

# *UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum* **Annual Report April 2019 - March 2020**

## **Report of Council**

### **Overview**

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum promotes awareness of, and conservation of, the rich and unique biodiversity, natural environment and related heritage across the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (UKOTs and CDs) – and is the only body devoted solely to this. For over 30 years, it has worked in partnership with a wide network of bodies in the UK and UKOTs/CDs, many of which are Forum member and associate organisations, as well as individuals with relevant expertise. Its small team fulfils a wide variety of roles in support of the tireless work of conservation bodies in the UKOTs and CDs.

Throughout the year our activities in support of the UKOTs and CDs have included several elements including: influencing policy, raising awareness activities, networking and information sharing, developing project ideas and seeking resources for these with local partners.

There was a significant opportunity to influence UK policy, when, in the budget early in 2019, the Chancellor announced a call for evidence on funding biodiversity in the UKOTs. Considerable effort was made by the Forum in preparing a submission, in order to highlight some of the challenges and proposed solutions. The Forum was compelled to raise some of the concerns it received from its network on some of the limitations in the UK Government's current model via its dedicated fund, Darwin Plus. A summary of the responses was published in March. At around the same time as the summary report was published, a tripling of

funds for Darwin Plus, was announced.

The Channel Islands Inter-Island Environment Meeting (IIEM) took place in Alderney this year. The Forum worked with the Government of Gibraltar and the IIEM Organising Committee, led by the Alderney Wildlife Trust and States of Alderney, to expand its scope to include participants from the UKOTs. An element of the meeting was the signing of the *Blue Islands Charter* by some UKOT/CD Environment Ministers in recognition of their outstanding biodiversity, unique habitats and the services that local communities rely on, both on land and in the seas that surround them.

Across the territories, the year has seen a number of cases of significant positive progress as well as some increased challenges. Amongst the former, examples include:

- Over one million non-native invasive green iguanas culled across the Cayman Islands in order to protect the ecosystem and native species
- The launch of a guide, and event in London as part of the Tropical Important Plant Areas project in the British Virgin Islands. One of the outputs of this project is a network of 18 sites of biological importance across the archipelago
- Further protected areas established and expansion of existing ones, e.g. in Cayman, a new bird sanctuary and existing marine park areas expanded



*Some of the participants at the Wilder Islands segment of the Inter Island Environment Meeting, in Island Hall, Alderney. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski*





Since early 2019, a non-native invasive bacterial infection that kills coral has been sweeping through the Turks and Caicos Islands, destroying what is believed to be the second largest barrier reef system in the Western Hemisphere. The reef is vital to biodiversity, storm defence and the tourism-based economy. UKOTCF partner, the Turks & Caicos Reef Fund has taken the lead in monitoring this Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD), and investigating ways of stopping it.

The Hon. Ralph Hoggs, Minister of the Environment (above left, with TCRF Chairman Don Stark) authorised TCRF to experiment with an antibiotic,

in a paste applied to individual heads – the only method found to be effective in Florida, where the disease was first found. The disease appears as small patches of white exposed skeleton on the coral heads and can kill corals in a matter of days to a few weeks from them getting infected. The picture above right shows the efficacy of this in TCRF's work in TCI. The 2 photos on the left show 2 sites of infection treated on 7 March 2020. 2 weeks later (centre pictures), disease progression has stopped, and remain stopped more that 7 weeks later (right photos). Now, permission and resources are urgently needed to extend this work to save TCI's reefs, and those of other UKOTs to which the infection has also spread.

Photos: TCRF

- International media recognition of efforts to conserve endemic species, for example breeding programme for Bermuda snails at Chester zoo appears in The Independent newspaper, with the headline "Bermuda land snail comes 'back from the dead' after disappearing 40 years ago"
- The Bird Trapping Steering Group, which has overseen a 90% decrease in illegal bird-trapping, in the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas, wins the Ministry of Defence's Silver Otter Award.
- The first cohort of international students arrives in Jersey to undertake an MSc in Island Biodiversity and Conservation at the newly established Jersey International Centre for Advanced Studies; future opportunities for UKOTs and CDs students are being explored.

However, the increased challenges include:

- Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) hits TCI.
- Climate-change emergencies declared in Jersey, Gibraltar and Isle of Man.
- In the last couple of weeks of the reported year, the widespread restrictions on movement and other activities due to Covid-19 reached UK and its territories, a UKOTCF visit to TCI hit some problems and the visit to Montserrat which should have followed had to be cancelled, and other UKOTCF activities delayed, as were conservation activities in many territories; for example, the RSPB-led project to restore Gough Island in the Tristan da Cunha group, by removing invasive rodents, has been postponed for a year.

Looking forward to the coming year, we plan continuing the activities outlined below, subject to satisfactory funding arrangements – which remain a major challenge since the total removal of funding from UK Government. Approaches to improving these funding arrangements are integrated into work, as are developing current activities and initiating new ones to address the needs of our partners in territories. At the time

of drafting this report, in April, field-work and physical meetings are not possible due to restrictions attempting to limit the impact of Covid-19, and it is not known how long these will continue in the various administrations. Nevertheless, a great deal of our activities on coordinating, informing and advising are continuing, using remote communications which have long been central to our work. All our personnel have always had the ability to work from home or other remote locations so, in this respect at least, we have over 30 years' lead on some other organisations.

## Project work

As part of the continuous programme to conserve and protect wetlands across the UK Overseas Territories, some scoping work was done during a visit to one such territory, the Turks and Caicos Islands, in March. This was also an opportunity to meet with and strengthen ties with local bodies particularly with the new Director of the Turks and Caicos National Trust.

A plan is being developed to restore the pioneering network of system of trails ("field-roads"), Middle Caicos Conservation Centre, interpretation and local guide training on Middle, North and a little bit of East Caicos. These are important both for conservation and as a facility for high-value sustainable tourism in support of local small businesses.

The Forum continues to work with world experts on wetland management to define the best specifications for maintaining and restoring the international importance for birds of the salinas (former salt-pans) at Grand Turk, Salt Cay and, if possible, South Caicos, and how best to manage water-levels etc to achieve this (as well as avoiding odours, maintaining the value as water run-off areas during tropical storms etc). The Salt Islands have a real asset of value to nature, quality-of-life and tourism here, provided that management is properly set up.

Continuing this theme of supporting local communities to protect their natural assets, the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* initiative, which aims to





Parts of the old salinas (salt-pans) at Grand Turk, TCI – of huge historic importance for the North Atlantic fishing industry (as a pre-freezing preservative) and producers of “the best salt in the world” and now internationally important for resident and migrant wetland birds: one of the best places in the world for watching water-birds and needing formal protection. Left: One of the UKOTCF/Turks & Caicos National Museum drive-trail markers, which have been renovated with support from the TCI Governor’s Office after storm, flood and vehicle damage. Centre: Stilt sandpiper, one of the arctic-breeding migrants depending on the salinas out of the breeding season, flies low between feeding sites along the salina shore. Right: One of the resident reddish egrets in characteristic “umbrella” fish-hunting mode in the salinas. Photos (March 2020): Dr Mike Pienkowski

provide opportunities for the local community on Montserrat to become involved in conservation activities, is maintained at a low level, due to resource constraints. A visit to the island took place in July but another planned for March had to be cancelled at the last minute due to the pandemic caused by the coronavirus.

*Species Champions* was an initiative started by members of the *Rethink Nature partnerships*, including several NGOs familiar with working in UKOTs, e.g. Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (a member of UKOTCF), Buglife and RSPB. It had provided an opportunity for MPs to take an interest and mention this from time to time. During the last Parliament, for example, one MP had raised questions on what is happening, and what is being done, about the decline of curlews. As part of this, there had been an awareness-raising event. There had been a good spread of species from across Great Britain. However, there were no species from the UK’s Overseas Territories (UKOTs) or Crown Dependencies (CDs), for which, under international agreements, UK is answerable. Our new Council Member, Lord (John) Randall suggested that the exercise could be extended to UKOTs/CDs, and take the opportunity of recruiting Peers and MPs, some of the latter entering Parliament for the first time after the general election in December. Over the last few years, UKOTCF, working with highly skilled volunteers, had been developing a list of endemic and near-endemic species and subspecies in the UKOTs/CDs, consulting with members and partners in the UKOTs & CDs. The response had been very encouraging with all the many responding expressing strong support for such an initiative. A preliminary list on mainly endemics suitable for championing has now been developed. The list includes suitable rare or vulnerable but interesting species, which cover a range of taxa across the UKOTs/CDs as a whole, and which – wherever possible – are flagships for threatened ecosystems on which a whole range of species depend. A species profile for each species has been developed for a first set of species. Some first approaches to MPs and Peers have been made. Thoughts will turn also to how we use this information in other effective ways to raise awareness of the UKOTs/CDs and UKOTCF in UK and elsewhere.

