



UKOTCF

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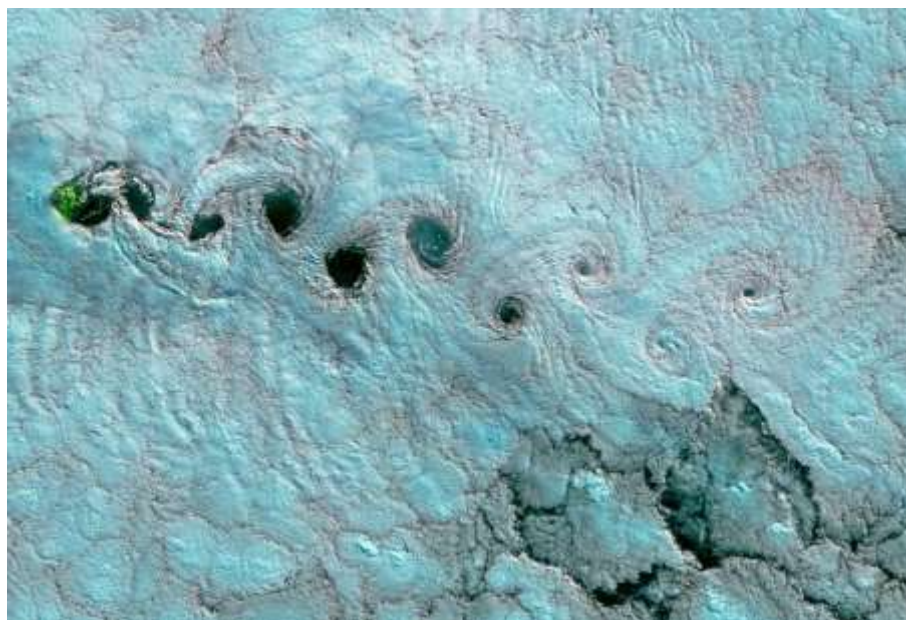
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Welcome to the latest round-up of news updates from the UK's Overseas Territories in the Southern Ocean; we hope that it finds you well and that you enjoy the read. The last couple of months saw UKOT Ministers and leading representatives coming together for an update on the status of Brexit and how it may affect UKOTs, and also conservation practitioners working in the UKOTs coming together to discuss common issues at the Invasive Species Conference. There are also updates on current research in the territories and planned policy development. The story from St Helena about the new documentary 'A Story of Bones' reminds us that the UK's OTs also have a wealth of built and cultural heritage to be treasured and protected. Please do get in touch with any queries or updates to be included in the next edition.

Nicola Weber & the UKOTCF Team



This false-colour image, captured 25/06/2017, by an instrument aboard the Landsat-8 satellite, shows a cloud phenomenon called von Karman vortices above the South Atlantic. They are created when wind moving at the right speed flows into a blunt object—in this case, the island of Tristan da Cunha—and separates into two distinct flows, which rotate in opposite directions. The rotating air sculpts water vapour in the air into a line of spirals. Credit: NASA Earth Observatory

Cross-territory

Overseas Territories EU Brexit Talks

Over 10th–13th July, a series of meetings were held in London to discuss Britain leaving the European Union and how this will affect the UK's Overseas Territories. The first day saw eight territories giving evidence to the House of Lords European Union Committee with the main concerns of those who spoke relating to funding, trade and the ability to travel freely. The video of the meeting can be viewed here: <http://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/4cf6edb8-d6b9-41ad-965f-044f41d9c882>. The following day, the pre-Joint Ministerial Council meeting had leaders/ heads of delegation covering topics including a joint approach to establishing a renewed relationship between the UK and UKOTs after Brexit, the importance of infrastructure (including for access) and the topics to be tackled at the full JMC to be held



Pre-JMC leaders/ heads of delegation assembled at Church House (11th July 2017) Left to Right: Leaders of Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands, Pitcairn, Anguilla, Turks and Caicos Islands, Montserrat, Falkland Islands, St Helena, Gibraltar, Tristan da Cunha and Bermuda (Photo: www.tristanandc.com)

in November. At the UK Joint Ministerial Council meeting that followed, the new Minister for Exiting the European Union, Robin Walker told attendees that “Negotiations to leave the European Union are now underway, and we are working hard to deliver a deal that works for everyone including our friends in the Overseas Territories. We have engaged extensively with the Overseas Territories already and will continue to make sure their interests are taken into account as the UK leaves the EU”. The Foreign Minister, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, was in attendance and told UKOT representatives at the meeting that “The Overseas Territories are integral to what defines Britain on the global stage and to our influence across the world. I look forward to continuing engagement with the territories on the key challenges they face as a result of Brexit and to work collaboratively on the great opportunities that lie ahead”. Leaders and representatives discussed the areas of priority for their territories at the meeting, although these have not been publicly disclosed.

