

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Annual Report April 2020 - March 2021

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 well 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, made up of volunteers and some paid staff, fulfils a wide variety of roles in support of the tireless work of conservation bodies in the UKOTs and CDs.

In an extraordinary year, there have been many challenges in all our lives and for nature conservation across the UKOTs and CDs. The link between human health, well-being and the natural environment has never been more obvious or profoundly felt. Recognising the enormous loss people have felt, and our deepest sympathies to those who have lost someone, the Forum's hope for the future with so many high-profile meetings pertaining to the environment coming up (e.g. UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP26, in which the UK has a major lead as host; Conservation on Biological Diversity (CBD) COP15), is that the loss of biodiversity, at the hands of damaging human activities, is halted. As we enter the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, there may be opportunities to restore and re-wild damaged ecosystems. Funding continues to be a major limiting factor in starting, continuing and expanding nature conservation, but there are new opportunities such as carbon credits, and blended financial investments, which are becoming more accessible.

On a practical level, many of our partner organisations have told us that they were able to keep some projects going, be they surveys during permitted exercise, or desk-based work. They also reported that there was some evidence to suggest that local communities spent much more time in and around nature, something echoed across the world. For those UKOTs and CD highly dependent on tourism, their economies (including the funding of conservation) are likely to be impacted for some time, and so harnessing local appreciation and support for conservation will be fundamental to limit the impact of reduced income on conservation efforts.

The natural world is also battling against novel diseases. Congratulations go to all of those leading the fight against the rapidly destructive Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) – which has somewhat more impact on coral-reefs than the tragic Covid-19 pandemic has on human populations – noting with sympathy the personal tragedies that many of us have suffered with the latter. A special mention to our associate Turks and Caicos Reef Fund. The reefs are of huge environmental and economic importance to TCI, and much of the economy ultimately depends on these. After the discovery in TCI, TCRF managed, despite Covid-lockdowns, to confirm effective techniques on SCTLD and advise other territories. Tragically, support for TCRF from UK Government did not materialise and many TCI reefs have been lost. It is hoped that support will be more forthcoming for the land-based rearing for eventually re-establishment that TCRF and other experts have identified as the next stage.

Our impact this year is documented throughout. However, here are some highlights. Significant efforts had been put earlier into a submission to the UK Government's Call for Evidence on its future funding of conservation in UKOTs. The 2020 Budget announced: "The government is tripling



With major constraints still in place on fieldwork in many territories throughout the year due to Covid-19, and much of the year concentrating on organising and running the conference, many of the illustrations in this year's report draw on that. Here, Hon. Prof. John Cortés, Gibraltar's Minister for Education, Heritage, Environment, Energy and Climate Change, and Chair of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers' Council gives the opening speech and addresses questions. We are pleased to see the European Breeding Birds Atlas play a supporting role, as well as its normal information one.

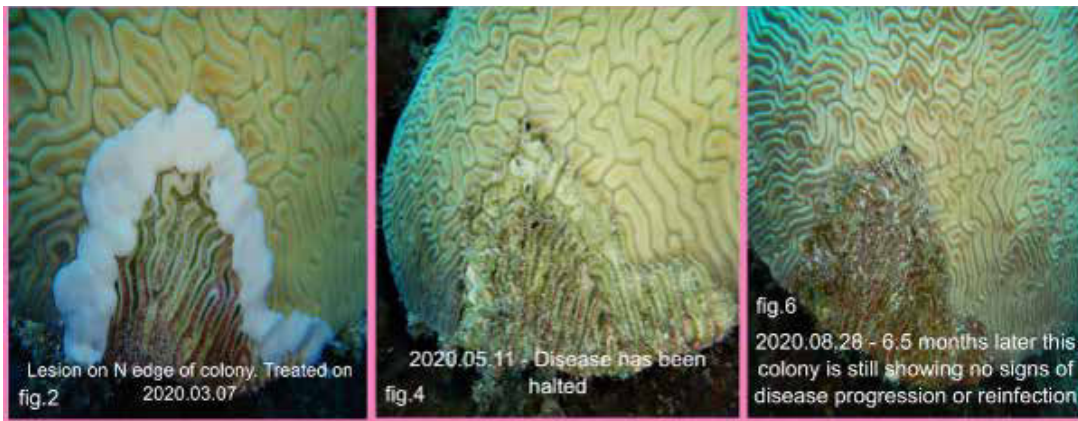


Photo montage, over a period of 6 months, of a colony of grooved brain coral *Diploria labyrinthiformes* treated with Amoxicillin in Base2B. This is one of the many species of structural reef corals being destroyed rapidly by Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD). Turks & Caicos Reef Fund has been leading the fight for over 2 years against this disease in the first UKOT to be infected, sadly still without any Government funding. The SCTLD disease (white dead coral area on

left at the time of treatment). 2 months later (centre), the disease has been halted, with no sign of re-infection 6.5 months after treatment (right). Source: Zimmermann, A. & Stark, D. 2021. Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease, Turks & Caicos Islands – A UKOT's Outbreak Case Study. pp 222-233 in *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*, 2nd, 3rd, 9th & 10th March 2021 – Proceedings (ed. by M. Pienkowski, C. Wensink, A. Pienkowski & J. Males) *UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum*, www.ukotcf.org.uk

funding [to around £10m pa] for the Darwin Plus programme to help protect and conserve the globally significant biodiversity found in UK Overseas Territories.” Just over £5m was awarded to projects in the most recent round. Two of the successful projects, with approximately £600,000 of funding, were facilitated in some way by UKOTCF: a project on experimental reintroduction of mountain chicken frogs, because a land-owner recruited as one of our *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* participants is providing the site; and, also in Montserrat, a marine turtle action-plan programme. During the call for evidence, UKOTCF recommended strongly for UK Government to allow room to be a responsive funder able to react to emerging issues. It is pleasing to see that this has happened on two occasions throughout the year. First, the Covid response awarded in summer 2020 was £168k for 5 projects. Second, it has released some funding (around £200,000) to deal, via JNCC, with the threat of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (although it is not yet clear how this is being deployed).

The Jersey International Centre of Advanced Studies (JICAS) has continued to work with us to encourage students from UKOTs to take part in their innovative MSc programme. As a result of coordination with JICAS, which began after meeting at the Jersey Biodiversity Conference in 2019, over 5 meetings have taken place with contacts in the UKOTs and several bursaries have been created for research projects. 50% reduction in MSc fees have been offered to UKOT students who study in Jersey and UKOTCF has facilitated several interviews of potential students for September 2020 & 2021.

Zoom has inevitably taken over our lives, but this meant that we were able to organise and deliver our first online conference in March. It took place over 4 days in March. There were 184 registered participants from 25 countries or territories, including all 5 Crown Dependencies, 15 of the 16 UK Overseas Territories, UK, USA, Europe, S America and elsewhere. On any one day, there were more than 100 participating. Although only registered participants have access to the recordings, in those territories without total lockdown, we know that the recordings are being viewed by colleagues.

As a result of the earlier Environment Minister's Council meetings and following Joint Ministerial Council meetings, several articles were published in the Gibraltar press outlining their Minister's involvement at COP meetings, representing the UKOTs and CDs.

Improvements in the website have led to personnel being able to do much more in terms of modifications and additional features. For example, the booking system for the UKOTCF online conference was semi-automated.

This year we had a new member, the Manx Wildlife Trust. They have already been very involved including attending and contributing to the conference as well as being an active member of the Europe Territories Working Group.

A small, but welcome, grant was received from the Garfield Weston Foundation, taking us through to 2022. This will allow us to provide some of our core functions requested by territories as we await to hear from several other funding bodies delayed as a result of the pandemic.

Project work

One of the most frequent enquiries from UKOTs and CDs to us 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. 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 well into 2021 at least before large physical meetings become practicable again.

The conference titled: “*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*,” was held on 2nd, 3rd, 9th & 10th March 2021.

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). 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). Conferences were due to take place 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. Other possibilities were being investigated but then Covid-19 intervened.

Our solution was holding an online conference using Zoom. A wide consultation with member and associate organisations, members of its regional working groups and others in our network to seek their views on both logistics and topics was undertaken in October. Amongst respondents, there was unanimous support for a conference. Without travel and accommodation dimensions, the conference was not constrained to one block of time, and most people opted for two blocks of 2-days in adjacent weeks.

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), the conference ran from noon to 8pm GMT on each day with several breaks. This allowed participation at not totally unreasonable hours from almost all UKOTs and CDs (with apologies to Pitcairn and BIOT!).

Although the team had been quite successful in generating sponsorship (via ‘in-kind’ support, supply of goods, funding), a huge amount of volunteer effort was needed – and supplied – to make it happen. The conference page is at: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/our-conferences/onlineconference2021/>.

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

Shayla Ellick
@ShaylaEllick

Thrilled to have been able to promote the incredible work at #StHelena's #MillenniumForest over the past 20years via our presentation at the @UKOTCF Conference on #WorldWildlifeDay2021



Shayla Ellick @ShaylaEllick · Mar 3
Replying to @ShaylaEllick
Martina and I planted our first #endemic #StHelenagumwood trees when we were still in school – obviously the catalyst for our terrestrial conservation careers!

Cayman Islands Department of Environment @doecay... · Mar 10
DoE Director, Gina Ebanks-Petrie is giving the inaugural Sir Richard & Lady Ground conference lecture on #Nature #Conservation in the UK Overseas Territories. Registration: ukotcf.org.uk/ukotcfonlineconf... & the programme is here: ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/upl...
@UKOTCF #Cayman #UKOTCFconf2021

Shayla Ellick @ShaylaEllick
Replying to @doecayman and @UKOTCF
It was such a great lecture, so interesting to note the similarities in challenges and successes here in St Helena and no doubt other UKOTs as well. Thank you!

Conference messages from St Helena. Being rather cut off (too much at times), St Helena remained Covid-free and so meetings remained allowed. So it was probably the only location where part of the conference met physically (larger picture left). Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks (Coordinator; St Helena Research Institute), Martina Peters (Head of Conservation, St Helena National Trust); & Shayla Ellick (LEMP Project Manager, St Helena National Trust) gave their presentation on St Helena's remarkably successful Millenium Forest (pictures at top left). Successful restoration projects tend to take some years, as Shayla's comment illustrates.

Lower left: UKOTCF conferences (logo shown) tend also to pull out cross-territory links which may otherwise not occur - as noted here by St Helena in respect of the inaugural Ground lecture by Gina Ebank-Petrie (below).



Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; and an address, and responses to questions, 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.

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) and the winners of the student poster competition were announced on the final day.

The topics for the main sessions were: 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 (with another shorter session held on the second day focusing on sustainable finance); 8. Plugging the gap: innovative approaches and capacity-building.

The gaps in sessions featured music from territory musicians, which was very popular and highlighted the link between the arts and nature: Mera Royle and Scran from the Isle of Man, Stuart Wilson from Cayman; Dean Sparks from the Turks and Caicos Islands and Dominic Lambert. Some short videos were also included, for example following Sammy, the rat-detector dog on South Georgia and several from UKOTCF by Ann Pienkowski. During the conference, Shakira Christodoulou, from Sark, composed poetry bringing together many of the elements discussed. This was delivered during the closing session.

The final 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 Department of Environment, Gina Ebanks-Petrie.

A fuller summary of the conference, including the full texts of the addresses by Prof. John Cortés, Dace Ground introducing the first Ground Lecturer, and Gina Ebanks-Petrie, plus Shakira's poetry,

has been published in *Forum News 54* (May 2021). The conclusions and recommendations are at https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/UKOTCFconf2021_ConcRec_210311.pdf. Conference proceedings will be published in due course [published 30th June 2021: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/ukotcf-online-conference-2021-download-proceedings/>].

Related to this, Gibraltar's Minister for Health, Environment and Climate, Professor John Cortés, asked UKOTCF to organise a meeting of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council, which he chairs. The conclusions and recommendations from the conference have been presented to the Ministers, and will be incorporated in the agenda at their meeting, in late April [see *Forum News 54* for Statement from that meeting].



Above: The Manx Wildlife Trust became a full member organisation during the year. Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture was already a member, thereby making the only territory with the main official and NGO conservation bodies both being UKOTCF full members. The Isle seems to like breaking records: both bodies were involved in making the Isle of Man the only whole territory to be a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

Right: An example species group sheet in the Championing project

Occasionally, personnel are able to visit some of the UKOTs. This means that they are able to meet with partners and have in depth discussions on environmental matters, needs etc. As noted in last year's report, in March 2020, one such trip was organised to the Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI), which would have been combined with a visit to Montserrat had Covid-19 restrictions not come into action. However, to continue and expand some of the work on Montserrat, especially the successfully trialled 'Adopt a Home for Wildlife' initiative, a funding application to the UK's Darwin Initiative had been submitted in collaboration with the Montserrat National Trust and some other partners.

Some very positive news from Montserrat resulted from fieldwork conducted during UKOTCF-organised visits to Montserrat in 2017, by the Montana State University team. Dr Justin Runyon has now published the findings on a group of flies known to predate on mosquito larvae. *The Dolichopodidae* [long-legged flies] of Montserrat was published in 2020: <https://zookeys.pensoft.net/article/55192/list/7/>. This is an open-access article available to everyone. A summary of the findings: 63 species in 27 genera recorded; 11 species new to science discovered; 6 species have been found only on Montserrat and are endemic, with 3 named for the island: *Medetera montserratensis*, *Chrysotus montserratensis*, and *Sympycnus montserratensis*; Montserrat has more species than predicted on the basis of its size (especially since less than half the island was sampled due to the exclusion zone); three of the six species endemic to Montserrat are restricted to lower elevation/dry forests, indicating importance of conserving some of these habitats; a discussion on the potential negative effect that large numbers of mangos might be having on aquatic insects (e.g. at Fogarty Ghaut). This warrants more study.

The project looking at endemic species in the UKOTs and CDs, being led by Dr Jamie Males, is on-going.

Progress has been made in cataloguing some of the main groups and this information is being used to feed into a related project, led by Council member Lord (John) Randall, arranging for MPs, Members of the House of Lords, and other sports and other high-profile individuals linked to the UKOTs/CDs to *Champion Species* to celebrate UKOT/CD biodiversity. The pandemic had stalled things slightly, but there had been a lot of interest in the species profiles drawn up with consultation with UKOTs (both governmental and NGO). Presentations on both were given at the UKOTCF online conference with a lot of interest generated.

Awareness raising and information management

A significant amount of time was spent throughout the year in preparing the new website using WordPress as the content management system. This replaced the existing platform (and its in-house, non-portable content management system) to reduce dramatically the costs involved in running a website. This was a huge task, but the team is pleased with the results. The new site was launched in July. The cost savings were significant, but the site carries most of the functions that the previous one did. In fact, some improvements and additional functions have been added with a much more flexible structure. Any difficulties so far have been managed in-house. This is partly because of the website's user-friendly interface, which makes it possible to make quick changes/improvements.

Several virtual tours were added during the year celebrating Bermuda and Anguilla. Drafts for several of the remaining tours, Gibraltar, Sark, Tristan da Cunha and Guernsey, are in various stages, with a view to have a complete set in the year, dependent on other demands on the time of the series editor, Ann Pienkowski, Honorary Environmental Education Coordinator.



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:

Henderson and Pitcairn endemic birds UK Overseas Territory: Pitcairn Islands

Henderson Island, in the Pitcairn group, is a World Heritage Site and one of the most natural islands in the Pacific Ocean, being the most unspoilt raised atoll. 5 bird species found nowhere else (endemic) depend on the maintenance of this near-natural state.

There are 4 islands in the Pitcairn group. Oeno, the westernmost, and Ducie, the easternmost (and Easter Island's nearest neighbour), are both low atolls. Pitcairn itself is a peak of geologically recent volcanic origin. Henderson was a low atoll, but the creation of Pitcairn caused flexing of the Earth's crust, causing Henderson to be lifted 33m into a raised atoll, the formerly almost sea-level atoll becoming a raised plateau.

The islands are remote. There are no airports. It takes about 1.5 days in a boat south-east from the nearest French Polynesian island, Mangareva, with its airport, to reach uninhabited Oeno, with Pitcairn a further 0.5 days. Henderson is half a day further east, and Ducie another 1.5 days east from Henderson.



The plateau (raised atoll) at the north end of Henderson Island, above the reef, beach and beach-backing vegetation.
© Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF

Henderson flightless Rail or Crake *Porzana atra*

The Henderson Rail or Crake is one of only seven species of flightless rail surviving on Pacific islands. Population estimates in 1987 and in 1991/92 were 3240 and 6200 individuals respectively, the difference possibly due to methodological reasons, rather than real increase. The species is classified as Vulnerable. While some eggs may be lost to the introduced Pacific Rats *Rattus exulans*, the crakes are very aggressive towards the rats, and have co-existed with them for some 800 years. The crakes are omnivorous, foraging in the leaf-litter, gleaning items such as skink *Emota cyanura* eggs from the undersides of fallen leaves, large nematodes, beetles, moths, spiders, dead caterpillars, land snails and small insects. The breeding season is long, extending from late July to mid February (double broods are not uncommon) and clutch-size is 2-3. Helpers may provide extraparental care such as defending eggs and chicks from crabs and rats.

Photo © Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF

Henderson Reed-warbler *Acrocephalus taiti*

The Henderson Reed-warbler has been the subject of a detailed single-season breeding study which established that about one-third of breeding territories were occupied not by pairs but by trios. Such trios, either two male/one female or one male/two females, were of birds unrelated to each other. Population estimates in 1987 and in 1991/92 were 10,800 and 9,500 individuals, respectively. The species is classified as Vulnerable.

Photo © Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF

Pitcairn Island Reed-warbler *Acrocephalus vaughani*

The only land-bird species breeding on Pitcairn Island itself, and occurring nowhere else, it is classified as Endangered. It is closely related to the Henderson Reed-Warbler. The potential threats include potential alien invasive species introduced by human activity.

Photo © Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF



Forum News 52 and 53 were published and circulated in July and November respectively. The popular version of the annual report was also circulated in July.

The UKOTCF Christmas Card was circulated in December. The idea behind it is always to provide a brief summary of activities throughout the year and looking towards the year ahead.

Social media accounts continue to be a good source and way of sharing information. While there are many different platforms in use, most of our focus is on Twitter and Facebook. By the end of the year, UKOTCF has amassed nearly 2,000 followers on Twitter. An additional advantage of numbers reaching this level is that @UKOTCF is tagged into other content, which contributes towards raising our profile further. In March the Twitter account had over 15,000 impressions, mainly around conference activity.

Influencing policy

The UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) launched a call for evidence on environmental diplomacy with a deadline at the end of May. The full inquiry response is online on the Committee's web-page with all other written submissions.

In early 2020, a submission was made to the Public Accounts Committee inquiry looking at Defra's 25-year strategy. The report has now been published, in February 2021, with little mention of UKOTs.

During the year, personnel met with Richard Benwell, Head of Wildlife & Countryside Link (WCL). Points of discussion included priorities, the Environment Bill, international conferences due in 2021 and linking UKOTs with those.

With the anticipated merger of two UK Ministries, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Department for International Development, the UK Government's 25-year plan and the Environment Bill, a briefing paper relating to these was produced and made available online: www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Briefing-Paper_UKOTs25_yearplanEnvironmentbillMergerFCO-DFID_Sept2020.pdf. Thinking positively, the new department, formed in September, could provide a chance to get more support into the environment in UKOTs. It has not always been UKOTCF's experience that DFID, with notable exceptions, pursued the environment's best interest in some of the UKOTs.

The All Party Parliamentary Group for Nature reconstituted during the year and held a virtual event in July on the *Global Deal for Nature and a Green Recovery* as a response to the pandemic. The online panel discussion, hosted by the chair of the group, Barry Gardiner MP, included: Kate Cole, East Sussex County Council and representing the Association of Local Government Ecologists; Stephanie Wray, Managing Director of RSK Biocensus Ltd and Chair of CIEEM's Strategic Policy Panel; Martin Harper, Global Conservation Director of the RSPB; and UKOTCF's Dr Mike Pienkowski.

Related to this, and something which was discussed in the ETWG, is that JNCC and Defra are investigating the possibility of those UKOTs in Europe, previously covered by EU Habitats and Birds Directives, joining the *Emerald Network*. The intention is that all Special Protection Areas and Areas of Special Conservation Interest in mainland UK would be transferred to the *Emerald Network* of the Bern Convention. EU legislation was based on the earlier Bern Convention, but added enforceability. The Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas and Gibraltar are currently considering this with a view that it might add a level of awareness rather than protection, as the Bern Convention does not add the legal bite that the EU regulations did. However, UK, Gibraltar and SBAA could legislate themselves to restore the potential for themselves to be taken to court to ensure protection if they wanted to – but this seems unlikely.

