascension Island Government Conservation Department (AIGCD) planted Critically Endangered *Pteris adscensionis* ferns into the wild, after growing them from spores in nurseries. The 2016 annual plant census has shown that 47 of the mature plants that were planted are healthy and producing their own spores. Even more exciting is the news that 137 new sporelings have established themselves in the surrounding area during that time!

Equally as good news is that there have been 144 confirmed Ascension frigatebird nests on the mainland for the 2015/16 nesting period! The endemic frigatebirds were the last of the seabird species to return to Ascension's mainland from Boatswain Bird Island, following a programme of feral cat eradication. The first two nesting attempts were recorded during the 2012/13 nesting season. Given that nesting attempts have gone from 2 to almost 150 in a few years, this is an incredible success story!

Congratulations to everyone who has been involved with restoration / conservation work for both *Pteris*



***Pteris adscensionis* ferns (Photo from Ascension Island Conservation Facebook page)**



**Ascension frigatebirds (Photo from Ascension Island Conservation Facebook page)**

*adscensionis* and the Ascension frigatebird!

## Mars of the Mid-Atlantic: Costing the Earth Episode

The BBC Radio 4's *Costing the Earth* series recently aired a programme on Ascension Island. In the *Mars of the Mid-Atlantic* episode, we hear presenter Peter Gibbs visiting the Island to discover more about the greening of Green Mountain by 19th-century botanist Joseph Hooker, who was encouraged at the time by Charles Darwin. Joseph Hooker planted forest on Green Mountain in order to trap moisture from the trade winds, and in so doing introduced diverse species of flora from around the world, from guava to bamboo.

Peter Gibbs talks to Ascension's Conservationists working hard to address the issue of invasive species on the Island. He hears also about the rescuing of Ascension's tiny endemic ferns, meets nesting turtles and visits the 'wideawake' birds on the coast.

Visit the following link if you would like to listen to the podcast which is available on BBC iPlayer:

[www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b077ggv9](http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b077ggv9)

(BBC Radio programmes are usually available online anywhere in the world, although TV programmes tend to be more restricted due to copyrighting and licensing arrangements).



*Ascension (Image from Costing the Earth podcast)*

## British Indian Ocean Territory

### Chagos Conservation Trust Darwin Initiative Grant

The Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) has recently been awarded a Darwin Initiative grant for its project entitled *Creating a Terrestrial Action Plan for the Chagos Archipelago*. Led by CCT trustee Pete Carr, the project involves collaboration with scientists and conservationists from many different institutions, including ZSL, RBG Kew, RSPB and the Species Survival Commission of the IUCN. A Terrestrial Action Plan for the British Indian Ocean Territory Administration will be developed. This will help towards achieving the goal of increasing the biodiversity of the

Chagos archipelago, through the management, reduction, or elimination of threats to the native biodiversity.



*Islets in the Chagos Archipelago (Image from Chagos Conservation Trust website <http://chagos-trust.org/>)*

Unfortunately, there are concerns regarding the ecological condition of the Chagos archipelago terrestrial environment. Invasive species are an issue on more than half of the 55 islands, with rats being particularly problematic. Thankfully, essential information will be gathered through this new project that will inform island conservation management decisions taken by the BIOT Administration.

Various assessments in the outer islands will commence later on in 2016. We look forward to hearing the outcome of these!

## Pitcairn

### Pitcairn Environment Group Website Being Developed

The Pitcairn Environment Group, which consists mainly of non-government organisations, researchers and other interested individuals based in the UK, has been developing a website together with ZSL's web design team and supported by the Pitcairn Department of Natural Resources.

The idea for this website is to “create the ‘go to’ place on the web to find out about the environment of the Pitcairn Islands, the efforts underway to protect it, and the organisations and individuals involved. The site is intended to be visually engaging, easy to navigate, and act as a portal to lots of other sites with further information. Hence, this site will not in itself be very text-heavy, but it will be quite link heavy, enabling people to find the information they need.” UKOTCF has provided some information and images for the site and looks forward to seeing the results later in the year.

### Contact Information:

If you have any questions regarding any of the articles in this Newsletter, or about any of the UK's Overseas Territories more generally, please contact SOWG Secretary Sarah Barnsley at: [sbarnsley@ukotcf.org](mailto:sbarnsley@ukotcf.org)