



UKOTCF

Wider Caribbean Working Group (WCWG) e-Newsletter

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Court decision in BVI Beef Island case

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Welcome to the first WCWG e-Newsletter, which we hope will help to keep you informed of activities related to UKOTs in the Wider Caribbean region. Input and feedback from Working Group members is always welcome – please e-mail Oliver Cheesman (oliver@dipsacus.org)

Court decision in BVI Beef Island case

WCWG members will recall that, early in 2007, the then BVI Government granted approval for a major resort development and golf course on Beef Island. This caused controversy, notably over the likely environmental impacts of the development. Local concerns are said to have influenced the electorate to vote in a new administration at the subsequent general election. Angry local groups came together under the banner of the Virgin Islands Environmental Council (VIEC), who mounted a formal challenge to the development approval. After months of legal wrangling, the case finally came before the High Court in April 2009, and judgement has just been handed down. On 21 September, Justice Indra Hariprashad-Charles ruled that there was good reason for quashing the development approval, on grounds of illegality. A key aspect is the status of Beef Island's Hans Creek as a fisheries protected area. Local news sources noted that "During the hearing, novel areas of law were judicially considered which is expected to affect the future of sustainable development, planning policy, and the status of protected areas in BVI and throughout the Caribbean."

The full history of the Beef Island case, and regular updates on this and related issues, can be found on the website of the BVI Heritage Conservation Group. See: <http://www.bvihcg.com/index.shtml>

NOAA warns of coral bleaching

A sobering reminder of the region's vulnerability to climate change came at the end of July, with a warning from the US National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Administration's Coral Reef Watch Program forecast high water temperatures in the Caribbean (especially the Lesser Antilles) through to October, conditions that could result in significant coral bleaching and infectious coral disease outbreaks. Predictions suggested that problems could be as (or more) severe than those experienced in 2005, when parts of the Caribbean suffered the worst bleaching and disease impacts ever recorded in the region. See: http://www.noaanews.noaa.gov/stories2009/20090722_coralbleaching.html

Andrew Dobson wins regional award

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Bermuda Audubon Society President and WCWG member Andrew Dobson received well-earned recognition for his conservation work in July. Andrew was presented with the President's Award of the Society for the Conservation & Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB) during the Society's conference in Antigua. A past President of SCSCB, Andrew is well known for his work promoting the conservation of birds and other biodiversity in Bermuda, and more widely across the region, and is a long-standing friend of the Forum. See:

<http://www.royalgazette.com/siftology.royalgazette/Article/article.jsp?sectionId=60&articleId=7d97e2730030005>

Montserrat / chytrid fungus updates

Montserrat / chytrid fungus updates

Updates on work on-going to save Montserrat's Critically Endangered mountain chicken, in the wake of the arrival of chytrid fungus earlier this year, are amongst the regular postings on Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust's blog. See: <http://blog.durrell.org/>

OTEP Successful Projects 2009 Note: At the time of writing, OTEP are still to confirm a final decision on some of these projects

OTEP Successful Projects 2009

Implementation of the Anguilla Energy Policy 2008-2020: (Phase One - Building a Broad Community Movement), ANG601

If Anguilla is to achieve its goal of energy independence, all stakeholders in society must be drawn into the effort. A broad social movement to attain 'energy literacy' and to actively increase and share knowledge about energy usage on the island is critical among individual residents young and old, government officials, tourists, and all professional and business sectors. The Government of Anguilla has thus mandated the National Energy Committee to establish the Anguilla Renewable Energy Office. Working with the Anguilla National Trust, the Energy Committee will hire a Renewable Energy Coordinator to set up the office, develop a comprehensive public awareness campaign, coordinate efforts and inputs by stake-holders from government departments, to NGO's, to the private sector and individuals, work with the Department of Education on renewable energy and efficiency curricula development, and establish model projects to measure and display the impacts of renewable energy and efficiency inputs.