During the year, there have been several opportunities to contact the UK's Minister for the Environment (and UKOT lead) Lord Goldsmith, including on some urgent conservation matters in the UKOTs (Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease), links with OTEC (outlined below), and involvement in the conference and Ministers' Council. He provided a pre-recorded message to the UKOTCF conference. He has been invited by Professor 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) to take part in the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers' Council meeting taking place in April.

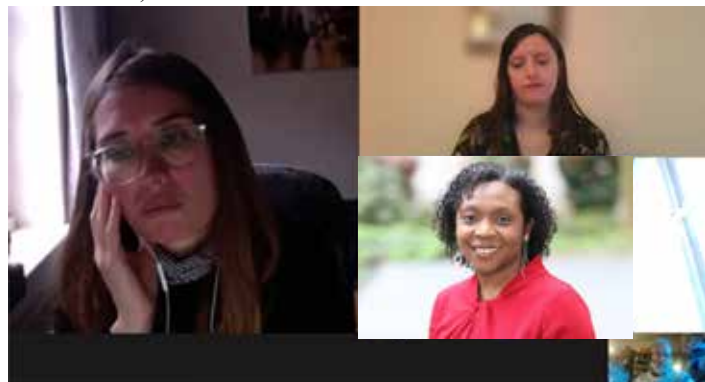
Prof Cortés was successful in leading the discussions on the environment at the Joint Ministerial Council, with a briefing from UKOTCF. Via the JMC, FCDO was proposing sign-up to the Leadership Pledge. This has now been signed by over 80 leaders, including some of the UKOTs and CDs. Professor Cortés has been selected as the representative of the UKOTs in a meeting ahead of the COP26 which the UK and Italy will be hosting in Glasgow in November 2021.

There had been some changes to the dedicated funding for UKOTs within the Darwin Initiative during the year. As a result, personnel had been invited to a meeting, convened by UKOTA, regarding the difficulties arising from the ODA-eligible UKOTs being moved to Darwin Main funding, rather than Darwin Plus. Some thoughts on the decision-making process as well as some feedback on the application process itself were provided. There had been no prior consultation on the changes and so, following the meeting, which included representatives from St Helena Government, Tristan da Cunha Government, Montserrat Government, CABI, RSPB, UKOTCF and MNT a letter was sent by UKOTA to Defra requesting a meeting.

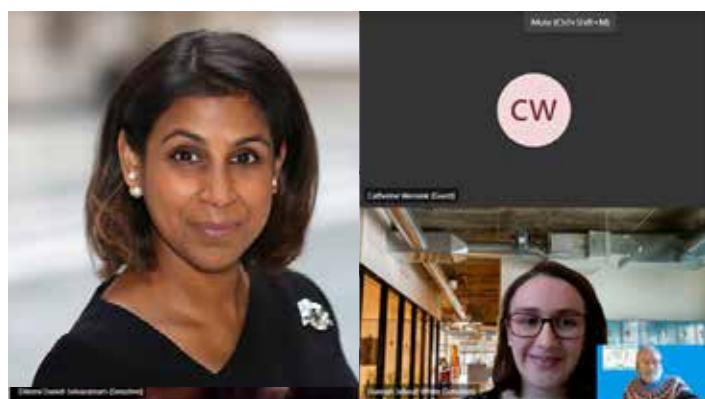
Relations with UK Government and Government Agencies

Meetings were held with the new Governors for Bermuda and Anguilla. The former, Rena Lalgie, comes from HM Treasury as Director of Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation and, before that, a string of appointments in the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills. The latter, Dileeni Daniel-Selvaratnam, a lawyer comes from the Cabinet Office and had held several senior legal and administrative roles within UK Government, including most recently the Director of the Grenfell Tower Public Inquiry. The purpose of these briefings is to provide information on the importance of biodiversity and UK's international responsibility towards them, including some background on the Environment Charters. Some key contacts are also provided relating to those environmental bodies most active in the territories.

JNCC continued to invite the Forum to provide information on various reports being prepared on behalf of UK Government to International Conventions. In March, this included input into the draft report to the Ramsar COP. It was pleasing that so much material from NGOs in support of UKOT&CD Governments was included (some from partners via UKOTCF).



UKOTCF officers meet incoming Bermuda Governor H.E. Rena Lalgie (lower image, above, with FCDO colleague in higher image), and incoming Anguilla Governor H.E. Dileeni Daniel-Selvaratnam (left image, below, with FCDO colleague on right). Screen-grab images for Governors have been replaced by official images at FCDO request.



Working for partners and responding to requests

Requests are often received from those undertaking research in the UKOTs & CDs. We try to meet these requests when we can, as exemplified here. During the year, some information was provided to a PhD candidate from the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens, particularly in making some contacts in the Caribbean. The study is investigating the phylogenetics and evolutionary history of the cacti genus *Pilosocereus* in the Caribbean and Andean regions and ultimately assess the conservation status of taxa in most need of protection.

Several links were facilitated, including: some military personnel looking for volunteer opportunities in Cyprus SBAs: beach cleaning groups wishing to be in touch with local authorities on Cyprus SBAs; and Centre for Environment and Hydrology (CEH), and UKOTCF associate organisation, Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) with regards to a project on invasive species in British Indian Ocean Territory.

Circulations on funding opportunities (as well as information informing new areas of potential funding, such as the Environment Funders Network) and relevant UK Parliamentary inquiries were sent. Some examples include: the call for proposals launched by the European Union BEST 2.0 Programme (called BEST 2.0+), the last for which UKOTs will be eligible because of Brexit; and PADI \$12k grant for research and educational projects focused on understanding and protecting aquatic environments. In addition, changes to the Mohamed Bin Zayed funding criteria for 2020, with the next two rounds of funding focussing on core grants of up to \$25,000 to fund staff and salaries during the pandemic, were advised to several UKOT partners, some of which are exploring this.

Personnel met online with new CEO of the Manx Wildlife Trust, Leigh Morris. He previously spent some years on St Helena where he had several contracts (working on waste-management) and working with local NGOs, such as St Helena National Trust (and also Blue Marine Foundation).

Links with World Heritage UK were made and images of Henderson Island were supplied for their website so that UKOTs are not under-represented amongst the UK's 31 World Heritage Sites.

Some information had been supplied to a journalist from the *Telegraph* newspaper on invasive species.

Details were shared via various channels of a survey from a researcher at Oxford University, on the effectiveness of island ecosystem management, aiming to identify common barriers and solutions, and to compile a list of training needs (which they plan to act on).

Our networks

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

The Inter-Island Environment Meeting (IEM), hosted by Guernsey took place via remote communications this year. It was held over two days on 17th & 18th September with over 80 attending the presentations (including UKOTCF personnel), and around 50-60 attendees in the afternoon workshops. Presentations are available here: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9h4_ysO6nm3HP6Xw9gYodw

An invitation to take part in a Roundtable event at the end of November was received. This was organised by On the EDGE Conservation (OTEC). They are a charitable philanthropic foundation "dedicated to championing the often-overlooked Evolutionarily Distinct and Globally Endangered [EDGE] species through supporting innovative conservation, science and storytelling." The aim of the Roundtable was to bring together philanthropic organisations, non-governmental organisations and charities to facilitate a policy discussion about the steps required to achieve a stronger commitment from the UK Government to protect our evolutionary heritage in the run up to COP15.

Organisations participating included: Fauna & Flora International, Shark Trust (interested in UKOTs as work with Falkland Conservation), Synchronicity Earth, Zoological Society of London, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, UNEP-WCMC, People's Trust for Endangered Species, IUCN SSC Post-2020 Taskforce, National Geographic Society, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, The Oak Foundation and the International

Conservation Foundation-UK. While most of these are well-known, the ICCF-UK supports the UK Parliament's All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on International Conservation. The APPG on International Conservation was launched in 2019, providing "a forum to address wildlife conservation and biodiversity issues affecting our planet, including but not limited to ecosystem collapse, species extinction, land degradation, invasive species, illegal fishing, and other threats to international conservation."

Some follow up had been done with several organisations including Peoples Trust for Endangered Animals, who have funded UKOT work previously (in TCI) and they provided some funding for the conference as a sponsor.

The Round Table was followed up by a high-level panel event which took place on the 8th December, with experts and senior political figures to discuss biodiversity and prioritising conservation efforts in the run-up to the Convention on Biological Diversity's COP15. An introduction was provided by David Lammy MP. Other speakers included Al Gore, 45th Vice President of the United States, The Rt Hon Lord Zac Goldsmith, Minister for Pacific and the Environment, Professor Jonathan Baillie, former Chief Scientist at the National Geographic Society, and Dr Nisha Owen, Director of Conservation at OTEC and Chair of the IUCN SSC Phylogenetic Diversity Task Force.

This was followed by the Roundtable participants with a letter to Lord Goldsmith, which UKOTCF had provided comments on mentions of UKOTs and CD. The final letter had been shared on social media.

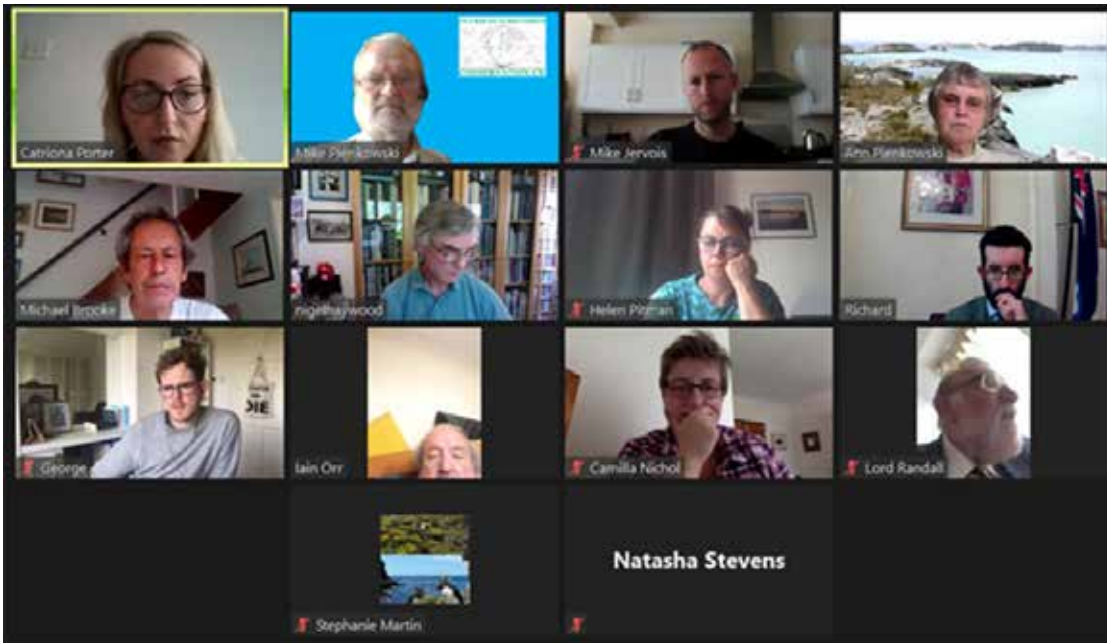
Co-ordinating with Others

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Overseas Territories Special Interest Group (OTSIG) and Marine Conservation Society, together with marine practitioners from the UKOTs, organised a webinar about marine management issues in the Caribbean in a post Covid-19 world. This took place in June. UKOTCF helped publicise the event.