Ascension Island:

Ascension Island Marine Biodiversity Special Issue



A special issue of the Journal of the Marine Biological Association of the UK, bringing together work carried out over a series of 3 expeditions to the Island can now be downloaded from the JMBA website (www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-marine-biological-association-of-the-united-kingdom). The work, part-funded by the Darwin Initiative and Blue Marine Foundation, involved experts from the Shallow Marine Survey Group (SMSG), South Atlantic Environment Research Institute (SAERI), Falkland Islands Government and British Antarctic Survey (BAS), as well as the local Ascension Island Government Conservation Department (AIGCD), many volunteers and the logistical support of the British Forces South Atlantic. As well as providing many interesting insights into the unique biodiversity in Ascension's waters, the project was also

instrumental in starting the vibrant marine research and marine and fisheries management programmes currently underway on Ascension.

Following a second unprovoked shark attack on a person in the water at English Bay, Ascension Island on 24th July 2017, AIG are advising against everybody entering the sea until further notice.

British Antarctic Territory:

Larsen C Ice Shelf Sets Free Large Iceberg in the Antarctic

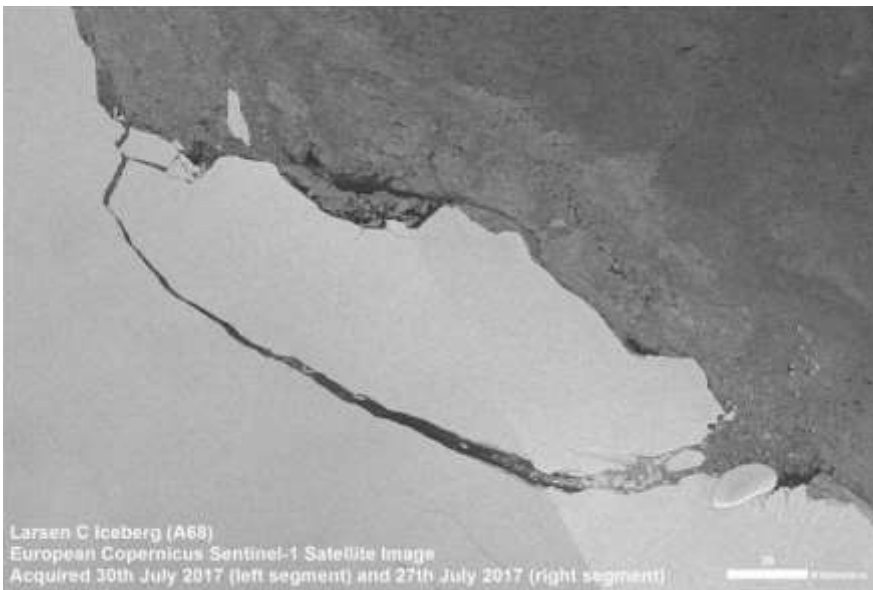


Photo: A Fleming/ British Antarctic Survey

The largest remaining ice shelf on the Antarctic Peninsula, the Larsen C ice shelf, lost 10% of its surface when one of the largest icebergs ever observed (about a quarter the size of Wales, or four times as big as London) detached from it on 12th July 2017.

Researchers at the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) and University of Leeds continue to track the iceberg's (known as A68) movements using the European Space Agency and European Commission's Copernicus Sentinel-1 satellite. They have seen the iceberg drift about 5km from

the ice shelf, and more than 11 other smaller icebergs have broken off both the remaining ice shelf and the giant iceberg itself. Satellite images also show that the cracks are continuing to grow on the main ice shelf with further destabilisation possible. The researchers report in a study published in *Nature Climate Change* that the 'calving' event itself might not be the result of changes in environmental conditions, but that the changes might bring about major alterations to the environment themselves, including contributing to global sea-level rise. Dr Gudmundsson from the BAS commented "With this large calving event, and the availability of satellite technology, we have a fantastic opportunity to watch this natural experiment unfolding before our eyes. We can expect to learn a lot about how ice shelves break up and how the loss of a section of an ice shelf affects the flow of the remaining parts".