Members and Associate organisations frequently ask when the next UKOTCF conference will be held. The Forum continues actively to explore this possibility and has had several discussions throughout the year.

On-going efforts to seek resources in order to carry out project work with local partners continue, including, but not limited to: on wetlands management, information sharing, tackling plastic pollution and protecting and highlighting biodiversity

(including of those which receive little attention, e.g. pollinators).

## Awareness raising and information management

Virtual tours for British Antarctic Territory, Falklands, South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands, and Isle of Man are now live (and the



OVERSEAS TERRITORIES  
CONSERVATION.UK

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

**Championing UK's most special species:**  
the wildlife of UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and  
Crown Dependencies (CDs)

FACT-SHEET ON:

**Whale Shark *Rhincodon typus***  
UK Overseas Territory: St Helena

Whale Sharks are giants of the ocean, the largest shark species. An average adult Whale Shark can measure up to around 10m and weigh around 9000kg. They are filter-feeders, eating mostly plankton and small fish. They are slow-moving, but highly mobile, the species being found in tropical oceans. Lifespan is thought to be around 70 years. The characteristic spots found on the skin are unique to each individual, like a finger print.

Aggregations of Whale Sharks are common. However, little is known about their reproduction. Mating has been witnessed several times off St Helena, a UK Overseas Territory in the South Atlantic, where they are known as Bone Shark. They are frequently seen here between January and March.

**Importance:** St Helena is thought to be the only place in the world where males and females congregate in large numbers. Researchers on St Helena and Georgia Museum are gaining more knowledge about Whale Sharks to inform conservation efforts by local NGO, St Helena National Trust, and global ocean advocates, Blue Marine Foundation. Some of these efforts include capacity-building on island, education and outreach. Highlights of this work include the annual Whale Shark Festival and the virtual reality whale shark experience which uses 260 underwater cameras without getting viewers wet!

**Ecosystem:** They are a highly pelagic (mobile) species. They are found mainly in open oceans in tropical seas. They are rarely found where the sea-temperature dips to below 21°C and are restricted to 30° latitude or lower.

**Threats:** They are listed as Endangered by the IUCN Red List, due to the impact of fisheries, including by-catch losses and vessel strikes, combined with late maturation in their long life-span. They are an Annex II species as defined by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), to which the UK is a signatory. Their presence in some countries at certain times of the year is a major tourist attraction and, in some countries, this has become unsustainable. They are also vulnerable to the continued illegal trade in shark-fins. Plastic pollution is now recognized as a major threat to the sharks as they mistake (or their feeding method cannot avoid) fragments for plankton, one of their main food sources.

**Needs:** Many of the threats will require cooperation between many countries and jurisdictions in order to protect this species on issues such as: plastics, illegal trade, and strikes from shipping. More research is needed to underpin their conservation.

In 2016, St Helena declared an IUCN category VI marine protected area, allowing only sustainable use. As part of the UK Government's support via the Blue Belt Programme, St Helena is improving laboratory facilities, with the aim of providing the island with a world-class marine research facility and centre of excellence.




Whale Shark in St Helena's waters:  
above © Paul Tyson; below © St Helena National Trust

An example species sheet in the Championing project



UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES



CONSERVATION FORUM

UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM

Virtual Tours: British Antarctic Territory

The Full Tour

Map

Introduction

Features of Natural Interest

Features of Other Interest, including Cultural

Threats / Problems / Issues

Projects / Conservation Actions


Opportunities

Organisations and Links

Tour Selection

Features of Natural Interest

Adélie and Emperor penguins, and Antarctic snow petrels, all breed on the continent itself, and chinstrap, gentoo and macaroni penguins breed on the northern tip of the Antarctic Peninsula, where conditions are less harsh.



Chinstrap penguins in early-season display at a breeding colony at Half Moon Island, the South Shetland Islands.

© Dr Mike Pienkowski (Features of Natural Interest, 9 of 12 - Slide ref. 1316)

previous

enlarge

next

Page from the Virtual Tour for British Antarctic Territory

Cayman one has also been rebuilt and republished after the failures of one of our ISPs). Bermuda is well advanced, awaiting final upload and editing. Anguilla and Sark are currently at various stages of development with work continuing on them. The remaining tours still to be drafted are Tristan da Cunha, Guernsey and Gibraltar, which will then mean there is a complete set of initial tours, with some already revised and updated.

*Forum News 50* and *51* were published and circulated in June and November respectively.

Issue 8 of our newsletter *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* was prepared and published in April and issue 9 was published in November.

New videos outlining the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* initiative were published, particularly on how one of the Adopters is working with Durrell on creating suitable habitat for the experimental release of several captive-bred Mountain Chickens.

Social media accounts have continued to be important ways of getting information out and are showing good levels of engagement. For example, Twitter has 1,673 followers and the Forum is regularly copied into posts in order to extend reach of news items.



Still from new UKOTCF video by Ann Pienkowski; mountain chicken from photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski. See videos at: [www.ukotcf.org.uk/media](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk/media)

Requests are often received from journalists and researchers for background information on a variety of topics. With so few bodies focusing on UKOT/CD issues, UKOTCF is often called upon to provide this. One such request was made by UK journalist Fred Pearce for an article he was writing on marine protected areas in the UKOTs. This was mainly highlighting some of the earlier information included in submissions to the UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee. The article was published on Yale360, the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies website: <https://e360.yale.edu/features/will-large-protected-areas-save-the-oceans-or-politicize-them>.

Forum personnel attended the Corby Big Film Week in October. As part of the London conference in 1999, the then Foreign and Commonwealth Office's organiser arranged for the conference to be recorded by professional film-makers Judy Caine and Paul Balmer, with advice from UKOTCF. With no budget for travel, so that they had to use stock film, Judy and Paul produced a video for schools, particularly in the territories, to encourage local discussions about some of the themes of the conference. What resulted was *A Breath of Fresh Air*, which also included music recorded by a gospel choir conducted by a Montserratian. At the Big Film Week, a workshop was held to enthuse and introduce local people to plan their own short films on environmental topics.

The Forum regularly reviews its effectiveness and whether it is using its limited resources efficiently. One of the ways in which it does this is to keep a regular watch on other charities in the UK for good practice, but also for lessons learned. It was particularly alarming this year to see that ARKive, a body which promoted "*the conservation of the world's threatened species, through the power of wildlife imagery*" had closed down its website. It was established in the first decade of the millennium, with much high-level support, including from Sir David Attenborough, and made available many images supplied by photographers for wider use. It included some 10,000 images of the UKOTs, which it was able to add after receiving some money in one of the last rounds of the FCO/DFID Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP). Despite its mass use, including by IUCN Red List and fundraising efforts, they received very few financial donations and were unable to future-proof the service, and had decided to close it down. The site says that the information is being held offline. With this in mind, Forum personnel, with approval from Council, made a decision to look at its information management systems in order to prevent such a waste of resources. A large part of this is involving moving information to a free or very-low-cost system, and this is well advanced, by UKOTCF personnel working on an unpaid basis.

## Influencing policy

The annual Channel Islands Inter-Island Environment Meeting (IIEM) took place on Alderney at the end of September. The hosts, Alderney Wildlife Trust, with the support of the States of Alderney, raised resources to make this a much wider and longer meeting than usual, incorporating a *Wilder Islands* day, bringing in also some participants from the UKOTs (Montserrat, Anguilla, BVI, Tristan da Cunha and Gibraltar). The Forum provided some assistance with the organisation and preparations for this, and provided requested review presentations and secretariat for policy meetings by ministers and equivalents. Alderney offered to Gibraltar that the extended meeting provide a venue for some initial signatures for the *Blue Islands Environment Charter* (which should have taken place at the cancelled July meeting in Gibraltar, which had been planned to take place





*Initial signing in Alderney of the Blue Islands Charter. From left: Assistant Minister (Deputy Gregory Guida) & Minister (Deputy John Young) Jersey, Minister Montserrat (Hon. Claude Hogan), President States of Alderney (Mr William Tate), Representative Tristan da Cunha (Dr Stephanie Martin), Minister Guernsey (Deputy Barry Brehaut), Representative Gibraltar (Dr Liesl Mesillo), Representative Sark (Shakira Christodoulou), Secretariat UKOTCF (Dr Mike Pienkowski). Photo: Lian Camilleri, HM Government of Gibraltar*

immediately before the Island Games being held there). A statement was released on the Alderney meeting and several local news services in the UKOTs and CDs picked this up. A news item can be seen on UKOTCF's website, including a link to the Charter itself: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/news/ukot-cd-governments-sign-agreement-on-environmental-co-operation>. (See also ETWG section below.)