UKOTCF continues to liaise with Jersey International Centre of Advanced Studies (JICAS). This year, several applications were received from UKOT candidates although, because of travel restrictions, they were unable to take up their places. Bursaries have been made available for students to undertake research projects as part of their MSc courses in several UKOTs. Two students visited Anguilla in the summer undertaking research, one in the marine environment and one on iguanas. In addition, with information and contacts provided by UKOTCF, a summer course on island archaeology, featuring the Turks and Caicos National Museum, has been organised.

Economics For The Environment Consultancy Ltd (eftec) is leading a Darwin-Plus-funded programme of natural capital accounting across the Caribbean UKOTs. This involves primarily collecting and collating environmental economic data for use in government decision-making. One of the phases of work is to develop a natural capital accounting practitioner's network (mostly working with the local government environment and statistics departments), which will also include the hiring of a local coordinator to facilitate the network. After meeting with eftec, personnel understood that the plan seems to involve quite a lot of capacity-building and scope for longer-term embedded accounting of the natural environment. One way to collaborate was to invite them to present at the UKOTCF conference, which was done.

An introductory meeting was held with the [Small Islands Organisation \(SMILO\)](#), a small NGO based in Marseille. In summary, they support small islands of less than 150 km² towards the sustainable management of their territory and resources, in relation to water and sanitation, waste, energy, biodiversity, landscapes and heritage issues. They have developed the Sustainable Island label, which rewards the positive local dynamics and sustainable practices. They further coordinate an international network, with members from Europe and the Mediterranean, West Africa, the Indian Ocean, and Southeast Asia. They encouraged UKOTCF to supply information for their mapping of island networks and organisations that have a major environmental focus on islands, or that focus on islands' heritage preservation. They work with various partners, including the [Conservatoire du Littoral](#), the [Global Island Partnership \(GLISPA\)](#), [Green Cross France et Territoires](#), [Island Conservation](#), [Local 2030 Islands Network](#) and the [PIM Initiative](#).



UKOTCF Southern Oceans Working Group meeting organised by volunteer and SOWG Secretary Catriona Porter (top left)

Several personnel attended some of the sessions of the large conference organised by Island Innovation. An article had been included in *Forum News*, outlining relevant sessions to UKOTs & CDs.

The new CEO of Plantlife, Ian Dunn (formerly of British Antarctic Survey), and Head of Conservation, Nicola Hutchinson, discussed opportunities for Plantlife to be more involved in UKOT & CD conservation. Plantlife had been an active member of UKOTCF up to about 20 years previously, and were now interested in picking up the work on Tropical Important Plant Areas, as they do coordinate with RBGK elsewhere. They are following up with UKOTs, including Turks and Caicos Islands.

Organisational development

There were a few changes throughout the year, Dr Nicola Weber now has a permanent lectureship at Exeter University, as well as a large grant to develop a marine turtle species-plan for Montserrat; the latter was a result, in part, of some of the facilitation work done by UKOTCF and her helping with that. Fortunately Nicola continues involvement with UKOTCF as part of its network, providing some valuable continuity.

In order to continue some core activities, as well as some new ones, two new volunteers have been welcomed to the team. Catriona Porter holds an MSc in Animal Behaviour and Welfare from Queen's University Belfast. Her research interests are focused on the impacts of sensory stimuli on behaviour, and the potential to utilise currently under-researched sensory modalities to improve welfare. Her Master's research examined the impacts of olfactory stimulation upon the activity budget and enclosure usage in zoo-housed Asian elephants. Catriona has a range of husbandry experience with both domestic and exotic animals, from cats and horses to chimpanzees and giraffes. She is passionate about science communication, and has been involved with several wildlife organisations, including RSPB and Ulster Wildlife. Amongst other contributions, she has taken on the role of Secretary to the Southern Oceans Working Group (image above). She has produced three SOWG newsletters and has written several articles, including summarising key topics, as well as organising the SOWG meetings and greatly increasing participation. She would like to continue assisting UKOTCF into 2021, partly because her travel plans are somewhat in the air, but because she is finding it rewarding in skills, experience and the friendly people. She helped greatly in the conference preparations.

Paul Cawsey graduated with a BSc (Hons) in Agricultural and Environmental Science from the University of Newcastle upon Tyne and an MSc in Conservation and Land Management from Bangor University. His career to date has seen him working for a number of companies and organisations involved in conservation and land management, from ecological surveying through to a stint as head of department / lecturer at two land-based colleges and even travelling globally to present courses on renewable energy. He is bravely stepping into a new research area to



help contact the UKOT diaspora to investigate its potential for supporting our new project on championing. He also expects to use his entomological expertise to support Jamie Males in the endemics project.

Dr Jamie Males (above) continues to be our Voluntary Conservation Officer leading the review of endemic species. Recent discussions are focused on the next steps in this project, which will be to publish some of the material in various ways

(e.g. summary tables, initial analysis, raw data etc.) while continuing to work on collating other taxa. He has played a key part in conference organising, particularly with session-running and sponsorship. He has also continued to provide assistance to the WCWG, which is much appreciated.

Katie Shaw left us as she is due to complete her MSc soon as well as undertaking other voluntary work.

Boyd McLeary stepped down after another term on Council, which expressed UKOTCF's thanks for his efforts over the years, ranging from very full and stimulating contributions in Council's discussions, his particular links with BVI, following his Governorship there, and links to business connections, to his time as Chairman of the Wider Caribbean Working Group and then taking the lead in our involvement in climate-change and renewable energy issues.

Several funding decisions were delayed during the year by Covid-19, including one from the Royal Bank of Canada, but this was to be expected given the impact the pandemic was having.

A welcome core grant was received from the Garfield Weston Foundation in December.

The Manx Wildlife Trust joined as member organisation. They are part of the Wildlife Trust movement and the leading nature conservation charity in the Isle of Man. They aim to protect the Island's wildlife and help people feel more connected to nature. They have already been very involved with UKOTCF joining the Europe Territories Working Group and with significant input into the UKOTCF online conference.

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: Catherine Wensink, Dr Jamie Males, Catriona Porter, Paul Cawsey, Dr Nicola Weber and Katie Shaw. 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 to 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 the Garfield Weston Foundation, Mr Peter Flockhart, and anonymous donors. During the conference, the Forum had so much support and is most grateful to all the speakers, poster-presenters, topic-team members, chair-persons, question-masters, rapporteurs, organising team, musicians, poet, 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, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; 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; and anonymous donors.

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum: Summary Statement of Financial Activities (including Income and Expenditure Account) for the year ended 31 March 2021

	2021 Unrestricted Funds	2021 Restricted Funds	2021 Total Funds	2020 Total Funds
Incoming Resources				
Voluntary Income	201,134	101,012	302,146	244,847
Investment Income	45	-	45	100
Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities				
Project Income				
Total Incoming Resources	201,179	101,012	302,191	244,947
Resources Expended				
Charitable Activities	167,982	98,135	266,117	237,808
Governance Costs and Other Resources Expended	6,761	-	6,761	7,204
Total Resources Expended	174,743	77,528	272,878	288,608
Net incoming/outgoing resources	26,436	2,877	29,313	(65)
Balance brought forward at 1st April 2020	56,920	(230)	56,690	56,755
Balance carried forward at 31st March 2021	83,356	2647	86,003	56,690

Note: Incoming and outgoing resources include donated time and expenses of £258,678 (2020: £191,760).

Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

Just before the end of the reporting year 2019-2020, UK and all the Caribbean UKOTs went into lockdown due to the Covid-19 outbreak. At that time, we never thought that we would be writing this Annual Report in another Covid lockdown. There is hope; we have several effective vaccines, medical knowledge has grown and care is better. But people throughout the world are still being infected, becoming very ill, with too many people still dying. Restricted working from home has continued, but tourist-generated income is still at very low levels, with protected areas and historic sites closed. The loss of tourism-income for a whole year due to the lockdown is very significant. Many colleagues have been furloughed or had their work time reduced. There will undoubtedly be long-term effects of loss of income and great constraints for ongoing and future conservation project work. However, despite this extremely challenging situation, people have been very inventive in finding new ways of working, and conservation work has continued. Of particular value has been the wider understanding of the importance of the natural environment and protected areas, and the increase in in-country tourism.

The online UKOTCF-organised conference “*Staying Connected for Conservation in a Changed World*” was a great success, as has been reported in another section of this *Annual Report*.

Wider Caribbean Working Group met via Zoom in May, June, September and November 2020, and January 2021. The move from Skype was prompted by the increasing difficulty and unreliability of that system. Zoom has been of great benefit in making it easier for people to take part and manage the meetings.

Topics of discussion at WCWG meetings included inevitably the difficulties and challenges of continuing conservation work due to the restrictions caused by the Covid pandemic, and the human cost of that in terms of illness and bereavement. With the economies of the wider Caribbean also being heavily dependent on tourism, income from tourists suddenly stopped, leading to huge financial challenges for governments and NGOs, still an ongoing situation. A concern raised by several WCWG members was that governments would be tempted to address their economic situation by allowing and encouraging inappropriate built development which would generate short-term funds – but have much longer lasting negative effect on the environment and the economy.

