

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum



TREWEEK ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTANTS

Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat

Newsletter 10, April 2021



Male Montserrat oriole, Montserrat's national bird on red heliconia, Montserrat's national plant. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Foreword

Welcome to the 10th issue of the newsletter about the current joint programme of work by Montserrat National Trust and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, in conjunction with the Government of Montserrat. We had not expected a gap of over a year since Newsletter 9 – but Covid-19 intervened. In fact, Mike and Ann Pienkowski were in the region, in the Turks and Caicos Islands, in March 2020 and due to arrive in Montserrat a few days later, but then Montserrat had to close down, so we could not.

However, work has continued both in Montserrat and outside. A large part of this has been remote joint working to fund more intense activity to build on the successful pilot years of this project. We are delighted to report that our proposal has passed the first stage of the current round of Darwin Initiative funding applications. Partners in UKOTCF, Montserrat National Trust and several other Montserratian partner organisations and individuals worked over the Christmas and New Year period (the time slot determined by the Darwin secretariat) to produce and submit the complex Stage 2 application. At the time of writing, we still have a couple of months to wait before learning the result. If successful, project funding will start at the start of July. If travel becomes possible a UKOTCF team will be in Montserrat in late June and early July 2021; if not, the next

phase of the project can still start then.

Meanwhile, here, we update on some of the work that has been progressing despite travel restrictions and lockdowns. This includes updates from one of the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* sites, and a summary of some work from the Montana State University team who were part of the first 2 years of work and whose analyses have now discovered from their Montserrat work several species new to science. We report also a strong involvement from Montserrat in UKOTCF's online conference for conservation in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and small island states held in early March this year, as well as some related activities.

The first two years of this current programme were supported in part by a grant from UK Government's Darwin Plus fund, under the title *Maximising long-term survival prospects of Montserrat's endemic species and ecosystem-services*. At present, the programme is not in receipt of outside funding but this is being applied for. Meanwhile, UKOTCF and MNT are keeping the programme going at a maintenance level using just their own limited resources – because it is important to maintain the excellent momentum built up and support the committed and effective efforts of local partners.

We are very grateful for the many kind and encouraging comments from people welcoming the first nine newsletters. We hope that you enjoy this one too. Comments are always welcome.

Please feel free to show or forward these newsletters to others. If anyone sees these and would like to be added to the circulation list, please send your email address to cwensink@ukotcf.org. For more information on the project, the main contacts are:

Dr Mike Pienkowski & Mrs Catherine Wensink, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum: m@pienkowski.org cwensink@ukotcf.org. See also www.ukotcf.org.uk. Mrs Sarita Francis, Montserrat National Trust: mnt@montserratnationaltrust.ms



Green-throated carib hummingbird. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Montana State University, partly from UKOTCF-led study, describes 11 species new to science (6 endemic) from Montserrat

The part-Darwin-supported study in Montserrat in 2016-18 was led by UKOTCF in partnership with Montana State University (MSU), Montserrat National Trust (MNT), the Government of Montserrat (MoG) Ministry of Agriculture, Trade, Lands, Housing & Environment (MATLHE), and Treweek Environmental Consultants (TEC).

One element of the work concerned describing and analysing some of the insects of Montserrat, key elements for many aspects of ecology and natural ecosystem services, including pollination, pest-control, nutrient-recycling, amongst others.

Dr Justin Runyon, of MSU and US Department of Agriculture Forest Service, undertook the study of long-legged flies (Dolichopodidae). His 95-page study, *The Dolichopodidae of Montserrat* has just been published and is open access at: <https://zookeys.pensoft.net/article/55192/list/7/>. This is a key, i.e. a paper that allows identification of, in this case, these tiny but important flies. Inevitably for this sort of essential scientific paper, it is not an easy read for non-biologists (or even some biologists), but it contains some important information for everyone.