The Charter was signed by: Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, Sark, Gibraltar, Montserrat and Tristan da Cunha at the meeting. Since then, the Isle of Man and Turks & Caicos Islands have expressed an interest in signing it. Follow-up discussions have been held with the Governments of Gibraltar and Alderney on the next UKOT/CD Environment Ministers' Council (possibility taking place in Gibraltar in 2020 or 2021) and how to take forward the suggestion of a small biodiversity fund to support the Charter in the UKOT/CDs. These are being explored.

The Blue Charter aims, for each signatory territory:

1. To control and reduce the negative impacts of the Island's activities on the environment
2. To control the risks and impacts associated with activities on the Island
3. To promote a rationale of continuous improvement
4. To factor the environment into every day practices
5. To move towards a complete ban on single-use plastic entering the Island and in particular its marine environment
6. To increase knowledge in order to improve and communicate
7. To contribute to the development of scientific knowledge with regards Island Marine Environments
8. To support other Islands through open communication and education
9. To protect native, terrestrial and marine species and enhance biodiversity
10. To enhance terrestrial and marine natural environments

UKOTCF provided one of the closing summaries at the meeting and a presentation on the final day of the meeting, focusing on the roles of NGOs and Governments in response to biodiversity loss in the UKOTs/CDs. About 80 delegates attended. High-level speakers included Tony Juniper (formerly Friends of the Earth, now Chairman of Natural England but speaking in a personal capacity); George McGavin (academic, TV presenter and explorer) and several Channel Islands Environment Ministers, as well as (through assistance from UKOTCF) Hon. Claude Hogan, then Environment Minister of Montserrat.

During some follow-up discussions, the States of Alderney requested some assistance from the Forum as they are looking to implement legislation to protect their wildlife.

Information and advice was provided to the scoping team established on St Helena to look at World Heritage Site designation, which the newly

established St Helena Institute had been tasked with. This had resulted in a document being put forward by the Chief Secretary to St Helena's Executive Committee to consider. It made recommendations on how to proceed. It can be seen here: <https://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/annex-a-st-helena-world-heritage-status-scoping-report-july-2019>

Several UK Parliament Select Committees continue to take an interest in the UKOTs and CDs. Member and associate organisations, as well as some others, were consulted and encouraged to provide points of detail to include in UKOTCF's submissions or to respond in their own right.

The most comprehensive input this year had been to the Environmental Audit Committee on its Invasive Species inquiry. A submission was made and, as a consequence, an invitation was received to provide additional oral evidence to the Committee. For only the second time, a session took place outside Westminster: at St Catharine's College, Cambridge. This was live-streamed and later a transcript was published online. Others on the panel included: the RSPB; British Antarctic Survey; and the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands. An article had been published in British Ecological Society (BES) magazine which recalled, alongside a photo of the Forum's Executive Director and another giving evidence, one of the trickiest question posed by then Chair of the EAC, Mary Creagh MP, which was why should her constituents in Wakefield with three jobs care about invasive species in the UKOTs. The final report has now been published see: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201919/cmselect/cmenvaud/88/88.pdf>.

The report notes UKOTCF's input particularly on the question of funding. Some excerpts: "*Catherine Wensink from the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum highlighted some of the key challenges UKOTs face: Most of the territories are small islands with small populations and small economies, which often lack the technical expertise to make decisions on forward planning in terms of invasive species. There are also resource issues with funding.*"; "*Catherine Wensink told us that 'the Overseas Territories are not able to access many funding streams because of their unique relationship with the UK, so they have very few funds to access. Big projects involved in invasive species cost a lot of money'*". Also: "*We heard that given their unique status, the OTs have relied heavily on EU funds. EU LIFE funding provides a 'significant contribution' to reducing the threat of invasive species in OTs. EU BEST is another funding stream for environment projects in the OTs, which operates on a competitive bidding basis. Catherine Wensink was concerned that it 'has a question mark over it now'*"

Following on from this, those with an interest to respond to the other on-going inquiry with relevance to the UKOTs on Sustainable Tourism were encouraged to submit a response. The inquiry has concluded, and UKOTCF's evidence seems to be the only one on the EAC website focussing on UKOT matters. A new chair of the EAC, Philip Dunne, was elected shortly after the General Election. It may be that the EAC returns to this inquiry in future.

The Forum worked intensively on a response to the UK Government's Call for Evidence on how effectively to fund biodiversity in the UKOTs. The evidence was based heavily on the conclusions and recommendations of the Gibraltar conference in 2015, which are still relevant today and



*St Helena's amazing diversity: the foreground is the cloud forest of the Peaks; the background, only 5 km away, the desert of Prosperous Bay Plain with many endemic invertebrates. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski*

to which the UK Government has never responded, despite ministerial commitments to do so. Further information was taken from the statements from the Environment Ministers Council meetings, Working Group discussions and other input from UKOTs, and feedback received from the Darwin Plus panel. The document was very lengthy, but was an opportunity to provide sufficient background information, current difficulties in how funding is being administered and possible ways forward. As the deadline was extended by a week just after it was ready to submit, this gave an additional opportunity to share the final submission with member and associate organisations. Where they were not expecting to make a submission of their own, several did support the Forum's submission, which was pleasing



Key points from the submission included that: funding should be linked to priority needs agreed with territories; budgets should include local bodies to ensure key local support; agencies, which are expensive and rarely make good use of volunteer resources the way that NGOs like the Forum do, are being favoured, which represents poor value for money. UKOTCF noted that, whilst the call was launched under a previous Secretary of State, the hope remained that the evidence would be used to influence UK Government's financial investment in UKOTs. A summary report from the 50 responses received was published in March on [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk).

*About half of the participants physically present outside Gibraltar House, The Strand, London. Photo: UKOTCF & CIEEM*

Managers (CIEEM), UKOTCF took the opportunity of the presence in UK of several Caribbean UKOT personnel (as part of a Darwin Plus project) to organise jointly a 1-day workshop on *Providing an Evidence Base for Conservation in the UKOTs*. This was held in Gibraltar House in London by kind invitation of Hon. Prof. John Cortés, HM Government of Gibraltar's Minister for Education, Heritage, Environment, Energy and Climate Change. As well as 27 people in the room, 29 online connections were made to the streamed webinar, during which people participating remotely could send questions and comments for answering. In some cases, these remote connections each involved several persons, for example 5 in the case of St Helena. A report appears on the front page of *Forum News 50* (June).

## Relations with UK Government and Government Agencies

A request was made at the Wider Caribbean Working Group (held in Guadeloupe at the BirdsCaribbean conference in July) to establish a website, or area of an existing website, as a clearing-house for synergies across projects. UKOTCF had previously done this service on two occasions. In the 1990s, partner organisations (in the UK, UKOTs and elsewhere) had been happy to supply information on past, current and proposed projects to share on its open database. Later, probably because of the move by UK Government grants to a more competitive, rather than collaborative, process for its grant processes, information had become less shared. Later, the Forum had supplied a public database service for the now defunct OTEP (Overseas Territories Environment Programme of UK Governments departments FCO & DFID). The Forum's website still remains a suitable place for this and has been made available, as requested, although some capacity would be needed to manage it in future.

Forum personnel met with the new Defra lead on dealing with matters relating to the international Convention on Wetlands, together with a recent retiree from JNCC and former Ramsar lead. These were very positive discussions in the first instance and officers would continue to explore possible joint ways of working in future.

A meeting was held in April with the new Governor of St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha, before taking up his post. As with all such meetings, the Forum provided some background material and information on biodiversity and local initiatives of the territory.

JNCC continued to invite the Forum to provide information on various reports being prepared on behalf of UK Government to International Conventions. In June/July this was for the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS). As had come to be the case, for UKOTs and CDs which have the Convention extended to them, there is little or no mention of the work of NGOs, so gaps were filled in the time available.

## Working for partners and responding to requests

UKOTCF continued to follow developments as part of the UK Government's *Blue Belt Programme*, which includes, as implementers, the UK government agencies, Marine Management Organisation and Centre for Environment and Aquaculture (Cefas). UKOTCF has used a variety of platforms to encourage all UK agencies to increase coordination with local partners and to be led by local priorities. During the year, an additional £7m of funds was announced for the programme in 2020-21, although it is understood that is mainly through the reallocation of work within these agencies.