Other areas of discussion were the rapid destruction of the coral-reefs by Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD). A special edition of *WCWG*

eBulletin, published in October 2020, reviewed the nature of the disease and treatments. The coral reefs are vitally important for biodiversity,

OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION.UK

UKOTCF
Wider Caribbean Working Group
(WCWG) eBulletin

September 2020 Number 27

In This Bulletin
Sargassum Special Issue

Background

Options for Action

- Doing nothing
- Removal from shore
- Removal from inshore waters
- Deflection barrier
- Air bubble curtains

What to do with removed sargassum

- Landfill/dumping
- Composting
- Use as a material
- Energy Production

Sustainability?

Sources of Information

Sargassum Influx - Is there a sustainable solution?

The large quantity of sargassum coming ashore in the Caribbean has been cause of concern for several years. UKOTCF, and especially WCWG, have received numerous communications about this. As secretary of WCWG, I have reported this problem and some of the various solutions which have been proposed, and tried. But I knew very little about sargassum, and as a trained scientist (albeit nearly 40 years ago since I last worked full-time professionally as a scientist) I thought I should learn more. So when I was made aware of the 2 webinars on Sargassum issues and solutions 2020 in July 2020, I signed up.

The webinars were organised by SOP (Stop Ocean Pollution) Technologies and focused on South Florida, but it was noted that this is a regional issue which is here to stay, and experts from around the world need to share knowledge and research – learn from each other and apply what is best.

Here are the links to the webinars:

<https://nopotechint.com/blog/2020/07/17/sargassum-issues-and-solutions-webinar-2020-07-17>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=84m9ccs0tM>

Webinar contributors are listed at the end.

This review tries to summarise the key things which I learned from these and some follow up, and which I thought might be of interest to others. The webinars contain references to the information for those who wish to find out more. Any errors in summarising this information are my own. Illustrations are from the webinars, unless otherwise stated.

Contact: WCWG Secretary
Ann Pienkowski
apienkowski@ukotcf.org

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Special issue of *WCWG eBulletin* on Sargassum

the economies and livelihoods of local people, and entire countries in the Caribbean reliant on tourism. Once tourism starts to resume, once the covid pandemic is under control, then healthy reefs will be very important in encouraging tourists to return to a destination. WCWG and UKOTCF facilitated exchange of views and effective actions across a wide range of stakeholders, including at Ministerial level.

Another cross-territory concern discussed was the problem of extreme *Sargassum* inundations. In September 2020, another special edition of *WCWG eBulletin* posed the question “*Sargassum* Influx – Is there a sustainable solution?” This followed WCWG secretary, Ann Pienkowski, taking part in two webinars, “*Sargassum* issues and solutions 2020”, organised by SOP (Stop Ocean Pollution) Technologies. These webinars focussed on South Florida, but it was noted that this is a regional issue which is here to stay, and experts from around the world need to share knowledge and research – learn from each other and apply what is best. The tourism industry had already been adversely affected by *Sargassum* inundations on tourist beaches before Covid restrictions and SCTL D impacts. Unfortunately, a sustainable solution to the *Sargassum* situation still seems far away, even if possible.

Projects in territories which required personnel from overseas have had to be delayed or amended, due to Covid restrictions on travel. Some developments and actions in individual WCWG UKOTs are described below. As ever, more information can be found online at www.ukotcf.org.uk

Anguilla

Dr Mike Pienkowski and Mrs Catherine Wensink (UKOTCF Chairman and Executive Director respectively) met online with the new Governor-Designate, Dileeni Daniel-Selvaratnam (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-governor-of-anguilla>) in early January 2021, before her departure from UK.

The Virtual Tour of Anguilla was completed, and made live in January 2021 (example view on previous page) . It can be viewed at http://www.ukotcf.org/1_vTours/tour.cfm?locn=ANG&tourType=FULL.

The Anguilla National Trust has been able to continue biosecurity and biodiversity monitoring on the Prickly Pears Cays and Dog Island. The population of the lesser Antillean iguana *Iguana delicatissima* appears to be growing, and Dog Island is still rat free. Wetland restoration has included planting many mangrove seedlings.

Bermuda

The Virtual Tour of Bermuda was completed and made live in May 2020. It can be viewed at http://www.ukotcf.org/1_vTours/tour.cfm?locn=BMD&tourType=FULL.

Several major hurricanes have caused significant disruption this year. Various restoration projects have been able to continue. Eve’s Pond has been stocked with the endemic Bermuda killifish and most planting has been completed. The Audubon Society is restoring the nature reserve at Long Bay.

Dr Mike Pienkowski and Mrs Catherine Wensink (UKOTCF Chairman and Executive Director respectively) were able to meet remotely with the new Governor of Bermuda, Rena Lalgie, in December 2020, before she took up post.

British Virgin Islands

Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease was found in BVI. Government, NPTVI and the Association of Reef Keepers, working with colleagues in the US Virgin Islands, and with input from Turks & Caicos Reef Fund, began amoxicillin treatment. The Governor’s Office provided funding

to support local dive-operators to undertake SCTL D monitoring and treatment.

A revised printed version of the *BVI Environmental Atlas*, with some extra funding from the BVI Governor’s Office, has been produced. There are new sections on Climate Change and Renewable Energy. This project was initiated some years ago, with funding from the Overseas Territories Environment Programme, but the envisaged interactive DVD had not been able to progress past the beta stage. At a time of lockdown home-schooling, the completion of the *Environmental Atlas* was very welcome. Resources for digital learning were in demand.

NPTVI was able to undertake monitoring on Anegada, thanks to a grant from Mohamed bin Zayed Species Conservation Fund.

An example page from UKOTCF’s Virtual Tour of Bermuda.

Cayman Islands

Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease was found in the Cayman Islands. The Cayman Department of Environment acted swiftly to close dive-sites in the affected areas, and create “firebreaks” to try to stop the spread of the disease. Unfortunately, these firebreaks proved ineffective.

Control of green iguanas continues. A blue iguana species action plan workshop took place in January 2021. The survival of young blue iguanas in the wild continues to be low due to the impact of feral cats. There are concerns about the populations of endemic rock iguanas on the Sister Isles. A major impact on Little Cayman is due to road-kill, despite extensive measures being taken to educate drivers on this impact.

The proposed cruise-berthing and cargo facility development in George Town was abandoned by government after a court battle with grassroots group Cruise Port Referendum Cayman and the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, during which all cruise travel to Cayman was halted.

Two new plants of *Aegiphila caymanensis* have been discovered. This endemic species from the mint family was thought to be extinct when the only known specimen was bulldozed in 2015. RBG Kew have confirmed that it is an endemic. The public online consultation for the National Conservation Council draft species conservation plan ended in January 2021.

Montserrat

Recently published was an analysis of insect material collected by Montana State University’s Dr Justin Runyon, as part of the UKOTCF-led 2016-18 project (partly Darwin-supported), on multiple aspects of Montserrat. He discovered 11 species new to science, six endemic, and three given the species name *montserratensis*. This is a high number of endemics, especially considering that half the island was not sampled due to the volcanic exclusion zone. A high proportion of the endemic/restricted-distribution species occur only in lowland dry forest/stream gullies – the sort of habitat that is covered by UKOTCF’s/MNT’s *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project. UKOTCF, MNT and partners have applied for Darwin Main funding for this project for the first time, as Montserrat is now no longer eligible for Darwin Plus. Outcome of a stage 2 application is awaited.

Turks & Caicos Islands

The Turks and Caicos Reef Fund was able to resume its treatment of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease and monitor the treatment and control sites. The efficacy of treatment with amoxicillin in a special base has been demonstrated. TCRF have



An illustration from the paper: new species *Medetera montserratensis*. Scale bar: 1.0 mm

provided remote training on the SCTLTD issue through videos and webinars.

The Department of Environment and Coastal Resources has been taking action to control green iguanas on Providenciales.

The Caicos Pine Recovery Project reported successful germination and survival of Caicos pine seedlings in the wild, after habitat restoration including controlled burning and attention to mycorrhizal fungi.



Left: In 2005, it was this stop where researchers led by UKOTCF and including Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew with Turks and

Caicos National Trust conservation staff first discovered the invasion of what turned out to be the pine tortoise scale insect.

Right: After 15 years of the restoration project, Caicos pines have begun recovering well in Middle Caicos, with (bottom right) the first Caicos pine seedling observed in the wild since 2010 was able to get through its first critical year from this initial sprouting stage.



Report of the UKOTCF Southern Oceans Working Group

Southern Oceans Working Group (SOWG) held three online meetings between April 2020 and March 2021, using Zoom: in July 2020, October 2020 and February 2021. In addition, three *e-Newsletters* were circulated between these meetings in July 2020, September 2020 and January 2021, with the last issue of the reporting year (Issue 16) being a special edition on invasive species. It focused exclusively on some of the threats posed by, and efforts to combat, invasive species throughout the Southern Ocean territories, and featured guest articles and summaries from a range of UKOTCF SOWG members.

The online meetings were interspersed also with email updates of various

interesting news items, and circulations of meeting minutes. Thank you to everyone who participated in the meetings, or provided updates if unable to attend; thank you also to everyone who provided interesting and useful information for circulation amongst group members. If you would like to contribute to SOWG, please visit: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/contact-details/>.

There has been very good participation in the group; online meetings have been met with a good level of attendance, with representatives joining from several NGOs such as the South Atlantic Environment Research Institute (SAERI), South Georgia Heritage Trust (SGHT) and

UK Antarctic Heritage Trust (UKAHT), as well as regular contributions from Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT), Great British Ocean Coalition (GBO) and Saint Helena National Trust (SHNT). Local government departments were also routinely involved in SOWG meetings, with contributions from the Falkland Islands Government (FIG), Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) and Tristan da Cunha Government. We have welcomed also 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.

The effects of Covid-19 and the associated lockdowns were felt by many of our members. The tourism industry was greatly impacted, with negative consequences to many NGOs which rely on this sector for a substantial proportion of their income. National parks, museums and the like were shut, and international travel was restricted. Covid-19 has projected a range of issues and impacts on to the territories, not least financially – but also great logistical constraints for conservation project work. Difficulties have been highlighted in individual territory updates provided in SOWG meetings and, when looking at cross-territory work, the impact was shown to be quite considerable. The meetings provided a useful platform to discuss shared experiences and knowledge, as well motivation through connectivity.