Some key aspects include:

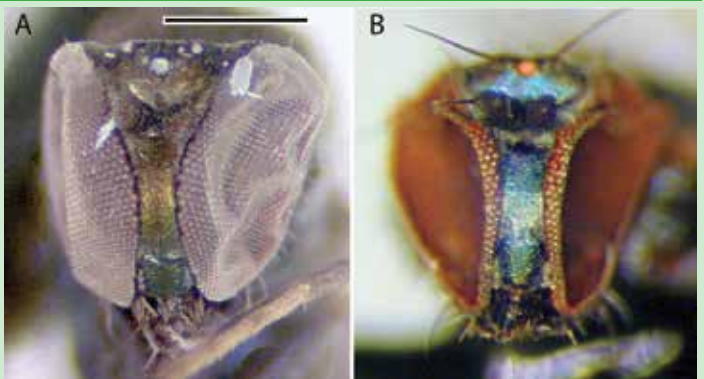
63 species of long-legged flies, in 27 genera, have been found in Montserrat;

11 new species (previously unknown to science) have been discovered;

6 species have been found only on Montserrat and are endemic;

Dr Runyon has named 3 for the island: *Medetera montserratensis*, *Chrysotus montserratensis*, and *Sympycnus montserratensis*;

Montserrat has more species than predicted based on size (especially since less than half the island was sampled due



Some of the illustrations from the paper.

Above: Heads of males, showing colour differences of face of (A) *Medetera iviei* (new species, Montserrat) and (B) *M. crassicauda* (Dominica). Scale bar: 0.5 mm.

Below: New species *Medetera montserratensis*. Scale bar: 1.0 mm
Opposite: New species *Chrysotus callichromoides*. Scale bar: 1.0 mm.



to exclusion zone); this reflects work on other taxa showing Montserrat to be exceptionally biodiverse despite its small size and impacts of natural and semi-natural disasters;

Three of the six species endemic to Montserrat are restricted to lower elevation/dry forests, indicating importance of conserving some of these habitats; these are under pressure, partly because they are the most comfortable for people to live. UKOTCF's/MNT's *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* initiative is working with the local community to help safeguard these forests.

Justin Runyon also discusses the potential negative effect that large numbers of introduced mangos might be having on aquatic insects in some locations, indicating the need for more study, taking account also the socio-economic importance of this plant and its benefits to some endemic plants.

Update from an *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* site

Topical dry forest at Garibaldi Hill: Tim Orton

As noted above, the first two years of this current programme of Montserrat National Trust, UKOTCF and the Government of Montserrat were supported in part by a grant from UK Government's Darwin Plus fund, under the title *Maximising long-term survival prospects of Montserrat's endemic species and ecosystem-services*.

At present, the programme is not in receipt of outside funding but applications are being made to various potential sources. Meanwhile, UKOTCF and MNT are keeping the programme going at a maintenance level using just their own limited resources – because it is important to maintain the excellent momentum built up and support the committed and effective efforts of local partners, especially in the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* component of the work.

Dr Mike and Ann Pienkowski arranged again (at their own expense) to spend a few days in Montserrat in March 2020, to help with this. While they were in the preceding UKOT of their trip (Turks & Caicos Islands), the Governor of Montserrat emailed to explain that, unfortunately, Montserrat had had to close down from that week. This was because some of the many current visitors (including Montserratians returning for the traditional family reunions of St Patrick's Week) had been exposed en route to persons with Covid-19. Thus, Mike and Ann had to divert directly back to UK from TCI.

Nevertheless, they and UKOTCF colleagues have been able to provide advice remotely to several enquiries from NGO and governmental partners in Montserrat, and continue to work remotely on future plans.

We were delighted to receive, a few days after when the visit should have been to Montserrat, an email from one of our most active local partners in the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* initiative, Tim Orton. We are pleased to quote from his email and include his photos of trees and bushes blooming in the globally threatened tropical dry forest on his land. As part of the project, Tim has been removing invasive vegetation from the forest and planting or encouraging native species.

Tim reported: "The dry forest is starting to bloom, interestingly 6 weeks earlier than last year, and is absolutely full of bees."

However, at the end of September 2020, Tim reported "We have been suffering another drought this year, one that the Antigua water authorities described as the worst in 80 years! So I have again suffered a fairly high attrition rate on my tree planting, about 50% have survived though and will hopefully become established over the next few years. The attrition rate on self-seeded trees though has been extremely high, close on 100%, so any success on getting trees established is a good thing! I have noticed that, of the trees that do become established, true growth seems to occur from the third year onwards and these early years seem to be when they at the most vulnerable."