UKOTCF receives many requests from researchers, institutions, local communities, decision-makers and many others on matters relating to the UKOTs. It tries to meet all such request within its resource constraints. Personnel continue to inform members and associates, and also government agencies that we work closely with, of funding opportunities (e.g. NatGeo research grants email sent to over 20+ contacts) and also calls for evidence, e.g. recently the Sustainable Tourism (as mentioned above email sent to over 20+ contacts).

## Our networks

UKOTCF has used a variety of platforms to encourage all UK agencies to increase coordination with local partners and to be led by local priorities. During the year, an additional £7m of funds was announced for the programme in 2020-21, although it is understood that is mainly through the reallocation of work within these agencies.

Meetings of the Wider Caribbean Working Group were held in April, July, November and February, of the Southern Ocean Working Group in May and November, and the Europe Territory Working Group in May, September and January.

Together with the Chartered Institute of Ecologists & Environmental

Forum personnel attended a one-day seminar on *Human Dimension of Blue Belt* at Nottingham Trent University in May. This was a good chance to build some contacts and meet with St Helena staff, as well as a range of academics interested in the social side of marine protected area (MPA) management. Several useful contacts were made and, as a result, were invited to the Blue Belt Symposium hosted at the University of Exeter Falmouth campus in July. This formed part of a Darwin Plus project to gain evidence on the impact of marine protected areas around Ascension Island. A few weeks following the conference, the Ascension Island Government announced a MPA in the waters around Ascension Island. The MPA will cover 100% of Ascension's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), an area of over 440,000 km<sup>2</sup>, making it one of the largest in the world. Within the MPA, it is proposed that commercial fishing and mineral extraction will be prohibited. (See also the SOWG section below for more information on this and the next paragraph.)

The launch of the St Helena Research Institute was held in November, in parallel events in St Helena and London, the latter attended by UKOTCF. St Helena's long-time leading botanist and conservationist (and former UKOTCF Council Member), Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks MBE, is the Coordinator for the Institute. James Elsmoor, from Island Innovation, which organised the first virtual conference for islands in 2019 attended, and contact was made with him.

## Coordinating with Others

The Forum was invited to attend the first Jersey Biodiversity Conference in November. It was organised jointly by Jersey Biological Records Centre



and Jersey Institute of Advanced Studies (JICAS). A presentation given on the review UKOTCF published in 2016 on progress towards meeting Environment Charter, Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Goals was well received. This report was mentioned on the Wikipedia page for Jersey under the environment section.

Following on from this, UKOTCF was invited by Jersey Institute of Advanced Studies (JICAS) to work with them to encourage students from UKOTs to take part in their innovative MSc programme. JICAS is “an independent, non-profit institution that promotes Jersey as an international focal point for research relating to islands and island communities”. They aim to “design a unique programme of niche postgraduate degrees in Island Studies as an embryonic University of Jersey, not only bringing the cultural and economic benefits of a university to Jersey, but also exporting knowledge and expertise around the world.” They believe that Jersey is “set to become the key global academic hub in all aspects of islands and island life.” They host a “consortium of internationally renowned academics, intellectuals and politicians to help raise the intellectual capital of the island of Jersey and elevate the island’s standing within the global academic community.”

Their first course is an MSc in Island Biodiversity and is accredited by the University of Exeter. In 2019, they welcomed their first cohort of students. They are looking to forge partnerships to enable them to provide more bursaries for students to study in Jersey and for the next generation of global conservation practitioners. Sean Dettman and Dr Amy Hall are the course leaders, based in Jersey. Their website is at [www.jicas.ac.je](http://www.jicas.ac.je)

Sean Dettman contacted the Forum to say that he has one or two students interested in conducting their MSc thesis in the Caribbean on marine projects and reptiles/amphibians. This had been shared with Wider Caribbean Working Group members. Furthermore, Sean has said that they are willing to offer a 50% reduction in fees to UKOT students and a bursary. Working with representatives from the Marine Conservation Society, several teleconferences had taken place in order to promote JICAS courses in order to provide higher education opportunities, and UKOTCF has used its network to spread the word in UKOTs, already resulting in enquiries from well qualified potential students.

## Organisational development

With securing continuing funding remaining a major challenge, UKOTCF has to review its budget annually and regularly throughout each year. Several volunteers are still providing some time to raise the capacity of the Forum while it continues to seek resources to carry out crucial conservation work. Several cut-backs are being made, particularly to paid personnel, but with a view to restoring these as resources allow.

New Council members were welcomed during the year. John Randall (Rt. Hon. the Lord Randall of Uxbridge PC) is a former Conservative MP and a member of the House of Lords. Joan Walley is a former Labour MP for Stoke-on-Trent North and Chair 2010-2015 of Parliament’s Environmental Audit Committee. Profiles appear on the Forum’s website and in Forum News: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/council/>

## Acknowledgements

UKOTCF Council would like to thank the individuals and representatives of member and associate organisations who have given numerous hours of voluntary time to the Forum, both in the UK and the Territories. These included: Dr Keith Bensusan, Caroline Prentice, Sara Mcfadyen and other Gibraltar staff, Alderney Wildlife Trust, Catherine Veron and other States of Alderney personnel, Dr Nicola Weber, Major General Anthony Leask, Mr & Mrs Quick, and participants in working groups and projects. Although all Council members donate time to UKOTCF, Council would like to acknowledge the very large quantities donated by Mike and Ann Pienkowski, on which UKOTCF depends, and to Lady Dace Ground for continuing financial support of the Forum this year, with contributions also from Mike and Ann Pienkowski, as well as anonymous donors. The Forum would also like to thank existing *Friends of the UK Overseas Territories*, and encourage those who have an interest in the UKOTs/CDs to join. The Forum is very grateful for financial assistance, as project grants and donations, from HM Government of Gibraltar and others. The Forum is grateful also to member organisations and others for allowing meetings to take place at their offices during the year, particularly HM Government of Gibraltar and the Government of the [British] Virgin Islands.

## UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum: Summary Statement of Financial Activities (including Income and Expenditure Account) for the year ended 31 March 2020

|  | 2019<br>Unrestricted Funds | 2019<br>Restricted Funds | 2019<br>Total Funds | 2019<br>Total Funds |
|--|----------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| <b>Incoming Resources</b>                            |                            |                          |                     |                     |
| Voluntary Income                                     | 202,875                    | 41,972                   | 244,847             | 257,531             |
| Investment Income                                    | 100                        | -                        | 100                 | 90                  |
| <b>Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities</b> |                            |                          |                     |                     |
| Project Income                                       |                            |                          |                     | 5,828               |
| <b>Total Incoming Resources</b>                      | <b>202,975</b>             | <b>41,972</b>            | <b>244,947</b>      | <b>263,449</b>      |
| <b>Resources Expended</b>                            |                            |                          |                     |                     |
| Charitable Activities                                | 192,611                    | 45,197                   | 237,808             | 281,761             |
| Governance Costs and Other Resources Expended        | 7,204                      | -                        | 7,204               | 6,847               |
| <b>Total Resources Expended</b>                      | <b>199,815</b>             | <b>45,197</b>            | <b>245,012</b>      | <b>288,608</b>      |
| <b>Net incoming/outgoing resources</b>               | <b>3,160</b>               | <b>(3,225)</b>           | <b>(65)</b>         | <b>(25,159)</b>     |
| Balance brought forward at 1st April 2018            | 53,760                     | 2,995                    | 56,755              | 81,914              |
| Balance carried forward at 31st March 2019           | 56,920                     | (230)                    | 56,690              | 56,755              |

Note: Incoming and outgoing resources include donated time and expenses of £191,760 (2019: £215,684).

# Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

## Meetings/General

Between April 2019 and March 2020, WCWG held four online meetings, which were happily supplemented by the opportunity for a face-to-face meeting at the BirdsCaribbean conference in Guadeloupe in July 2019. Attendees of the WCWG meeting in Guadeloupe discussed the Defra (UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) call for evidence on UK funding for 'Safeguarding the environment in British Overseas Territories', as well as strategies for cross-territory information sharing and specific issues. (In response to one of the requests there, UKOTCF has made available again its database on proposed, current and completed projects, and provided a new form for anyone to supply information.) In addition to the meetings held during the year, a round-up *eBulletin* covering 2019 activities was circulated in February 2020 and supplemented by a special bulletin focused on the Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) outbreak in Turks and Caicos Islands. SCTLD has now been identified also in BVI, and possibly Little Cayman.


WCWG online meetings have been very well attended, and its networking role has been much appreciated and valued, increasing the opportunity for stakeholders to share ideas, experiences and common issues. One such common issue is the ongoing invasive lionfish problem, and the threats posed by the invasive green iguana to Caribbean UKOT biodiversity. Through our member organisation in Bermuda, WCWG members were made aware of an opportunity for Caribbean UKOTs to take part in the "Master Gardener" programme (run by the University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences Extension), which could offer great potential for botanic gardens.