2020's FCO/DFID merger was another key cross-territory topic, specifically its consequential move of ODA-eligible territories out of Darwin Plus, and to Darwin Main. Some concern was expressed amongst SOWG members from different territories at this decision; they thought the full implications of such a move were not properly taken into account. In particular, the additional requirement for poverty-reduction targets meant that, for the first time in 20 years, UK Government had removed its biodiversity grant fund for certain UKOTs (some of the poorest but most biodiversity-rich). Some territories were considered by members as being left behind, and receiving a poor deal – especially those less developed which, some argued, should be supported more. Some felt that the move removed a vital stream of funding for smaller conservation organisations, and some uncertainty was expressed about the impacts this decision would have going forward.

Below is a summary of information for each SOWG territory; further information can be found on the UKOTCF website (www.ukotcf.org.uk), and browse e-Newsletters (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/sowg-newsletter-1/>) to read in more detail.

Ascension Island

Ascension Island Government (AIG) implemented new biosecurity legislation in 2020, requiring imported goods to undergo further inspections. The new biosecurity strategy also identified several species considered to be high risk to the island and its surrounding marine ecosystem: namely brown rats, mosquitoes, fire-ants and lionfish. Lionfish have been devastating coral reefs throughout the Caribbean, with huge efforts to control them and with limited success. Through July's SOWG meeting, this was then raised at UKOTCF Council to consider any other steps desirable to facilitate exchange between Caribbean and Ascension researchers on this potential shared invasive species issue.



A major activity at Ascension during the year has been the establishment of a large marine protected area covering the entire Exclusive Economic Zone. This was described in one of the talks at UKOTCF's online conference in March.

Activity is at last underway to resurface the airport runway, the unavailability of which has caused major setbacks to many aspects on Ascension, including conservation, for several years.

Common Lionfish Pterois volitans. Photo: Michael Gäbler, Wikipedia Commons

British Antarctic Territory

Antarctica was the last continent on Earth to be touched by Covid-19: in late December 2020 the first cases were reported. For science programmes, 2020 saw more of a 'caretaker' season; British Antarctic Survey (BAS) focussed mostly on servicing existing science, rather than introducing new projects or big programmes. Quarantine protocols were, and continue to be, in place to keep the virus out of research stations, and overall science was much more limited in BAT. The Thwaites glacier project was halted for

SOWG e-Newsletter Issue 16

the season, and Halley research station remained closed. The pandemic had a detrimental effect on BAT survey work, but BAS did the best that they could, given the limitations imposed by Covid-19 – the *RRS James Clark Ross* visited various stations to transport people, and BAS also utilised the expedition cruise ship *Island Sky* for transportation to the Falklands.

Due to the physical restrictions imposed by the pandemic, a trend of increased digitalisation occurred in 2020 to maintain interest, awareness and dialogue around various conservation issues. Like many places, tourism in Antarctica suffered greatly due to the pandemic. Many companies cancelled their entire Antarctic season, and this impacted organisations, like UKOTCF associate and SOWG member UK Antarctic Heritage Trust (UKAHT), whose income mainly stems from the tourist season and visitors to Port Lockroy. Although they had contingencies in place, lack of cruise-travel made things difficult for the charity. A cancelled field-season saw instead a pivot towards analysing data and developing 3-D models for managed historical sites, using laser scanning. We heard from the Chief Executive of UKAHT in October's SOWG meeting, who provided details of current projects and Covid-19 impacts. She provided insight to UKAHT's work with the British Science Association to digitize much of their cancelled physical plans and produce online podcasts, films etc. In September 2020, UKAHT released a podcast series about Antarctica including conversations with leading scientists, conservations, explorers and artists: <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/a-voyage-to-antarctica/id1528585224#episodeGuid=5f4961c74f15433d7800ec9d>.

British Indian Ocean Territory

The Director of the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) provided updates in all three SOWG meetings regarding their *Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs* programme, which began in 2019. The programme is an archipelago-wide (30 islands) rewilding of the degraded islands, to remove invasive species – notably rats. The feasibility study and environmental impact assessment have been completed and peer-reviewed by the Island Invasive Action Group in



Chagos Archipelago coral reef
Photo: Anne Sheppard / Chagos Conservatio

New Zealand, and subsequently forwarded to the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) Administration for consideration. Plans to undertake an expedition in 2022 were highlighted – they intend to gather information such as how much bait coconut-crabs steal, how to bait rats in mangroves etc. She noted that it was currently unknown if rats and/or mice were present on some islands, and plans to investigate these would take place as well.

In March 2021, the Global Reef Expedition Final Report was released. This was a 5-year project to assess the state of coral-reefs around the world, by the Khaled bin Sultan Living Oceans Foundation, and is one of the largest coral-reef studies in history. In 2015, the Global Reef Expedition visited the Chagos Archipelago to conduct research issued under a permit from the BIOT Administration. Researchers spent two months at sea and conducted thousands of surveys of benthic and reef fish at over one hundred locations across the archipelago. The report found that the reefs of the Chagos Archipelago were some of the most diverse and had some of the highest coral cover and fish biomass seen on the Global Reef Expedition. Read the Chagos Archipelago. Final Report here: <https://www.livingoceansfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Chagos-Archipelago-Final-Report.pdf>.

The Bertarelli Programme of Marine Science had mostly been put on hold due to Covid-19. Nothing happened from March 2020, due to pandemic evacuations. Various expeditions and plans were rescheduled, but inevitably cancelled.

Falkland Islands

Bottom-set longline fishing for Patagonian Toothfish *Dissostichus eleginoides* has been a conservation issue in the Falklands. During this reporting year, this received more attention: a paper published in the journal *ICES Journal of Marine Science* in July 2020 found that unregulated longline fishing immediately adjacent to the Falkland Islands Outer Conservation Zone (FOCZ) could be undermining fisheries management and marine conservation efforts. It found that this fishing could be having significant impacts on vulnerable marine ecosystems (VMEs). These impacts are much greater than the licensed fisheries within Falkland waters; the study predicted VME taxa distributions, and compared these to fishing footprints of licenced fleets and areas beyond national jurisdiction (ABNJ). The results found the ABNJ footprint was almost twice as high as in licenced waters. In SOWG's 2021 February meeting, a SAERI representative announced plans for the Falkland Island's Fisheries Department and the Consolidated Fisheries Ltd. to conduct research, in collaboration with SAERI, into the impact of Patagonian toothfish-longlining on vulnerable marine ecosystems. Research paper: [Straddling the line: high potential impact on vulnerable marine ecosystems by bottom-set longline fishing in unregulated areas beyond national jurisdiction | ICES Journal of Marine Science | Oxford Academic \(oup.com\)](https://academic.oup.com/icesjms/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/icesjms/fsaa088/5811111)

The Falkland Islands Government (FIG) published the *State of the Environment* report in September 2020. The report provides a summary of the overall state of the Falkland Islands natural environment towards



Patagonian Toothfish Dissostichus eleginoides
Photo: SAERI Website

the end of 2019 and uses the UN Sustainable Development Goals as measuring guidelines. Download here: <https://www.fig.gov.fk/policy/downloads/environmental-reports/category/11-environment-reports-and-guidance>.

The Falklands utilise a biosecurity detector-dog programme, in partnership with South Georgia, as a preventative measure. The detector-dog programme has been funded for a further 3 years via an Environmental Studies grant in order to conduct cargo checks concerning outer islands, as well as on island rodent checks — including annual checks of Kidney and Cochon, as their proximity to Stanley and frequent visitation make them high-risk islands. Throughout 2020, several Falkland Islands were checked for rodents, and 2020 plans to investigate Bleaker Island were postponed to 2021.

Pitcairn

In June 2020, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS) shared a bulletin containing annual updates on the *Blue Belt Programme*. Over the past year, the Programme supported the Government of the Pitcairn Islands, helping to develop a management plan for their Marine Protected Area (MPA) which will ensure effective management for the next five years. The bulletin highlighted an expedition to Pitcairn Island in January 2020, where the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), together with the *Blue Belt Programme*, completed a survey using drop-down cameras. The survey compiled 4,000 still images and over 10 hours of seabed footage which was used to establish baseline data to assess changing coral conditions around the island: *Blue Belt Programme* bulletin: [Blue Belt Programme Annual Update Brochure 2019 2020 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/921414/Blue-Belt-Programme-Annual-Update-Brochure-2019-2020.pdf).

St Helena

Numerous natural heritage programmes took place, both marine and terrestrial: such as the annual census of the endemic wirebird plover *Charadrius sanctaehelena* to inform RSPB work; whale shark research; and a habitat restoration project (The Millennium Forest) which celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2020. Two Darwin projects remain the biggest news for St Helena during this reporting year: Conserving St Helena's endemic invertebrates through invasive invertebrate control (led by Saint



St Helena Plover Charadrius sanctaehelena
Photo: SHNT Website

Helena National Trust), and Community-supported multispecies invasive vertebrate control on St Helena (also led by Saint Helena National Trust). By the time of the second SOWG meeting in October 2020, the invertebrate project had started, and the Director of Saint Helena National Trust (SHNT), alongside the project manager, provided updates, both here and in the subsequent SOWG meeting. They had begun writing methodologies and monitoring plans, and had also begun conducting fieldwork regarding population surveys.

SHNT's invertebrate team had been very active towards the end of 2020, and are set to be involved in the first comprehensive invertebrate survey Ascension Island has had in quite some time. This will seek to widely survey Ascension's invertebrates and determine what is endemic and what is not: SHNT are hoping to contribute some survey techniques species identification skills.

St Helena's cloud forest originally covered all high altitude areas on the island above 600m; today this has been reduced to 16ha, mainly made up of 120 core fragments above 170m on the highest peaks and steepest slopes all within the Peaks National Park. At least 250 unique plant and animal species are found entirely or almost entirely within the Peaks National Park. The Peaks is a popular attraction for locals and tourists, and provides an excellent educational resource, as well as the source of most of the freshwater on St Helena, largely through mist capture. A highly collaborative approach was adopted and, through active engagement with stakeholders and the establishment of a Peaks Project Development Group, a Peaks Management Plan and Implementation Plan was produced. The Implementation Plan comprises the three pillars: Biodiversity, Water Security and Socio-economics covering the key areas for delivery along with an over-arching Management pillar. The Implementation Plan which covers a 5-year period has been costed, and funding for its delivery is being sought.

As with other territories, Covid impacted St Helena. Though the territory has had no Covid-19 cases, it has experienced other inconveniences, e.g. the scheduled flight that normally goes from St Helena to South Africa has stopped, so getting to and from St Helena was difficult.