Source: www.independent.co.uk/news/science/larsen-c-ice-shelf-iceberg-huge-record-antarctic-climate-change-global-warming-a7873411.html

Exhibition: The Year That Made Antarctica

There is a month left to catch this exhibition at the Scott Polar Research Institute, Department of Geography, University of Cambridge. "Over dinner in the spring of 1950 a party of scientists produced an ambitious proposal for a global year of science: the International Geophysical Year was born. With a heavy emphasis on Antarctica, thousands of people from dozens of countries came together to learn about our planet. Among many other achievements, the year laid the foundations for the Antarctic

Treaty which has preserved the continent for science and peaceful activity for almost sixty years".

Additionally, The Polar Museum, has unveiled a redesigned and expanded display in its permanent galleries covering Sir Ernest Shackleton's life and career.



www.spri.cam.ac.uk/museum/exhibitions

British Indian Ocean Territory:

BIOT Megafauna Stamp Issue

On 8th June 2017 the British Indian Ocean Territory Administration released a set of six stamps and a first day cover portraying marine megafauna species that are all found in the Territory. They are available for purchase online from the BIOT Post Office (www.biotpostoffice.com), and were designed to promote the conservation of marine biodiversity around the Territory.



Sailfish *Istiophorus platypterus* (60p)

Reef Manta Ray *Manta alfredi* (£1)

Oceanic Whitetip Shark *Carcharhinus longimanus* (£1.50)

Blue Marlin *Makaira nigricans* (£1.50)

Sunfish *Mola mola* (£2)

Whale Shark *Rhincodon typus* (£3)

To discover more about the Chagos Archipelago see also the Chagos Information Portal (<http://chagosinformationportal.org>) that recently went live.

Falkland Islands:

Sei Whales in the Falkland Islands

Contributed by Caroline Weir



Falklands Conservation has been conducting a project on endangered sei whales in Berkeley Sound (East Falkland) since October 2016, funded by the European Union BEST 2.0 Programme. The fieldwork was carried out between January and May 2017, corresponding with the expected seasonal presence of sei whales in the Falklands. A total of six aerial surveys were flown and 26 boat surveys conducted within the Berkeley Sound candidate Key Biodiversity Area (cKBA). Additionally, shore-based monitoring was carried out from the Cape Pembroke lighthouse.



Sei Whale Dorsal Fin (Photo: Caroline Weir)

The survey work has confirmed the importance of the Berkeley Sound cKBA, indicating that the KBA qualifies for full status for sei whales. We showed that the whales occur in minimum water depths of around 15 m but are otherwise seen both very close to shore and out in deeper, open waters with their spatial distributions varying between surveys and months. We recorded single animals and groups of 2 to 7 individuals, with larger foraging aggregations forming in late January and early February. Sei whales appear to use the Berkeley Sound cKBA primarily as a feeding area; we collected 19

faecal samples which all contained the hard parts of lobster krill (*Munida gregaria*). Using photo-identification, we monitored the movements of individual whales, finding that some animals stayed in the cKBA for only a day while others remained for several weeks. We have also discovered clues about aspects of their lives outside of Falkland waters. Almost all individuals were covered in small scars from cookie-cutter shark bites, confirming that they had travelled to subtropical waters in previous years. Additionally, at least one whale had diatom films on its body indicative of time spent in Antarctica.



Sei Whale in the Berkeley Sound (Caroline Weir)

To understand more about how Falkland sei whales are related to those in other areas, we successfully biopsied 13 sei whales to collect small skin and tissue samples. This genetic work, funded by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, should increase our understanding of population structure which is fundamental to managing the animals over the longer-term and across wider geographic areas.