WCWG has continued to act as a forum for the exchange of updates, advice, expertise and contacts in relation to issues ranging from the impacts of *Sargassum* to volunteer training programmes. It has also provided a point of liaison between UKOT partners, NGOs and other stakeholders in discussions of the regional implications of projects such as the UK government's Blue Belt programme, now entering its second phase. For example, WCWG made information about the workshop held in August *Identifying challenges and opportunities for Marine Management in the Caribbean UK Overseas Territories* available to stakeholders and interested persons.

WCWG has interacted with CIEEM (Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management) Overseas Territories Group to facilitate contacts and exchange of information: for example, via contributions to their November meeting "planning and initiatives to maximise biodiversity in the UKOT's".

Some of the key developments in individual WCWG UKOTs are described below. As ever, more information can be found online at [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)

Just before the end of the reporting year, UK and all the UKOTs went



## UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group (WCWG) eBulletin

February 2020 Number 26

### In This Bulletin


- Species Conservation
  - TCL Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease - update

Contact: WCWG Secretary  
Ann Pienkowski  
[apienkowski@ukotcf.org](mailto:apienkowski@ukotcf.org)

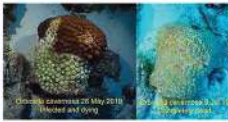
### Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease in TCI - Update

In our WCWG Review of 2019 (circulated recently and also available to download at [www.ukotcf.org.uk/news/wcwg-newsletter-1](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk/news/wcwg-newsletter-1)) we appealed for news items which you would like us to publish in a WCWG eBulletin. In that review we highlighted the spread of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) in the Turks and Caicos Islands. So we are very pleased that the Turks and Caicos Reef Fund have sent us information about their latest efforts to treat SCTLD in TCI.

SCTLD is a highly contagious and fast-killing new disease of coral that was first observed in TCI in South Caicos in January 2019, on the reefs of West Caicos in May 2019, in Grace Bay on Providenciales in August 2019 and on Grand Turk reefs in November 2019. In January 2020, TCRF finally received permission from the TCG's Department of Environment and Coastal Resources to begin treating diseased corals.



*Minister of Environment and Tourism, Hon. Ralph Higgs and Don Stark (right), Chairman of the Turks and Caicos Reef Fund, on the occasion of the granting of the research permit to TCRF to allow treating of SCTLD*



*Read the article in Times of the Islands at [www.timespub.tc/2019/09/all-is-not-lost-yet/](http://www.timespub.tc/2019/09/all-is-not-lost-yet/)*

1

## Special issue of WCWG eBulletin on Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease

into lockdown due to the Covid-19 outbreak. Restricted working from home was able to continue for many of our members, but protected areas and historic sites were closed. The loss of tourism income due to the lockdown was instant and very significant. There will undoubtedly be long-term effects of loss of income and great constraints for ongoing and future conservation project work.

## Anguilla

Since the end of March 2019, single-use plastics have been banned in Anguilla, making the territory one of the leading places in the Caribbean when it comes to tackling plastic pollution. Other WCWG UKOTs are on similar paths: a single-use plastic bag ban came into force in TCI in May 2019, territory-wide recycling systems are underway in BVI and Montserrat, and grassroots initiatives have also making headway in Bermuda and Cayman Islands through public petitions.

The DPlus-funded project (DPlus066 - Climate change adaptation in the fisheries of Anguilla and Montserrat) involving Anguilla and Montserrat ended in March 2020. WCWG were pleased to assist with the dissemination of the outputs of this project through online WCWG meetings and relevant links, such as the video *Anguilla's Fishing Dilemma* ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_1erKOUQP5o&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_1erKOUQP5o&t=1s))

Farah Mukhida, Executive Director of the Anguilla National Trust, took part in the Channel Islands Inter-Island Meeting in September in the Crown Dependency of Alderney in the Channel Islands. It was hosted by UKOTCF partner Alderney Wildlife Trust, and the States of Alderney. UKOTCF had worked with the Alderney National Trust to expand this meeting to include representatives from several UKOTs.



Anguilla's Fishing Dilemma

Still from video Anguilla's Fishing Dilemma



## Bermuda

In Bermuda, Hurricane Humberto (September 2019) left in its wake significant damage to reintroduced populations of the endemic Governor Laffan's fern *Diplazium laffanianum*. However, 56% of the plants have survived, offering some hope for longer-term resilience. Following the success of the reintroduction of the endemic Bermuda land snail *Poecilozonites bermudensis* to Nonsuch Island, 14,000 snails bred in Chester Zoo (UK) were released on other offshore islands in June 2019. Meanwhile the recovery of the Bermuda cahow *Pterodroma cahow* continues to go from strength to strength, with 131 breeding pairs producing 73 chicks in the 2019 season. In October, one cahow was even sighted by birdwatchers over the ocean near Cape Cod, Massachusetts – some 700 miles from Bermuda.

WCWG facilitated contacts between the Marine Conservation Society and the Bermuda Government on marine programmes in Bermuda, for example those being conducted by the Waitt Institute.

## British Virgin Islands

Gradual recovery from Hurricane Irma (September 2017) has remained a dominant theme in BVI over the past year. The National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands has been engaged in two projects relating to habitat mapping and ecological resilience, including one in collaboration with the Royal Botanic Garden, Kew and Fort Worth Zoo.



*This guide to BVI's Important Plants and Tropical Important Plant Areas is now available to purchase, price \$25, from NPTVI offices. Photo: National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands.*

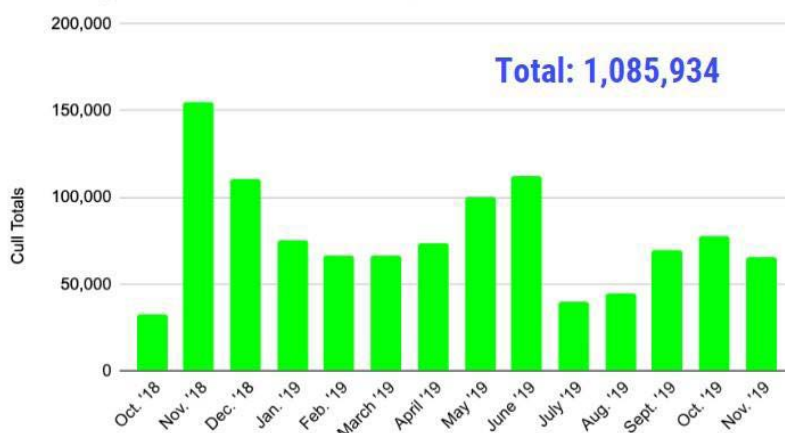
Susan Zaluski, Director of the Jost Van Dykes Preservation Society, took part in the Channel Islands Inter-Island Meeting in September in the Crown Dependency of Alderney in the Channel Islands. It was hosted by UKOTCF partner Alderney Wildlife Trust, and the States of Alderney. UKOTCF had worked with the Alderney National Trust to expand this meeting to include representatives from several UKOTs.

## Cayman Islands

Debate surrounding the proposed cruise port development has continued in the Cayman Islands, with a public referendum on the issue scheduled for December 2019 but then postponed pending the preparation of an environmental impact assessment. Meanwhile culling of invasive green iguanas on Grand Cayman has begun to produce impressive results;

## 2018/19 Green Iguana Cull

Green Iguana cull totals: Oct. 29, 2018 - Nov. 30, 2019



a population survey in August 2019 found a 90% decrease relative to previous year. The challenge now will be to find the best way to maintain this trend over the coming years.

Other issues discussed at WCWG meetings included: the proposed E-W arterial roadway, which would impact the Central Mangrove Reserve; the start of the Blue Iguana transition project; and coral monitoring, coral nursery work and education outreach conducted by CCMI.

## Montserrat

Despite the lack of external funding, there has been continued cooperation between UKOTCF and local partners in Montserrat on habitat conservation and restoration of native vegetation. The *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* programme has remained a particular focus, and has made important contributions to the Mountain Chicken Project, which is reintroducing the Critically Endangered frog species to new sites. *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat Newsletters* continued to be produced, and can be found on the UKOTCF website [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)

WCWG personnel facilitated information exchange and took part in discussions on nesting sea-turtles in Montserrat, which resulted in an application to Darwin Plus by the Montserrat Fisheries Department and Exeter University. Several videos showing WCWG work in Montserrat have been produced, and can be accessed from [ukotcf.org.uk](http://ukotcf.org.uk). WCWG personnel visited Montserrat in July 2019, and took part in many useful and informative meetings, including an evening event hosted by the



*Some of the participants at Governor Andy Pearce's reception for Montserrat's Environment Stakeholders Group, July 2019.*

*Photo: Annesta Fergus, Governor's Office*



Governor for Environmental Stakeholders in Montserrat. A second visit planned for March 2020 was cancelled a few days before arrival due to the Covid-19 crisis.