Blue Belt funding enabled a new purpose-built marine laboratory on St Helena, complete with office space for staff and scientists and a marine visitor centre. It is estimated to be operational by April 2021, and is an exciting new development for marine research on St Helena.

St Helena have drafted new marine tourism regulations to be enacted at the end of March 2021.

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI)

Opportunities to raise money and fund charitable work were greatly diminished for the South Georgia Heritage Trust (SGHT) and also the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI). However, like BAT, they made efforts to move to a digital format. In 2020, SGHT collaborated with UKAHT in the form of a webinar, which was attended by over 400 people. Other impacts of Covid-19 include logistical challenges: Chief Executive of the Government of South Georgia & South Sandwich Islands relayed in SOWG's 2021 February meeting that the biggest logistical challenge was to ensure the fishery patrol vessel *MV Pharos SG* could stay operational in moving crew, getting certificates done, and getting people into the Falklands – which had been a huge challenge over the summer of 2020. She noted that they



*Aerial shot of the new wharf at King Edward Point
Photo: Daan Alderberg / South Georgia Newsletter*

had succeeded in this, although it had been difficult. She also informed SOWG members that trying to prevent illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing was another challenge faced by SGSSI. The lack of tourist vessels meant they did not have many eyes on the water, and were unable to rely on those sentinels. There was talk of future collaborations, as the Chief Executive spoke of joint work between GSGSSI and SAERI on marine invasives, which she noted to be a strong piece of cross-territory collaboration when developed.

SGHT supported work on albatross tracking by both RSPB and BAS, and continued to raise funds for, and support, the whale expeditions carried out by BAS. In January 2020, BAS completed a long-term research project which found high numbers of blue whales around South Georgia.

In May 2020, the £11m wharf was completed at King Edward Point Research Station (KEP). It was commissioned as a joint effort between the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI). The research station, owned by GSGSSI and operated by British Antarctic Survey (BAS), is an important facilitator of interdisciplinary research and collaboration. The expanded capabilities offered by the new wharf will ensure these joint efforts can continue—accommodating GSGSSI fisheries patrol vessel *MV Pharos SG*, polar research vessel *RRS Sir David Attenborough*, and Royal Navy ships *HMS Protector* and *HMS Forth*. It will also be used to operate Government harbour patrol boats, rigid inflatable-hull boats, scientific survey boats and workboats; welcoming scientists and visitors, as well as transporting cargo.

The first biosecurity detector-dog in the Falklands visited the islands for two trial periods in 2018 and 2019 and, as of 2020, is now permanently stationed in South Georgia with his handler as part of the Biosecurity Dog Programme established by GSGSSI, which has been running for just over a year.

Tristan da Cunha

Tristan's Gough Island Restoration Project was delayed for an entire year due to Covid-19. Researchers, assembled on the island in February 2020, had to leave in April. The first ships left again for Gough in February 2021, as reported to SOWG members by Tristan da Cunha Government's Environmental and Conservation Policy Officer in the 2021 February meeting. The project aims to remove invasive mice from the island which are devastating seabird populations, including albatross and prion. The group heard that there was an almost complete failure in one of the prion nesting colonies at the beginning of 2021, and the implications of extinction remain quite strong if the mice are not removed immediately. If the project does not successfully go ahead in 2021, it is likely it will not happen: the project is still short on funding, and delays brought about by Covid-19 are thought to have increased expenditure to an estimated £5-9m, as heard by SOWG in February.

Covid-19 has impacted fisheries quite a bit; due to global closure of restaurants, Tristan's lobster market had been significantly impacted, which is in turn impacting the economy.

Flax eradication on Inaccessible Island is another conservation project set to get underway in the summer of 2021. SOWG's long-term contact in Tristan provided updates on this. The project will last two years, and the team were currently on location to begin the first year's work, and



*Gough Island shot from the SA Agulhas II helicopter, 2019
Photo: Chris Jones*

weather would play a key role in deciding if the team would be able to stay on the island or not, and getting people back to South Africa would be another big challenge.

Tristan's Marine Protected Area (MPA) was announced in November 2020. It is the largest MPA in the Atlantic, and the fourth largest in the

world. It has a 90% no-take zone, although fishing for lobster is ongoing as well as some small-scale fisheries on sea-mounts. Focus is now on developing management plans and legislation which is needed to develop schemes of marine protection.

Report of UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group

Alderney

Throughout the year, Alderney Wildlife Trust has seen its conservation activities reduced as a result of the pandemic. This is because AWT relies so much on seasonal workers coming to the island to be able to undertake most of their activities, especially additional survey work which has improved their baseline data (especially in the marine environment) and allowed them to see where their gaps in knowledge are.

Several on-going projects include: an ormer project (a highly valued economic shellfish species in the Channel Islands, which was found in 2018 to be present, after some absence); the development of a Ramsar website, including a code of conduct for sites; invasive species removal along the coastline (including sour fig and sea fig); gannet monitoring using geo-locators, as part of a 5-year ongoing survey.

Over the summer, visitors from within the Bailiwick of Guernsey and through air bridge to the Isle of Man maintained numbers not dissimilar to a normal season. Online, the AWT's "puffincam" has attracted over 600,000 viewers this year from around the world. The online platform will be expanded to include more cameras and an additional camera-link looking at the gannet colony.

The States of Alderney had reached a political agreement to bring in a single-use plastic ban which came into force on 1st January 2021. Legislation had been drafted, based on that for New Zealand, although it had been useful to look at other smaller jurisdictions, e.g. Gibraltar.

In addition, wildlife protection legislation was drafted and a public consultation held during the year. The new legislation was pursued on the back of the UKOT & CD Environment Ministers meetings and the signing of the Blue Island Charter, which provided the States of Alderney with the political will in its initial stages.

Cyprus SBAs

Reports from local bodies over the year was that Covid-19 has had a serious impact on work. The Education Centre has been closed and most fieldwork has halted, and so it has provided an opportunity for desk-based work. It has accelerated management planning, although it would not be possible to conduct a full consultation – this will be reviewed at a later date. When the pandemic began, spring bird-migration had just about ended but the turtle-nesting season had just started. There had been 30 loggerhead turtle sightings, nesting both on the normally quiet beaches and on the most popular tourist beach, Lady's Mile on Akrotiri, which they usually avoid. People are allowed to go swimming but are not allowed on the beaches, presumably leaving quiet space for the turtles.

Sadly, some griffon vultures that nest near the cliffs have been found dead this year. A recently launched European-funded project with Birdlife Cyprus is looking at the population decline and threats to these, e.g. poisoning of this species. Conservation measures might include some artificial feeding. Other work is looking at protected sites in the Sovereign Base Areas.

Together with local partners, the UK's Centre for Ecology and Hydrology produced a guide for visitors to the wetlands. They have also published a database, which has been put together for all non-native species in Cyprus; see: <https://www.ris-ky.info>. All the plant, freshwater fish and marine records the wetland project has created (about 10,000 non-native species records) are openly available (either through a NERC open data portal or GBIF directly). The main website also provides other outputs of the project: www.ris-ky.info. The Joint Services Health Unit published a paper on wetland management and some education materials.

The Ministry of Defence undertook an assessment of its carbon footprint in light of the climate change emergency and international targets. Some early results from Akrotiri were interesting. One area of focus was reducing the vehicle fleet. Within this, SBA environmental officers were encouraging consideration for ecosystem services and natural capital. In December, a team leader would be in post. The team had already recognised the potential for testing proposals in Cyprus to be replicated elsewhere. This would put Cyprus ahead of the curve in some ways.

Significant changes are expected to take place in the CSBAs. With a shift in policy permitting non-military development in the SBAs, it is likely that residential development will now take place.

Gibraltar

Gibraltar had not been hit hard by Covid-19 due to an early lockdown, although there were some later problems, largely overcome. It appears that southern Spain had also been spared the worst of what the country had experienced. The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) initially cancelled outings and postponed their AGM until later in the year. It was then held online for the first time. Wider participation was achieved and future meetings online were being considered. Later in the year, a marine 'bioblitz' (collaborative short-term survey) took place, a first in Gibraltar. Many attendees were surprised by the list of species present, especially in a well-used coastal area.

Local bird-ringers covered as much of the spring migration as possible, as help which was usually provided by volunteers from outside of Gibraltar. People have been recording sightings during their permitted exercise and from



The conference was happy to feature joint work in the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas by UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology and Laboratory of Vector Ecology & Applied Entomology, Joint Services Health Unit, British Forces Cyprus – which resulted also in the winner of the conference student poster prize.



A strong turn-out at the conference of 5 posters by MSc students at the University of Gibraltar's School of Marine Science

their homes. Some wildlife rescues had taken place with the help of the police. Interestingly, there had been no reports of 'problem' macaques, so maybe they were enjoying the nature reserve with no visitors. There were some apparent links between atmospheric pollution and effects of coronavirus, and so the Government has undertaken to make some roads pedestrian-only.

There were still some unknowns around 'Brexit'. In some ways the impacts would be more acutely felt in Gibraltar than in the UK. It was possible that Gibraltar would join the EU's Schengen area (within which there are not normally passport checks), which would also allow Gibraltarians more free movement than ever before. The details of this are still unknown, but will be a remarkable outcome and one that would bring Gibraltarians closer to EU. There is hope that this will herald a new stage of the relationship between Gibraltar and Spain.

Jersey

The States of Jersey began debating a new wildlife law in November. If passed, it would come into force next year. Some of the most significant changes for the Department would be implementing the new law through licencing. The Department were spending a lot of time on access network at the moment. The previous government plan included some work on implementing access to the countryside. Covid has halted progress in terms of getting an access officer. However, there was some good work coming out of the strategy post-Covid lockdown. One interesting development was that, after lockdown, the States had put out a user questionnaire to get information on how people use the countryside. This had provided a lot of information, particularly because people were given only a short time each day to get outdoors. They found that 94% of respondents had a new appreciation for countryside. This now provides a basis for getting more support for positive engagement with the public in support of conservation efforts. With the success of the Pollinator Project, which began in Guernsey, it had now become a Channel Island initiative running from the same platform. This is an excellent example of how pooling of resources and expertise, combined with public support, can result in significant gains for biodiversity (see www.pollinatorproject.je for specific activities for Jersey).

Following the start of the pandemic, efforts to address the Climate

Emergency in Jersey had been put on hold. They had hoped to hold a citizens' assembly, which had been paused, although, some meetings with local groups had been held. These included with Jersey Trees for Life and Jersey Hedgerows, to look at carbon sequestration, particularly pooling resources in order to create tree planting areas. Some work had been done on modelling and locating the best areas to ensure habitat connectivity. An approved island-wide tree and hedgerow mix was now available for local NGOs to use in order to start re-planting. This was an encouraging step towards developing a Jersey Tree Strategy.