Two photos on the next page illustrate this.



Views of Tim Orton's tropical dry forest in bloom on 4 April 2020. The invasive plants are being removed from among the native ones in this forest and native species being encouraged and, in some cases, planted. This is part of the Adopt a Home for Wildlife initiative of UKOTCF and Montserrat National Trust.

Photos: Tim Orton

The white pipes on the image below indicate where trees planted about this time last year are still surviving.



And, in the same general area, trees planted three years ago, now close to 6 foot tall (image below).



“The ring-barking experiment also seems to be a success. In the photo below the large non-native tamarind, in the centre, that was ring-barked is still alive but with greatly reduced leaf cover and the lower story of young native trees has thickened up considerably. The survival rate for seedlings inside the forest shade is very much better, so I suspect that ground temperatures are my main problem with re-establishing areas of bare ground.



Hopefully, that means that the survival rate will increase as the older trees start to shade the ground.”

“The established forest (below) doesn't seem to have suffered any ill effects from the drought. The cactus, especially, are thriving! It will soon be time for a wild harvest.”

UKOTCF recalled that Tim had mentioned previously that self-seeders grew more vigorously than planted ones. Tim noted that “that was before the months-long drought conditions we have experienced over the past two years. Those that became established prior to then are still doing better than the relocated trees from the same period. It would seem that seedlings need more than a single year of good conditions to be able to survive in the longer term. It is important to clarify that I am

mainly referring to those in the open, unshaded areas I am trying to reestablish. Those within the shade of the forest have fared much better. Another conservation lesson perhaps - it is much



more difficult to re-establish clear-cut than areas with shade. In hindsight, I perhaps should have only thinned the area, managed the invasive plants whilst planting native saplings and seedlings amongst them until they were established. Without an area to run a comparison trial, however, it is difficult to say what the problems would have been with that approach!”

UKOTCF is really grateful to Tim for trying these techniques and noting the results. One of the aims of the continuing project is to build up and share this knowledge between *Adopters* and, indeed, with others further afield.

Related capacity-building for conservation efforts on Montserrat

Montserrat National Trust recently announced some changes in personnel, notably the addition of some new staff and Board Members. One such new Member is Vernaire Barnes, the Director of Bass Consultancy Services (BCS). Vernaire is currently managing the marketing campaign for the Government of Montserrat's Remote Worker Programme. The Programme was launched on 29 January 2021 and, to date, they have designed the branding for the campaign, built the application website and are currently managing its international promotional and marketing campaign.

664 Connect (664Connect.com; www.Facebook.com/664connectmedia) is an offshoot of BCS. It is a hugely successful culture, entertainment and destination website about Montserrat and the Caribbean region, reaching over 100,000 persons.



Vernaire said: "I am personally dedicated to raising the profile of the island, so I fully support the work of the UKOTCF [and MNT] and the potential that it has to regenerate and redevelop the beautiful island of Montserrat."

In addition, Veta Wade, the celebrated ocean advocate, has been working with UKOTCF and MNT over the last few months, especially through the project application already outlined. Veta, through Fish 'N Fins, the non-profit organisation she founded, enables Caribbean children to learn to swim, snorkel and protect our oceans. Conservation activities include: exploring



tropical marine habitats, creating ocean-art community-projects, internships, sea-safety skills, and more.

Many of the regular readers will know that Veta Wade is passionate about the ocean and is particularly strong on outreach and educating youth via empowerment and adventure. Through her outreach work, Veta has been able to engage the community and volunteers of all ages and abilities in embracing marine conservation and ocean confidence. To date she has engaged over 1000 children via Fish 'N Fins' programmes. Her goal is not only to educate and increase Caribbean youth awareness about the marine life but also to immerse them and inspire them to be passionate ocean leaders.

The proposed project with UKOTCF and MNT will make best use of her successfully demonstrated community work. If the project funding application is successful, her role will be to assist with liaison with community groups and individuals, providing assistance with the monitoring and evaluation of the project's success in reaching its aims.