The Hon Claude Hogan, then Minister for the Environment took part in the Channel Islands Inter-Island Meeting in September in the Crown Dependency of Alderney in the Channel Islands. It was hosted by UKOTCF partner Alderney Wildlife Trust, and the States of Alderney. UKOTCF had worked with the Alderney National Trust to expand this meeting to include representatives from several UKOTs.

## Turks & Caicos Islands

The fast-moving SCTLD outbreak in TCI's coral reefs has been highly destructive, with a mortality rate of up to 80%. However, based on evidence from Florida, the TCI Reef Fund (TCRF) has received permission from the TCI Department of Environment and Coastal Resources to use a topical antibiotic treatment on affected corals, on an experimental basis. TCRF has been organising training workshops for qualified divers to assist in the application of the treatment. There is early evidence that the treatment is producing positive effects in TCI, as it did in Florida and in contrast to other methods tried.

WCWG's Secretary and UKOTCF Chairman visited TCI in mid-March, and held valuable meetings with a number of partners and stakeholders, including DECR personnel (Director, Terrestrial Ecologist, Acting Education Outreach Office), the Director of the National Trust (Winema Sanders-Penn), the Director of the Turks and Caicos National Museum (Michael Pateman) and the Chairman of the Turks and Caicos Reef Fund (Don Stark). Meetings scheduled with the Minister of the Environment,

the PS for the Environment, and the Governor had to be cancelled due to the Covid-19 crisis. However, a successful visit was made to Salt Cay, where whale-watching issues relevant to a proposed cruise ship pier were raised by local stakeholders. Bird counts on Grand Turk and Salt Cay were also conducted. Project proposals were discussed with the National Trust and others on terrestrial biodiversity conservation, which DECR were keen to support.



*Humpback whale blows in the breeding area south of Grand Turk.  
Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski*

## Report of the UKOTCF Southern Oceans Working Group

During this reporting year, two Southern Oceans Working Group (SOWG) meetings were held, via Skype: in June 2019 and November 2019. The SOWG meetings were interspersed with email updates, along with circulation of the meetings' minutes. Thanks go to everybody who participated in the meetings, or who provided reports and updates if unable to attend. We thank also everybody who supplied points of information/interest to be circulated amongst group members. If you would like to contribute to this group please contact the Secretary (see contact info on [www.ukotcf.org.uk/contact-details](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk/contact-details)).

There has generally been good participation in the group, with representatives from both NGOs, including the South Atlantic Environment Research Institute (SAERI), Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) and Great British Oceans Coalition, and local government departments, including Ascension Island Government and Falkland Islands Government,

making regular contributions. We have also welcomed contributions from researchers and others working in the field when these have been available. SOWG has continued to make links between UKOT personnel and others, when requested, and facilitated the exchange of information and reports between group members on topics discussed in the meetings.

A selection of topics relevant to specific SOWG UKOTs is given below, and more information is available from the UKOTCF website, including the Virtual Tours for all of the UKOTs in the Southern Ocean with the exception of Tristan da Cunha (currently being developed).

### Cross-Territory Projects

In July 2019, the University of Exeter (Cornwall Campus) hosted the first ever international Blue Belt Symposium, an output of the Darwin Initiative-funded Ascension Island Ocean Sanctuary project. With representatives from the University of Exeter, UK Government and several UKOT governments, the highly anticipated event brought together experts and policy makers to discuss the challenges and opportunities in creating and managing the UK government's Blue Belt. The week was a great success, with a series of talks and workshops sharing knowledge and experiences in creating and managing large-scale MPAs in the UKOTs. The Southern Ocean Territories were particularly well represented, with Trevor Glass from Tristan da Cunha having travelled the furthest to attend the meeting. See here for more details: <https://marinedevelopments.blog.gov.uk/2019/09/20/first-blue-belt-symposium-held-at-exeter-university/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RYI3BN4rWbE>

The Blue Belt Programme has recently



*Blue Belt Workshop participants  
Photo: Billy Heaney*





*Ascension's Marine Protected Area covers a substantial area of the Atlantic Ocean. Base-map © Google; Imagery © 2000 NASA, Terrametrics; Boundary by Ascension Island Government.*

released its annual update 2019-2020 that “showcases how the Blue Belt Programme is helping strengthen governance, protect biodiversity, support sustainable fisheries, support compliance and manage human activities across the UK Overseas Territories”. The report can be downloaded here: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/890468/Blue\\_Belt\\_Programme\\_Annual\\_Update\\_2019\\_2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/890468/Blue_Belt_Programme_Annual_Update_2019_2020.pdf)

## Ascension Island

On 30 August 2019, the Ascension Island Marine Protected Area (MPA) was designated, following a recommendation from the Island Council. The MPA covers 100% of Ascension's Exclusive Economic Zone, an area of over 440,000 km<sup>2</sup>, making it one of the largest MPAs in the world. Within the MPA, it is proposed that commercial fishing and mineral extraction will be prohibited, ensuring one of the highest levels of protection possible for this biodiversity hotspot. The designation of the MPA was the culmination of many years of data gathering, planning and consultation to ensure that an informed decision could be made about the best approach to manage Ascension's waters. This work was supported by the UK Government's Blue Belt Programme, funding from Darwin Plus, EU BEST and the Great British Oceans Coalition as well as input from academic institutions and the elected Council and people of Ascension. The Ascension Island Government is drafting regulations governing the MPA and finalising the management plan with partners.



*One of the images from the BAT virtual tour: snow petrel, one of the few animal species which have been seen at the South Pole.*  
© Dr Mike Pienkowski

On land, Ascension Island Government is currently implementing a fresh biosecurity system to reduce the risk of introduction of alien species that may be damaging to public health, biodiversity or the island's economy.

## British Antarctic Territory

No specific points relating to this territory were raised/ discussed during this reporting. The Virtual Tour for this territory is now complete and live on the UKOTCT website: [http://www.ukotcf.org/1\\_vTours/tour.cfm?locn=BAT&tourType=FULL](http://www.ukotcf.org/1_vTours/tour.cfm?locn=BAT&tourType=FULL)

## British Indian Ocean Territory

We heard updates from the Director of the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) in both 2019 SOWG meetings where she provided details about their *Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs* programme that had just began. The project aims to eradicate invasive black rats from the Chagos Archipelago. This, in turn, will enable seabirds to recolonise previously affected islands and provide vital nutrients to the recovering coral reefs that surround them. CCT is currently working with a number of experts from around the world, in partnership with the British Indian Ocean Territory Administration, to determine the best way to eradicate the rats and boost biodiversity.

Ten expeditions visited the archipelago in 2019 through the *Bertarelli Programme in Marine Science*. Involving nearly 100 scientists across 24 institutions from six countries, they have resulted in more than 20 scientific papers being published. More details about all of these news items can be found here: <https://chagos-trust.org/news>.

## Falkland Islands

SAERI continues to facilitate a range of environment research programmes, both within the Falkland Islands themselves and also the South Atlantic territories more generally. The group received interesting updates on these projects throughout the year that promoted further discussion among group members, including the Darwin Initiative-funded soil and coastal habitats mapping projects which will result in the creation of fine-scale habitat maps. More details on these can be found on the SAERI website.

Falklands Conservation also provided updates on their many environmental initiatives, including education and outreach through their *Watch Group* (for their junior members). For example, tussac-planting trips provide an understanding of habitat restoration, and also work to support habitat restoration led by landowners. Falklands Conservation has worked closely with Falklands Island Government (FIG) to strengthen biosecurity policy and practice, as well as the development of Nature Areas and management plans for National Nature Reserves, and to shape the developing oil industry regulatory framework, for the benefit of the



*Falklands Conservation Watch Group at work.*  
Photo: Julie Halliday, Falklands Conservation





*As well as its importance for endemic species and its marine ecosystems, the Pitcairn Group is internationally important for some non-breeding migrants, such as Alaska-breeding bristle-thighed curlews, pictured here at Henderson, although more have been recorded at Oeno.*

*Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski*

environment. FC undertook successful fieldwork for a Darwin-Initiative-funded project to further its work on the little understood sei whales and other baleen species within Falkland Sound and Berkeley Sound candidate Key Biodiversity Areas. This is also complimented by the development of a *Cetacean Shore Watch Observer* programme to collect more information about sei whale visits. Finally, 2019 saw FC's *Annual Seabird Monitoring Programme*, also supported by FIG, continue into its 30th year.