The fieldwork has highlighted the significance of Berkeley Sound for endangered sei whales, emphasising the importance of taking this species into account when considering any future development of human activities in the region. The BEST 2.0 project is scheduled for completion in mid-September 2017, when a full report including management recommendations will be published. For more information about the project then please send an email to the project manager Caroline Weir at SWPO@conservation.org.fk

Pitcairn Islands:

Pristine Paradise to Rubbish Dump: Henderson Island 23 Years Apart

Following on from the article that we published in the June 2017 SOWG Newsletter about the study of plastic debris that was found to have accumulated on the uninhabited Henderson Island, the University of Tasmania team has just released a new photo that was sent to them following their publication. The photo (displayed below) from Professor Marshall Weisler was taken in 1992 when he visited the island on an archaeological survey expedition.



A stretch of beach on Henderson Island 23 years apart (Photo L: Marshall Weisler, Photo R: Jennifer Lavers)

The image of the pristine coastline is a stark contrast to that taken in the same location by the research team just 23 years later that displays some of the millions of pieces of plastic debris that have washed up there on ocean currents. The authors also note that following their publication they received multiple enquiries about people can help to clean up Henderson Island— the answering being that with thousands of new plastic items washing up every day, the efforts would be futile. Instead, they note that rather than travel to a remote island to make a difference, people can simply make some changes at home to make a difference including reducing waste and how it is disposed of, and switching to products that are more environmentally friendly. The full article can be viewed here: <https://theconversation.com/pristine-paradise-to-rubbish-dump-the-same-pacific-island-23-years-apart-80811>

St Helena:



The Bones of St Helena

A preview of the film 'A Story of Bones' has recently been shown on St Helena featuring clips from film shot in 2015 by PT Film, a London based film company, that had a team back on the Island to collect more material for the feature length documentary. A Story of Bones is billed as a "complex enquiry into fundamental questions of death and memory. The story is told through a combination of interviews, archival footage and run- and gun-filmmaking, exploring an unfolding narrative on one of the most isolated places on earth." The introduction goes on, "on St Helena, a small British island in the South Atlantic, lies a mass burial ground: the most significant physical trace of the transatlantic slave trade on earth. The bones buried there remain buried in history." Between 1840 and 1874, an estimated 30,000 Liberated Africans were released into refugee camps on St Helena. When they died, an estimated 8,000 were buried in three vast graveyards in the shallow volcanic earth in Rupert's Valley and at the quarantine station in Lemon Valley. The filmmakers say that, while locals knew about the bones, few knew who they belonged to. The bodies didn't represent "Saints", as locals are called, and weren't seen as part of the island.

The film preview shown to residents of St Helena in June/ July 2017 focussed on the people most active in finding the answer to a question almost a decade old; what is the most appropriate way to reinter the remains of the Liberated Africans in Rupert's, exhumed to make way for the Haul Road and other areas of the airport development? When the road was built to bring fuel and supplies to the airport, it was during a geotechnical survey that workers discovered signs of the burials. In 2008, archaeologists excavated the bones of some 325 Liberated Africans. The bones are currently stored in archival boxes, in an old storeroom attached to the prison, and will remain there until a consensus is reached on how best to commemorate them, and indeed even on who should be given a role in the decision.



Detail at "Butcher's Grave", one of the graveyards that remains, unmarked, untended, and largely unknown (Photo: PT Film)

Original story and further details: <https://psmag.com/magazine/the-bones-of-st-helena>


St Helena Airport Announcement

St Helena Government signed an agreement on 21st July 2017 for SA Airlink to provide a scheduled commercial air service between St Helena Airport (HLE) and OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, with a stopover at Windhoek International Airport in Namibia (a flight time of approximately 6 hours and 15 minutes). Airlink will also operate a monthly charter service between St Helena and Ascension Island. The agreement covers a three year period, with the option to extend for a further two years. Over the coming weeks, Airlink will be finalising regulatory approvals with the South African Civil Aviation Authority, which will include a proving flight to the island.

www.sainthelena.gov.sh/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/Air-Services-to-St-Helena-QandAs-21-July-2017.pdf

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

The South Georgia Newsletter, June—July 2017 can be viewed here: www.gov.gs/july-17-newsletter/
Highlights include:

- Nigel Philips CBE has been appointed as The Governor of the Falkland Islands and Her Majesty's Commissioner for South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) in succession to Colin Roberts CVO. Mr Philips will take up his appointment in September 2017.
- The Government of SGSSI has released the results of its annual biosecurity review 2016/17 (link can be found in the newsletter). Between June 2016 and May 2017, 213 biosecurity checks on cargo and baggage were undertaken by Government staff at King Edward Point and at the gateway port of Stanley, Falkland Islands. Of the 926 items that were individually inspected during these checks, biosecurity infringements, were detected on just 24 (2.5% of cargo needing remedial action to ensure biosecurity standards were upheld compared).
- GSGSSI has launched its latest stamp issue 'Albatross Conservation', developed in conjunction with the RSPB. Through the strict implementation of various conservation measures including bird-scaring devices the mortality of albatross in South Georgia waters has been reduced to zero. Incidental mortality associated with fisheries operating outside of South Georgia's maritime zone is still high and thought to be the main cause of the recent population declines.
- GSGSSI, in collaboration and consultation with stakeholders and experts, plan to run a spatial prioritisation project from May 2017—early 2018. The aim of the project is to adopt a data-led, precautionary approach to propose a terrestrial network of protected areas that provides for sustainable use of the environment while meeting a series of conservation goals agreed by the GSGSSI and the island's key stakeholders. The designations will contribute towards GSGSSI's commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity, and take forward one of the objectives under the 5-year Strategy 2016-2020.
- In July 2017, the South Georgia Heritage Trust and the University of Dundee jointly hosted the Island Invasives Conference 2017 with representation from over 44 countries (including many UKOTs and UKOTCF Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski). Awareness of the damaging impact of invasive species is growing rapidly, just as the problem itself is growing. Island flora and fauna tend to be particularly vulnerable to invasive alien species, and many insular endemics have been driven to extinction by these invaders. But, by their very nature, islands may also offer the possibility of long-term refuge and security if alien species can be eradicated or effectively controlled. For more: www.islandinvasives2017.com

Tristan da Cunha:

Key Stakeholders Meet to Discuss Tristan's Blue Belt Commitment

A workshop was held during 24th–27th July 2017 to discuss Tristan's commitment to implement a strategy to protect its marine environment by 2020 as part of the UK Government's Blue Belt programme. The purpose of the workshop was to identify what is already known about Tristan's marine environment and where there are gaps, ideas on how they may be filled, so that the strategy is science-based and evidence-led. The first couple of days of the workshop, hosted by the RSPB, saw scientists come together including seabird and penguin experts, marine mammal experts, marine, fishery and oceanographic scientists as well as those that will help to deliver the programme including Tristan's Director of Fisheries, James Glass, and Administrator, Sean Burns, who both attended the workshop. The final day hosted by the Tristan Government at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was attended by a wider group including, Chris Carnegy, Tristan Government UK Representative, Richard Grundy and John Cooper from the Tristan Association, representatives from the fishing company Oventones, Joint Nature Conservancy Committee (JNCC), South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI), UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), RSPB, British Antarctic Survey (BAS) National Geographic, as well as other scientists, UK government experts and officials. The Overseas Territories Minister Lord Ahmad was able to join for part of the meeting to discuss the Blue Belt programme generally and how it could be taken forward on Tristan. Work will now progress with input from stakeholders on developing a strategy that protects Tristan's marine environment for the future and for the Tristan community (who through the Tristan Government will decide on the final plan) and its sustainability.



Delegates gathered in the India Office Council Chamber of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office during the Workshop on Tristan da Cunha's Blue Belt Programme held on 27th July 2017 (including UKOTCF rep. Dr Mike Pienkowski)

To coincide with the workshop, the National Geographic Society and the RSPB hosted the **National Geographic Pristine Seas film premiere** on the evening of the 27th July at the Royal Geographic Society in London. Introduced by expedition leader, Paul Rose, the film features stunning imagery of Tristan da Cunha islands including aerial shots from drones as well as underwater filming, and also showcased the interesting marine and terrestrial scientific work carried out by the expedition team. Dr Jenn Caselle, Chief Scientist of the Pristine Seas expedition based at the University of California Santa Barbara, made the audience aware of the brilliant work the expedition was able to carry out in excellent weather conditions that allowed the full scientific programme to be carried out.

Information and photos from the Tristan da Cunha Government and Tristan da Cunha Association website: www.tristandc.com

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

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