



**Staying Connected for Conservation in a Changed World:  
UKOTCF's 6th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island states  
By Zoom  
2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021**

## **First announcement: save the dates!**

**UKOTCF will hold the next in its series of renowned conferences, for the first time online, on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup>, Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup>, Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday 10<sup>th</sup> March 2021. Further announcements, with details and booking arrangements will be made on [www.ukotcf.org.uk/onlineconference2021/](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk/onlineconference2021/) as soon as possible.**

### **Introduction**

Consistently over several years, one of the most frequent enquiries from UKOTs and CDs to UKOTCF has been “when is the next UKOTCF conference?” This is because, as reported by UKOT participants, the conferences have proved invaluable in enabling successful conservation initiatives which would not otherwise have occurred.

For those new to the topic, UKOTCF organised conferences for conservation practitioners in the UKOTs, CDs and a few territories of other states or small independent states in 2000 (Gibraltar), 2003 (Bermuda), 2006 (Jersey), 2009 (Cayman) and 2015 (Gibraltar). UKOTCF also helped FCO in organising and running a conference arranged at short notice in London in 1999. The conferences until 2009 received major financial support from UK Government, as well as from the host territory (with major in-kind work contributions from UKOTCF). It took UK Government over 2 years from 2009 to decide that it would not fund a conference in 2012, and in fact has not provided majority funding since. HM Government of Gibraltar funded the 2015 conference, with a small contribution from UK Government (and a very large donation of work-time by UKOTCF). We were to have had conferences in 2018 or 2020 but the host territories were struck by the severe 2017 hurricanes just as these were about to be confirmed, and the resulting financial, structural and social damage made these impossible. We have been investigating other possibilities but then Covid-19 intervened.

Whilst not abandoning the idea of physical conferences in the future (because they clearly add elements still not possible remotely), it is clearly going to be months at least before large physical meetings become practicable again. UKOTCF officers have, over recent months, been participating in various webinars and online meetings (by a variety of bodies, not just conservation), to review techniques and possibilities. UKOTCF has opened a Zoom account and switched to that, from the failing Skype, for our regional working groups, Council meetings and other working meetings.

Putting this together, UKOTCF proposed holding an online conference using Zoom – and undertook a wide consultation with our member and associate organisations, members of our regional working groups and others in our network to seek their views on both logistics and topics.

## **Structure of conference based on consultations**

Amongst respondents, there was unanimous support for a conference. Without the travel and accommodation dimensions, we could choose whether to hold the conference as a block of 4 days (as for the most recent physical conference) or split into blocks of 2-days or 1-day, with gaps. On the basis of quite diverse views, we have opted to hold the conference as two blocks of 2-days in adjacent weeks, on the most popular days of the week indicated (Tuesdays and Wednesdays). Other constraints led to March being the most appropriate month. Based on our successful experience with previous conferences, this is also the earliest date by which we can achieve all the preparations that we need to make the most value of the conference for UKOT/CD conservation.

To allow for live participation from as widely as possible from across the UKOTs, CDs and others interested (including overseas entities of other nations, several of which have participated in previous UKOTCF conferences), we plan to run the conference day from noon to 9pm GMT. This will allow participation at not totally unreasonable hours from almost all UKOTs and CDs (with apologies to Pitcairn and BIOT!). Within this period (in addition to meal breaks etc), there will be two 2.5-hour main sessions, plus one 1-hour session per day. The short sessions will be used for a variety of functions but at least one will be a poster session (more explanation of the logistics later) without a restriction on topics, other than relevance to UKOTs/CDs (as is usual at our conferences). We anticipate that posters will be available for viewing throughout the conference period, not just in the dedicated session(s).

Our consultation offered several conference subject areas, based on recent discussions in UKOTCF regional working groups and elsewhere, and invited other ideas. There was general support for these, as well as useful suggestions for other topics and ideas for splitting or combining some subject areas. As a result, we now plan to include these 8 topics for the main sessions:

1. Progress (or otherwise) in reaching environmental targets
2. Engaging people; the wider benefits of conservation and healthy ecosystems
3. Facilitating local leads in conservation
4. Coping with recovery after hurricanes and natural disasters by building resilience
5. Nature-based solutions for the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration: Terrestrial
6. Nature-based solutions for the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration: Marine
7. Funding mechanisms – tourism and alternatives
8. Plugging the gap: innovative approaches and capacity-building

The overall title for the conference was also drawn from several of the suggestions.

We plan that the conference will produce proceedings, as did previous UKOTCF conferences (see [www.ukotcf.org.uk/our-conferences/](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk/our-conferences/)).