## Pitcairn

No specific points relating to this territory have been raised/ discussed during this reporting year in the SOWG. Unfortunately, the eleventh meeting of the Pitcairn Environment Group, originally scheduled for the end of November 2019, was postponed until spring 2020 because of the calling of the UK general election, and then did not go ahead in light of lockdown restrictions.

Details about recent activities and research expeditions to the Pitcairn Islands, as part of the *Blue Belt* programme, are available in the *Blue Belt Annual Update* (web address above).

## St Helena

The Education & Employment Directorate officially launched the St Helena Research Institute (SHRI) at dual events hosted on St Helena and in London on 12 November 2019. SHRI is a collaborative organisation founded in St Helena. It aims are to support, promote and conduct high quality responsible research on the Island, and connect researchers and people on St Helena, across the South Atlantic and beyond. Partners comprise St Helena Government, Saint Helena National Trust, Enterprise St Helena, the South Atlantic Environment Research Institute, and From



*Diana's Peak and Cuckold's Point in the Peaks National Park. Photo: Paul Tyson. UKOTCF has advised St Helena on several occasions, including during the reported year, on potential international site designations on St Helena under the World Heritage and Ramsar Conventions.*

Discovery to Discovery. For more information and news see: <https://sthenaresearch.edu.sh/>

The Group also heard from a member of the IUCN Invertebrate Specialist Group that they were continuing to help develop invertebrate work on St Helena, including an identification guide for the invertebrates of St Helena and potential work on introduced/ invasive invertebrates and their potential impacts on the native invertebrates.

## South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI)

No specific points relating to this territory have been raised/ discussed in SOWG during this reporting year. The Group are aware that, following the successful rodent eradication project during the previous reporting year, biosecurity continues to be a priority and is strictly enforced. Additionally, following enhancements to the Territory's Marine Protected Area in 2018, sustainable fisheries management and compliance and enforcement remain priorities for the SGSSI Government and the UK *Blue Belt Programme*.



*Pair of South Georgia pintails, endemic to the territory. These are one of the species showing immediate increases in productivity after rodent eradication. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski*

## Tristan da Cunha

July 2019 saw this remote Territory hit again by a damaging storm that caused no loss of life, but did result in extensive damage to infrastructure and communications. This took a number of months to repair with support from the UK Government and additional relief funding. The end of January 2020 also saw the longest-serving Tristan da Cunha Administrator Sean Burns hand over to Fiona Kilpatrick and her husband Steve Townsend who take up the first Joint Administration on the Island. (Following his departure, Sean Burns was sworn in as Administrator of Ascension Island in March 2020.)

Work has continued throughout the reporting year as part of the *Blue Belt Programme* (see their Annual Update for details), and Tristan da Cunha's Marine Protection Zone will be formally announced in 2020.



*After Tristan da Cunha's storm of July 2019. Photo: tristandc.com*



# Report of UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group

The Europe Territories Working Group held meetings in May, September and January, via Skype.

As mentioned in earlier sections, in addition, in September, Forum personnel attended the Inter-Island Environment Meeting (IIEM) on Alderney. The hosts, Alderney Wildlife Trust, with the support of the States of Alderney, raised resources to make this a much wider and longer meeting than usual incorporating a Wilder Islands day, bringing in also some participants from the UKOTs (Montserrat, Anguilla, BVI, Tristan da Cunha and Gibraltar). The Forum Chairman and Executive Director provided some assistance with the preparations for this and expenses were covered to do this.

As a result, some new connections have been made resulting in several initiatives, which enables a much broader approach to be taken to start addressing some of the shared challenges faced by the UKOTs and CDs. One such connection has been with Plastic Free Jersey, which is looking towards a model for how citizen scientists can make an impact on dealing with plastic waste on islands.

Another challenge is the lack of opportunities for further education in the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies. The Jersey Institute of Advanced Studies (JICAS [www.jicas.ac.je](http://www.jicas.ac.je)), based on Jersey in the Channel Islands, was founded in 2018. Their MSc programme has been developed with some of the leading academics on island biodiversity and is accredited by Exeter University (Department of Biosciences) in the UK. The programme is specifically focusing on islands.

Their first course is an MSc in Island Biodiversity and Conservation. In 2019, they welcomed their first cohort of students. Throughout the year, the Forum has been working with JICAS and personnel at the Marine Conservation Society to highlight the programme and see how this might result in candidates from the UKOTs and other CDs being accepted on to the course. As a result of these efforts and recognising the importance of the programme to students in the UKOTs, JICAS is offering a reduction in fees by 50% to those undertaking the MSc. In addition, several bursaries have been established for students undertaking research projects, which fulfil urgent needs in terms of data gaps in several UKOTs.



*MSc students in the field in Jersey as part of the JICAS course.  
Photo: JICAS*

## Guernsey

The island habitat survey in 2018 indicated a loss of all agricultural unimproved (*i.e.* unintensified) and semi-natural grasslands, with key habitats under threat. This resulted in amendments to the budget during the year in recognition of the resources needed to protect the islands biodiversity and implement its biodiversity strategy. Several important pieces of work related to this are underway, including a threats and mitigation report.

The States of Guernsey has implemented an Asian hornet strategy, which aims to prevent them from becoming established in the island and keep the number of secondary nests at below 10 [NB: Asian hornets build a primary nest, initiated by the queen, before moving to a larger secondary nest]. The strategy includes an island-wide spring trapping



*Meal break in Alderney's Island Hall during the Inter Island Environment Meeting. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski*

campaign, 'Spring Queening' which was rolled out in the spring. Traps were placed at 500m intervals and monitored daily by volunteers. The traps were modified to prevent by-catch. 10 queens and one primary nest were located. This summer, only one secondary nest has been located. The team is also starting to look at other invasive species, which have an impact of the islands' wildlife.

In the marine environment, the territorial seas were extended to 12 nautical miles in July.

## Alderney

Over 80 delegates attended this year's IIEM on the theme of Wilder Islands. As an additional extra day, open to the wider community, high-level speakers included: Hon. Claude Hogan (then Environment Minister, Montserrat), Tony Juniper (formerly Friends of the Earth, now Chair of Natural England, but speaking in a personal capacity) and Alderney Wildlife Trust patron George McGavin (academic, author and TV presenter).

The organisers of this year's IIEM meeting (see above), the Alderney Wildlife Trust, supported by the States of Alderney, offered to Gibraltar that the extended meeting could provide a venue for some initial signatures for the Blue Islands Environment Charter after the environmental meeting expected to take place before the Island Games in Gibraltar in July had to be cancelled at the last minute. Gibraltar readily accepted this offer. A statement was released and several local news services in the UKOTs and CDs picked this up. A news item can be seen on the Forum's website, including a link to the Charter itself: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/news/ukot-cd-governments-sign-agreement-on-environmental-co-operation>.

Conservation projects continued throughout the year, including an eel-grass mapping project, seabird surveys and monitoring. With the valuable data collected by AWT, the States of Alderney is looking to update its wildlife legislation to ensure that their unique wildlife is protected, and UKOTCF is facilitating this.

## Sark

Asian hornets are starting to make an appearance on Sark. An article published this year noted that each worker-hornet is capable of taking



## Sunflower

*Screen-grab from Sue Daley's video on sunflowers in Sark*





Images from the National Trust for Jersey's presentation at IEEM on pollinators: left: a bee hotel made from a drainpipe filled with tubes made from cardboard and bamboo (this hotel was purchased as a kit from [masonbees.co.uk](http://masonbees.co.uk)) Photo: Jon Rault; centre: a female red mason bee *Osmia bicornis ssp cornigera* takes a well-earned rest after building her nest in a bee hotel (note the completed nest sealed with mud in the centre of the image) Photo: Jon Rault; right: female spring colletes bee *Colletes cunicularius* inside her nest on sand-dunes, Photo Tim Ransom.

around 50 insects of pollinating species per day; this could have a massive impact on Sark's biodiversity. Sark uses Guernsey's approach, which is spring queen-trapping. The public are urged to report sightings in order for new nests to be identified.

Links to several interesting videos created by Sue Daley were made available from the Forum's website (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/europe-territories/sark/>). The first documents the return of an incredibly important commercial species, the crawfish, in its waters. The second is on Project Sunflower, which uses methods implemented in other Channel Islands, which aims to set aside some areas of agricultural land for wildflower and other seed mixes which provide birds and other wildlife with year-round food supplies.