More on Veta's work: <https://www.aquafishnfins.com>.

Related projects

A Marine Turtle Action Plan for Montserrat

Following several years of discussion with the Chief Fisheries Officer (in part facilitated by UKOTCF), a project has been awarded funding by the UK Government's Darwin Plus to provide knowledge about the marine turtles around Montserrat in order to protect them.

Two species of turtles regularly nest on Montserrat, hawksbill and green turtle. Other species occasionally nesting here are leatherback and loggerhead turtles. They also spend time feeding in the waters around the island. The project is a partnership between the Government of Montserrat, the University of Exeter in the UK and UK-based NGO, the Marine Conservation Society. Through the project, more information will be gathered on beach-profiles, nest-sites and hatching success on land, and then habitat-use at sea through satellite telemetry devices that will be attached to the turtles. In addition, training will be provided on monitoring and management of the existing hatchery, and a review of the marine turtle legislation will take place through the Community Voice Method as well as general outreach activities. An action plan will be developed with island stakeholders informed by the scientific information collected.

The project has inevitably suffered a slow start due to the pandemic, but the local team continue to monitor and protect

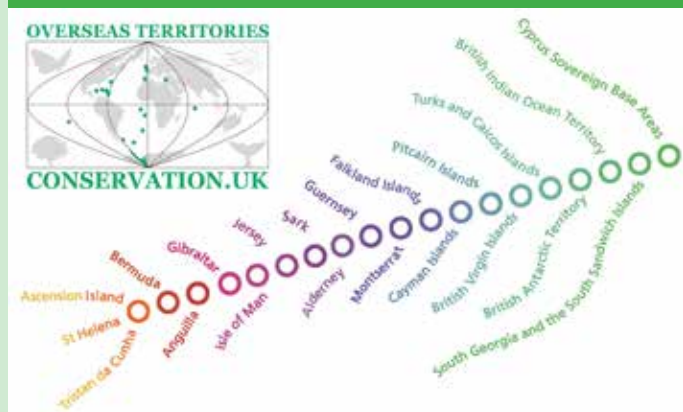
the nesting turtles and the overseas team are very much looking forward to visiting and assisting with further research once it is safe to do so.

The project leader is Dr Nicola Weber from University of Exeter, who has visited the island several times previously as part of the UKOTCF team working with MNT on *SOS Nature of Montserrat*.



Watching a laying turtle. Photo: James "Scriber" Daley

Montserrat at UKOTCF's online conference, *Staying Connected for Conservation in a Changed World*



Montserrat was well represented at the online conference “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,” held on 2nd, 3rd, 9th & 10th March 2021.

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.

UKOTCF had 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). 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.

UKOTCF’s solution was holding an online conference using Zoom. It undertook a wide consultation with member and associate organisations, members of its regional working groups and others in its network to seek their views on both logistics and topics.

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 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 UKOTCF’s successful experience with previous conferences, this was also the earliest date by which we could achieve all the preparations needed to make the most value of the conference for UKOT/CD

conservation.

To allow for live participation 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 ran the conference day from noon to 9pm GMT. This allowed 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 were two 2.5-hour main sessions, plus one 1-hour session per day. The short sessions were used for a variety of functions, including the opening, a special session on large-scale novel funding, a poster session (without a restriction on topics, other than relevance to UKOTs/CDs, as is usual at our conferences), and a closing session. The posters were 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 settled on 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.

The conference opened with:

- A statement by The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park, Minister of State for Pacific and the Environment at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; and
- An address by Hon. Professor John Cortés, HM Government of Gibraltar’s Minister for the Environment, Sustainability,



Climate Change, Heritage, Education and Culture, and Chairman of the UK Overseas Territories & Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council, this followed by questions and answers.

The gaps in sessions featured music from territory musicians and some videos. The end of the introductory session was followed by an extract from the educational video based on the 1999 conference "Breath of Fresh Air," featuring that early environmental song, Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi" by the London Gospel Choir, arranged and conducted by its Montserratian leader, Bazil Meade (with some of the choir members singing this here).



Mrs Sarita Francis (Executive Director of Montserrat National Trust and Council member of UKOTCF) chaired Session 3 on "Facilitating local leads in conservation" (below).