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Baseline Marine Ecosystem Surveys To Facilitate Environmental Management in Bermuda, BDA601

A fundamental impediment to marine resource management in Bermuda is the lack of critical baseline data of the benthic and fish populations present across fore-reef habitats, and within current marine protected areas of the Bermuda Platform. These reef habitats are large, covering over 300 sq. km, and of global significance as preliminary surveys indicate that the Bermuda fore-reef contains some of the healthiest coral and herbivorous fish assemblages remaining in the Western Atlantic.

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The project will undertake a comprehensive assessment of the entire fore-reef habitat at 10-m depth intervals across 3 depth zones, and of all spatially-bounded managed marine areas, using standardized methodologies. New information will be critical for the development of future marine zone management plans, and will allow Bermuda to meet its commitments as detailed in the Bermuda Environmental Charter, the Bermuda Biodiversity Action Plan, the Rio Convention on Biodiversity, and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Local resource managers will collaborate closely with our team on the project, and we will provide educational opportunities to local, UKOT and international students.

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Cayman Shark/Cetacean Network for Conservation Awareness, CAY 601

The Cayman Islands receive over 1.6 million visitors a year. The islands are fringed with reefs and mangrove, but set on a deep trench that provides an environment suitable for a wide range of shark and ray (elasmobranch), and whale and dolphin (cetacean) species. Yet there is little information on the distribution of elasmobranchs or cetaceans in the Cayman territorial seas, nor is the opportunity to reach a very large number of people on marine issues utilised. The project will 1) conduct boat surveys for cetaceans using established visual transect methods, 2) deploy Baited Remote Underwater Videos (BRUVs), supplemented by SCUBA diving, to assess shark and ray populations, 3) collaborate with local fishermen to monitor elasmobranch catch or by-catch, and record traditional knowledge, 4) organise and support a Volunteer Observer Network in reporting sighting of sharks and rays, and whales and dolphins, and 5) develop a significant local public awareness and marine environmental education programme. Linked to this latter component the project will also approach and engage with visiting cruise liners and their passengers, thus grasping a significant opportunity to raise, on a wider scale local and global, awareness of elasmobranch and cetacean conservation issues.

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Environmental education curriculum development concerning water resources in Turks and Caicos Islands, TCI 601

This project will develop a curriculum-linked teaching programme on natural freshwater systems, the increasing need for the scarce water resource, and how these needs can be met in TCI. As well as describing the hydrological systems which enable fresh water to be accessed through artesian wells, it will also provide information on rainwater collection and storage. Furthermore it will provide information on the desalination process, the energy requirements for this and the ecological effects of the process. It will also deal with wise use of water, and water-saving measures.

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Achieving GSPC Target 1: the UKOTs on-line Herbarium, XOT604

The creation of the UKOTs on-line herbarium will facilitate cost-free, easy access to plant diversity information for all UK Overseas Territories. The website, specifically created through this project, will enable access to a virtual herbarium that will be populated initially by all the UKOT herbarium specimens held at RBG Kew. Data associated with these specimens will be made available via a searchable database, subject to the removal of any Territory-specific sensitive information. The website will be further populated by field images of plants that will be linked to the specimens/species. All species names will be based on internationally accepted taxonomy. Changes in taxonomy or conservation status will be up-dated so that Territories have access to the most up-to-date information on their plant species at local, regional and international



levels. Key botanical literature will also be made available through this website. All these data will be managed through the BRAHMS database system (<http://dps.plants.ox.ac.uk/bol//home/>) where geo-referenced specimens, images, data and literature are held all together and could be easily accessed for the development of field guides. Once established under this project, RBG Kew will maintain this website as part of their core commitment to UK Overseas Territories. (Left: J.D Hooker's 1843 specimen held at Kew of the long-extinct Ascension Island endemic,

Oldenlandia adscensionis. Photo: RBG Kew).

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Invasive Species in UKOTs: databases and awareness, XOT 603

Updating the Global Invasive Species Database (GISD) for UKOTs builds on the work of the JNCC Report # 372, Non-native species in UK Overseas Territories: a review (Varnham 2006); updating the GISD with outstanding records from this report, new data from Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (RBGK), and ongoing complimentary initiatives, in conjunction with production of a UKOTs poster series, one individual poster for each UKOT, illustrating top invasive species for each, towards improving the general understanding of invasive species issues in UKOTs.



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