## Bailiwick of Jersey

Jersey had declared a climate emergency. In response, the States Assembly voted unanimously to approve the amended Carbon Neutral Strategy and a Sustainable Transport Policy. Public consultation began in February.

Asian hornets continue to be a problem here as across the Channel Islands. On Jersey, the team looks for nests. There are thought to be about 60 primary and secondary nests. They were currently trialling methods for dealing with nests, some more successful than others.

Following on from the work that Guernsey was doing on pollinators (and reported previously at several IIEEMs), Jersey was now creating its own pollinator strategy across the island within the agriculture team. They hope to set aside crop areas for pollinators. Within this, changes are being made to the way agricultural industry subsidy payments are made. Currently, they are made via the Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) initiative. This requires all organisations receiving funding to be LEAF-accredited to set up projects.

The first Jersey Biodiversity Conference was held in November. It was jointly organised by Jersey Biological Records Centre and Jersey Institute of Advanced Studies (JICAS). A presentation was given on the review that the Forum published in 2016 on progress towards meeting Environment Charters, Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Goals.

## Isle of Man

In May, the Chief Minister declared a climate emergency. An independent report, published in October, produced by Professor Curran from Glasgow, looked at options for targets and actions to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050. His approach to writing the report was to request a team of government officers to research options and provide a strong Isle of Man focus to the work. The team included representatives of most departments and utilities. As a result, the Council of Ministers published an action plan in January 2020 ([www.gov.im/climateaction](http://www.gov.im/climateaction)). The Government has now committed £10million to implement the action plan.

As part of the Isle of Man's plans to reduce single plastics use on island, they have developed both a government and community plan, which has already made progress. For example, Refill Isle of Man has reduced the need for single use bottled water with 132 refill stations created.

The Biosphere Reserve continues to be a focus for conservation efforts. The Stakeholder Partnership Group meetings form the basis for the vision and strategy, which is under development.

50% of the 0-3 nautical miles area has now been designated as Marine Nature Reserves.

A new Director of the Manx Trust had been appointed; Leigh Morris spent some time on St Helena.

## Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas

The anti-bird-trapping team received the Ministry of Defence's silver otter award for its work to reduce illegal trapping of migrant song-birds in the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas. The MOD's Sanctuary article included a full article on the progress, which has been made ([www.gov.uk/government/publications/sanctuary](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sanctuary)). There had also been some good coverage in the Birdlife Cyprus magazine.

This had been a significant undertaking for all involved and there was still a lot of work to do, particularly in working with the community. The project began in 2015-16 and since then, it has seen year-on-year decreases in illegal bird-trapping activity within the SBAs. Although the past season's figures are still to be analysed, it is thought there is now a 90% reduction in activity. This is an amazing outcome and a result of the multi-agency approach taken, including government agencies, non-government organisations, community groups etc., as well as cooperation with the Republic of Cyprus. The steering group set up to drive things forward meets regularly and in addition meets with NGOs. All are working together in a supportive and positive way and this is producing some outstanding results. The group is trying to move pressure on to other states, but it still faces a challenge for future to maintain this work.

The Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) continue their work on the second Darwin Plus project they had been awarded for work looking at remote sensing to develop methods for monitoring the lake water quality around Lake Akrotiri. A report and annex from their other work can be found at: <http://www.ris-ky.eu/resources>. Papers stemming from the GB Horizon Scanning work in Cyprus and other UKOTs can be found here: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/gcb.12603> and <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10530-019-01961-7>.



Silver otter award. Photo: [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

## Gibraltar

Gibraltar declared a climate emergency in May. This had full parliamentary support. Schools had been involved in climate strikes. Since then, several



NGOs in Gibraltar, including GONHS, the Heritage Trust and the Environment Safety Group had formed a coalition for climate change action. The core demand from the group was the setting up of an independent climate body to establish commitments and a watch-dog to make sure the commitments are met. The core aims are for action on pollution and waste, planning etc.

Local NGOs in Gibraltar had recently issued a press release on the taking of Atlantic blue fin tuna by recreational fishermen. The Atlantic tuna is an endangered species according to the IUCN Red List, on a par with the tiger. In Gibraltar, tuna fishermen are not regulated by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) as the UK is not party to it. They have not set sustainable quotas in order to lead by example. Local NGOs will continue to monitor this situation. Several CDs report that tuna have been showing up in their waters.

During the migration season, the raptor team is kept very busy helping those that have come into difficulty as they cross the Gibraltar Strait on their migratory path. They have a fairly good rate of rescue, helped by the marine section of Gibraltar police and customs.



*A dark-morph booted eagle which was released in May following successful rehabilitation at the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society Raptor Unit. It had been rescued at sea by the Royal Gibraltar Police Marine Section on 10th April. Photo: GONHS*

## Officers and Contact Points

**First contact** on any issue should normally be:

*Executive Director:* Catherine Wensink, 110 Nottingham Road, Stapleford, Nottingham, NG9 8AR, UK. *Tel:* +44 7955 888795; *email:* cwensink@ukotcf.org

### COUNCIL

*Chairman:* Dr Mike Pienkowski, 102 Broadway, Peterborough PE1 4DG, UK. *Mobile:* +44 777 8841 233; *Tel:* +44 1733 569325; *Fax:* +44 1733 530325; *email:* m@pienkowski.org

*Other Council Members:* Peter Beckingham; Sarita Francis; Lady (Dace McCoy) Ground; Nigel Haywood; Boyd McCleary; Iain Orr; Lord (John) Randall; Bill Samuel; Joan Walley; Kathleen McNary Wood

### WIDER CARIBBEAN WORKING GROUP

*Chairman:* Dace Ground; *email:* dacemccoyground@gmail.com  
*Secretary:* Ann Pienkowski, 102 Broadway, Peterborough PE1 4DG, UK. *Tel:* +44 1733 569325; *Fax:* +44 1733 530325; *email:* apienkowski@ukotcf.org  
*Assistant Secretary:* Dr Jamie Males; *email:* jmales@ukotcf.org

### SOUTHERN OCEANS WORKING GROUP

*Chairman:* Nigel Haywood CVO, 6 Tom's Mead, Corfe Castle, Dorset BH20 5HH, UK; *Tel:* +44 1929 481375; *email:* nigelhaywood@mac.com  
*Secretary:* Catriona Porter (Dr Nicola Weber until June 2020); *email:* cporter@ukotcf.org

### EUROPE TERRITORIES WORKING GROUP

*Chairman:* Dr Keith Bensusan, Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society, PO Box 843, Gibraltar. *Tel:* +350 5400 1111; *email:* kbensusan@gonhs.org  
*Acting Secretary:* Catherine Wensink, 110 Nottingham Road, Stapleford, Nottingham, NG9 8AR, UK. *Tel:* +44 7955 888795; *email:* cwensink@ukotcf.org

### ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

*Voluntary Co-ordinator:* Ann Pienkowski, 102 Broadway, Peterborough PE1 4DG, UK. *Tel:* +44 1733 569325; *Fax:* +44 1733 530325; *email:* apienkowski@ukotcf.org

### PARLIAMENTARY ADVISER

Iain Orr, 70 Glengarry Road, London SE22 8QD, UK.  
*Tel:* +44 20 8693 3425 *Mobile:* +44 7484 268 886 *email:*

## Membership

UKOTCF's current Member and Associate organisations linked to a particular UK Overseas Territory or Crown Dependency: Alderney Wildlife Trust; Anguilla Archaeological & Historical Society; Anguilla National Trust; Ascension Conservation Centre; Ascension Heritage Society; Bermuda Audubon Society; Bermuda National Trust; UK Antarctic Heritage Trust; Chagos Conservation Trust; National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, BVI; Jost van Dykes Preservation Society, BVI; National Trust for the Cayman Islands; Central Caribbean Marine Institute; Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre, Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas; BirdLife Cyprus; Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society; La Société Guernesiaise; Société Jersiaise; National Trust for Jersey; Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture; Montserrat National Trust; Pitcairn Natural Resources Division; St Helena National Trust; La Société Serequiaise; National Trust of the Turks & Caicos Islands; Turks & Caicos National Museum; Turks & Caicos Reef Fund. UKOTCF's current Member and Associate organisations not linked to a single Territory: Amphibian & Reptile Conservation; Army Ornithological Society; Royal Air Force Ornithological Society and Royal Naval Birdwatching Society.

Information and advice given on behalf of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum are given on the basis that no liability attaches to the Forum, its directors, officers or representatives in respect thereof. Views reported are not necessarily those of UKOTCF.

**You can also subscribe online at [www.ukotcf.org.uk/become-a-friend-of-the-ukots/](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk/become-a-friend-of-the-ukots/)**

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.

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

*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.*

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.*