In this session, and on behalf of herself, Mike Pienkowski, Catherine Wensink, Sarita Francis and the other project participants, Ann Pienkowski presented "Save Our Special Nature of Montserrat – integrated conservation, facilitating local community leadership: Adopt a Home for Wildlife" – the joint programme of Montserrat National Trust and UKOTCF (below).



In the interval after this session, the UKOTCF video introducing Montserrat, produced in association with the publication of the UKOTCF/MNT book "Birding in Paradise: The Emerald Island of Montserrat," was played. The video, and others, can be viewed at <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wider-caribbean/montserrat-2/>. The book can be purchased from Montserrat

National Trust on the island or, as either physical book (by post) or download from: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/publications-for-sale/>.

The first presentation in Session 4 "Coping with recovery after hurricanes and natural disasters by building resilience" was "After the volcano – 20+ years on." This was given by Sarita Francis (Executive Director, Montserrat National Trust) and Vernaire Bass (MNT Board Member in charge of Promotion and Outreach and Director of 664CONNECT)



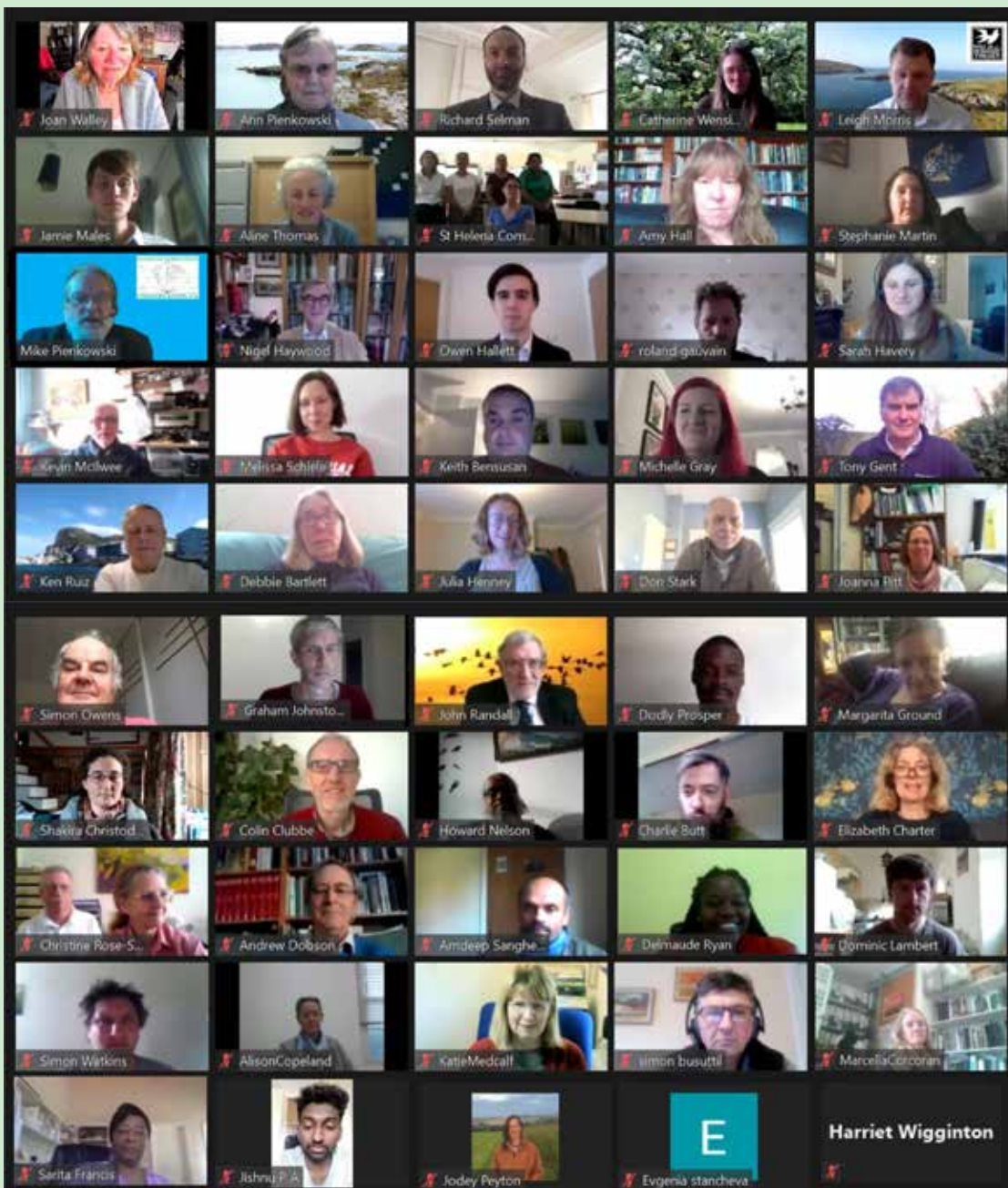
The final conference session included the first in the series of high-level presentations inaugurating the Sir Richard and Lady Ground Lectures on Nature Conservation in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.