We propose to model our approach on that used successfully in the 2015 Gibraltar conference, itself evolved from that used in our previous conferences. That is that topic sessions are structured to reach useful conclusions or recommendations, rather than just present interesting and potentially useful studies (as occurs in conferences of scientific and some conservation organisations). Hence, speakers will be selected in relation to relevance to themes (and will include, wherever possible, contributions

from the territories themselves - so that all territories will be represented across the conference although, for practical reasons, not within every topic session).

To ensure that we have good involvement from those closest to the issues and with relevant experience, for each topic session at the conference, a small team is helping prepare for that topic at the conference. We have invited appropriate personnel to join these topic session teams, and managed to arrange it that persons from or closely associated with all 21 UKOTs and CDs have been invited to join these teams (although they are acting in individual capacities, not as representatives).

For each topic, the topic session team will draw together wide experience with some knowledge of the topic and/or how to phrase conclusions and recommendations to give the best chance of these being adopted by others. As was done for the 2015 Gibraltar conference, Mike Pienkowski and Catherine Wensink, as overall conference coordinators, will sit in all such teams, in order to ensure overall conference coherence. However, whilst they may each act as a coordinator for a team, they have asked others to coordinate the other 6 teams.

The main task of the session team is to produce a first draft of the conclusions and recommendations for each session. In doing this, they will take account of:

- Current important issues and priorities for conservation in the UKOTs/CDs;
- The importance of noting the views of speakers and others from the territories, supplemented by those of outside speakers where necessary;
- Posters will be included on the conference (with fewer constraints on numbers); these will be allocated to topic sessions (but viewable longer term within the conference period) where appropriate, and a general section where not.

As for the 2015 Gibraltar conference, to allow proper consideration of conclusions and recommendations, we want to give participants the chance to discuss them with colleagues before the conference, and indeed to be able to feed in ideas during the conference, not just throw the load entirely on to the discussion period within the topic session.

We aim to circulate a late draft to participants by a month before the conference. We aim to revise that in the light of any comments received by mid-February, so that a final draft can be circulated immediately before the conference. This will be considered and final comments received in the discussion period at the end of the appropriate topic session. (We are in consultation with the Chair of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council with a view to organising a meeting of that Council about a month after the conference, so that conclusions can be fed into that, as well as to other target audiences.)

Each talk will be limited to a maximum of not more than 15 minutes (some may be slightly shorter), with up to 5 minutes of questions and introduction of the next speaker. Speakers will not be allowed to over-run their speaking slot into the question period. Indeed, to avoid the delays and difficulties that have plagued the online conferences of some other organisations, the talks will be pre-recorded, but the questions (and general discussion sessions) will be live. (This arrangement worked very well at a short conference of another organisation with which some of the UKOTCF conference team were involved recently.) The purpose of talks is to stimulate those discussions. Speakers can give fuller accounts in the proceedings. Speakers and other participants can also supply posters, which can be drawn into the discussion. (Procedures for submitting posters will be indicated at a later date.)

### **Funding**

To keep conference costs as low as possible (bearing in mind that UKOT/CD conservation workers and their organisations are not generally well funded) and to give the opportunity for other organisations to be associated with this successful series of conferences, UKOTCF is offering sponsorship opportunities for other organisations. For more details of these (or to suggest

organisations from which to invite sponsorship), please email [jmales@ukotcf.org](mailto:jmales@ukotcf.org) (Dr Jamie Males) and copy to [hello@ukotcf.org](mailto:hello@ukotcf.org).

Whilst UKOTCF depends heavily on large amounts of unpaid work, some costs are unavoidable, including many to make the conference happen. Many people responding to the questionnaire made it clear that they would be happy to pay a reasonable conference fee. Therefore, we will be charging a conference fee, with reductions for some categories, and with some free places for persons involved in conservation in the UKOTs/CDs but genuinely unable to pay. The fee will be per participant. We recognise that, subject to local anti-Covid-19 regulations, some people will wish to meet together and join the conference by a shared computer. We have no objection to this and can indeed see certain advantages. However, we should note that the costs are worked out on the basis of the fee relating to the number of participants – so we would hope for honesty here. We would prefer this to be done by individuals registering separately regardless of whether or not they connect to the conference separately or with others. Amongst other things, this will ensure that participants receive all advance and follow-up materials and consultations. However, if it is agreed that a local coordinator wishes to register a group of persons, we will still need those persons' contact details and fees. We are aware too that certain territories, especially in the South Atlantic, suffer exceptionally high internet fees set by the monopoly supplier. We would be happy to negotiate whether it is possible to offset some of these fees against a reduction in the group's total conference fees.

Booking and payment will be available at a later date online at [www.ukotcf.org.uk/onlineconference2021/](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk/onlineconference2021/), where further details will appear, as these become available.

We look forward to seeing as many of you as possible in March, online at the conference.