This was "Three essential elements for conservation success in the Overseas Territories" by the long-serving and highly respected Director of Cayman Islands Director of Environment, Gina Ebanks-Petrie.

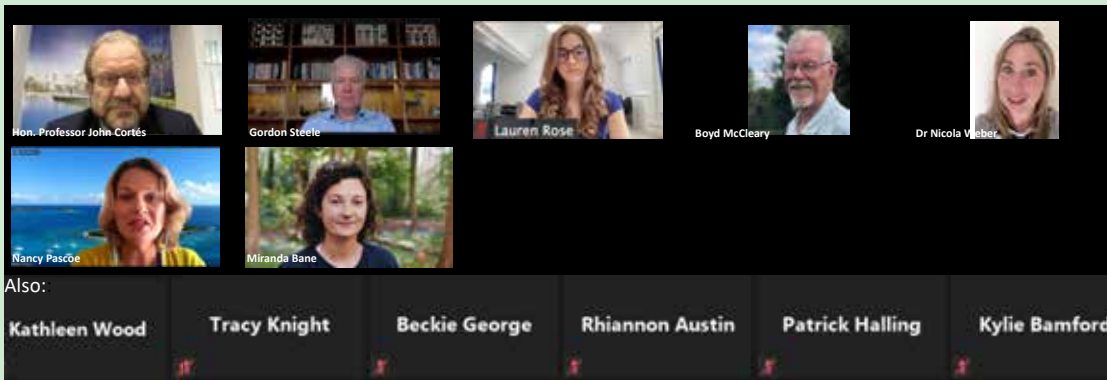
The conclusions and recommendations are at https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/UKOTCFconf2021_ConcRec_210311.pdf. The conference will produce proceedings, as did previous UKOTCF conferences (www.ukotcf.org.uk/our-conferences/); this will take several months.

UKOTCF is grateful to all the speakers, poster-presenters, topic-team members, chair-persons, question-masters, rapporteurs, organising team, participants and all others who helped, including sponsors:

- SWA Environmental Environment Systems
- JICAS: the Jersey International Centre of Advanced Studies
- GONHS: Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society
- Bermuda National Trust
- Manx Wildlife Trust
- Isle of Man Government Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture
- National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands
- Amphibian & Reptile Conservation
- RSPB
- St Helena Government and its St Helena Research Institute
- St Helena National Trust
- People's Trust for Endangered Species
- Environment Job
- Defra: the Department for Food, Agriculture & Rural Affairs
- Halo Coffee
- Lefrik Eco-Friendly Fabric
- Mr Peter Flockhart, and anonymous donors.
- Some of the conference participants are on the next page.



Gathered immediately above are some of the St Helena participants who (with Covid-19 absent from the Island) can still gather together. Photo is by Vince Thompson (St Helena Independent and Member of the St Helena National Trust Council) – so his image is not captured.



Also:

Nearly half of the conference participants, including Sarita Francis and Delmaude Ryan, of Montserrat National Trust, and several others involved in conservation work in Montserrat. Photo and compilation: Ann Pienkowski (UKOTCF), and Vince Thompson (St Helena Independent and St Helena National Trust).