The Island Plan (Jersey's development control document) had been postponed. An interim plan, which expanded boundaries of Jersey's National Park, would be in place for the next three years.

Other positive initiatives included improvements to Jersey's cycling infrastructure and Linking Environment and Farming (LEAF) an initiative to work with farmers to create management plans to increase biodiversity on their land.

Jersey Marine Society had published data on their marine survey. When Covid-19 started, they were in middle of an education outreach programme. A large part of this included a touch-tank where children (and adults) could get up close to marine wildlife. This had to be curtailed and there are doubts over when it would resume, given that social distancing and hygiene are going to be imposed for some time to come. The touch tank is about contact and pupils crowd around it. The tank project had visited schools and reached over 300 hundred students. The team was thinking about other ways to carry out educational work and had been looking at potential education opportunities, particularly for those being home-schooled, e.g. models of rock-pools and marine wildlife, including limpets.

A PhD candidate at Plymouth University, had to cancel a lot of planned work over the summer as well as several other researchers.

A Ramsar management meeting had taken place via Zoom. They were starting to think about ways in involve other Channel Islands with Ramsar sites in the group as a way to exchange information.

The fishing industry had been impacted by the pandemic, as they are unable to land their catch in France. Lobster pots and nets had been left out and had come loose in bad weather, which could have an impact on marine life.

The Jersey Records Centre (JRC) are working on their strategy and communication, which included a collaboration with other Channel Islands as part of a wider inter-Channel Islands Records Centre. This would enable them in sharing campaigns across islands, including education. They have continued their conservation training and citizen-science programmes throughout lockdowns.

The Isle of Man

This year, the Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture (DEFA) published *Managing Our Natural Wealth*, Isle of Man's Biodiversity Strategy 2015-25 Action Plan mid-term audit (see: <https://www.gov.im/media/1369998/biodiversity-strategy-mid-term-audit-10-august-2020.pdf>). As part of this, several Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) were being considered.

The Isle of Man Government's Climate Change Action Plan to reach net zero carbon emissions by 2050 was adopted <https://mm.aiircdn.com/147/5e1717852897c.pdf>. This had been unanimously approved with an initial £10 million to be set aside this year to reach the target.

Other activities and initiatives included: ecological information fed into the Island Development Control plan; stakeholder workshops took place via webinars to feed into the Biosphere Reserve management plan; launch of an agri-environment scheme to support farmers to integrate environmental protections into their practices; cycle-lanes created on former railway-lines to encourage more cycling; creation of a nature reserve at a large gravel pit in the north of the Island, managed by Manx Birdlife; launch of an inquiry following major flooding at Laxey, leading to some natural flood management in one catchment with the intention of rolling this out across others; and various discussions around 'Brexit', particularly on fishing, but also on joining international conventions such as CITES.

The Manx Wildlife Trust (MWT), published its strategy (<https://www.mwt.im/strategy>), with three main aims: to drive the development of a nature recovery network across the Isle of Man; to champion nature-based solutions in the Isle of Man; and to connect people in the Isle of Man strongly to nature.

As part of the Manx Mires Partnership, which MWT founded, over 4,000 hectares have been surveyed. This is important because peat is known to be storing over 2m tonnes of carbon. More funding has been secured to develop data-sets, including around damage, species mix etc.

Other natural carbon-capture habitats include seagrasses. MWT is trying to find the best way to protect, restore or expand these. Future work (in collaboration with Isle of Man Government) includes a carbon off-set calculator.

MWT is expanding its partnerships within the region, particularly the Irish Sea Network. MWT attended its first meeting recently to explore joint ways of working and funding bids. Other partnerships include UKOTCF and Island Innovation.

Around 60 years of data have been collected on the Calf of Man (a small rocky islet, half a mile from the south-west coast of the Isle of Man); these data are not being used. MWT is exploring ways to use these data to underpin its conservation efforts. This has included some preliminary discussions with the British Trust for Ornithological Trust (BTO).

MWT hope to develop education materials to link Isle of Man schools with those in different jurisdictions, and a certificate course in wildlife gardening and observing nature. There was currently nothing like this within the Wildlife Trusts in the UK, and so there was huge potential there. A pilot is planned for this year, which could be replicated elsewhere.

Guernsey

The annual Inter-Island Environment meeting took place on 17th & 18th September 2020 via Zoom. Outputs and a meeting report will be published online, including a communication tool-kit for NGOs and Governments. Overall, 80 participants took part, with about 50-60 participating in the afternoon workshops. Presentations are available here: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9h4_ysO6nm3HP6Xw9gYodw.

The most significant recent change in Guernsey was the new *Strategy for Nature*. This has a much wider reach than a biodiversity strategy, as it mainstreams biodiversity into everything the government does. It includes net biodiversity gains and a marine spatial plan, as well species and habitat conservation targets (<https://www.gov.gg/CHttpHandler.ashx?id=128405&p=0>). This sets the scene for more conservation activity on Guernsey.

One of the biggest challenges to biodiversity consists of invasive species, including Asian hornets. Last year there were no secondary nests (the nests where the main production takes place). So, although, there are likely to be re-invasions, the team is quite successful in monitoring and controlling them. This has meant that the team has been able to expand its work on other invasive species. This had led to the development of the Islands' first comprehensive invasive species plan. As part of this, they have done some horizon-scanning and developed new legislation, particularly on imports.

Leigh Morris
@MorrisLeigh

This evening at the @UKOTCF conference was an online poster session, including 2 excellent ones from my @manxnature colleagues Sarah Hickey, on the Manx Mires Partnership, and @DrLaraHowe & Breeshey Harkin on the Calf Seal population monitoring #GreatJob #ManxNature 🇮🇲

Both Manx Wildlife Trust and Manx Government's Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture featured strongly at the UKOTCF conference

Some other activities include: carbon assessment of terrestrial environment carried out by students (hopefully with marine next year); investigating potential rat-removal from Herm with the RSPB; looking at 'ormering' on the foreshore (this is in response to increased popularity with reports of 500 ormers being taken per person in recent years); a

Miranda Bane
@MirandaBeeGirl

Thanks @ITVChannelTV for this article highlighting our participation in the @UKOTCF Conference. I'm so pleased to be representing @pollinatorproj to an audience of islands all over the world.

Guernsey scientist to represent Bailiwick at international conference | ITV Ne...
Dr Miranda Bane from the Pollinator Project will present online at the UK and Overseas Territories Conservation Forum in March.
itv.com

The Channel Islands Pollinator Project, started in Guernsey, was one of the conference presentations featured in the news media.

bat survey commissioned involving citizen-scientists, as little is currently known about them and they are not protected under current legislation (potentially working with Alderney and Sark); and a current audit of biodiversity records, hopefully partnering with Jersey to share resources and possibly linking with the National Biodiversity Network (NBN). Overall, there was currently a lot of momentum within government for environmental protection.

Sark

The impact of Covid-19 was much the same as other jurisdictions. The Société Serquaise's AGM was cancelled. There had been no visitors, and none were expected to return for a while. There had been many sightings of puffins and also cuckoos. However, it had not been possible for regular bird-ringing on island. There had been many sightings of dolphins in the waters around the island, probably as a result of the lack of visitors and fewer boats.

The successful spring queen-trapping of Asian hornets meant that there were no reported sightings this year. Volunteers will repeat this each spring. Bat-tours have been well supported by visitors and residents. Sark hopes to be included in the bat survey work with Guernsey.

Sark's pastoral landscape is enormously popular with visitors and residents alike and, if left, it becomes covered in bramble and gorse. The island lost its dairy several years ago and this had meant a return to reliance on imported dairy goods. The most significant activity on-island to take place in relation to sustainability was the re-establishment of the dairy. In

2019, the Sark Dairy Trust was founded. It looked at several dairies in the Channel Islands. Two new residents, Jason and Katharine Salisbury, have moved to the island to run it. Sixteen cows would be brought over in the spring. The land has been committed and the 'green' sites agreed. A timber-frame construction has started with assistance from a volunteer engineer. When finished, it will have a viewing gallery for children and visitors. A third of the funds needed to complete the dairy have been secured but around £500,000 is needed. Overall, it is encouraging that the island is nearly there. There are so many environmental benefits that will come from it, including a recycling bottle system to reduce plastic waste. There is a website at: <https://sarkdairytrust.com>.

Other recent activity includes some recent reports of poisoned raptors in the Bailiwick. As a result, the island vet had been concerned about homing pigeons. Pigeon owners had agreed not to release them for the time being.

A ban on crawfish fishing continues (since Sue Daley's discoveries; see last year's Report), which is reviewed every three years. This is significant as it is the only area where crawfish are fully protected in the British Isles. The ban is having a positive effect as there have been plenty of sightings of adolescent crawfish during the summer.

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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 Guernesaise; Société Jersiaise; National Trust for Jersey; Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture; Manx Wildlife Trust; Montserrat National Trust; Pitcairn Natural Resources Division; St Helena National Trust; La Société Sercquaise; 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.

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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.

EITHER: I wish to become a Friend of the UK Overseas Territories at the annual support level: £20 £50 £100 £.....

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

Name of individual Friend or contact person for Corporate Friend:

Company name of Corporate Friend (if relevant) :

Address:

Telephone: Fax: Email:

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.

1. UK cheque: I enclose my UK cheque made out to UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum for this amount.

2. Standing Order form: To: The Manager, Bank Name: Branch Sort-code

Bank address: Bank postcode:

Please pay: UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum at NatWest Bank, 9 Bank Court, Hemel Hempstead HP1 1FB Sort-code: 60-10-33

Account number 48226858 the sum of £..... now and a similar sum thereafter on this date annually.

My account number: Name

Address: Postcode:

Signature: Date:

3. Standing Order instructions sent: I confirm that I have sent instructions directly to my bank for a standing order as per option 2 above.

4. Credit or charge card: Please charge the amount indicated above to my card now *and thereafter on this date annually. [Delete the words after * if you wish to make only a single payment] (If you are based in another country, your card company will handle the exchange and include the equivalent in your own currency in your regular statement.)

American Express, Delta, JCB, MasterCard, Solo, Switch/Maestro, Visa Expiry date: / (month/year)

Card number: Security number (3 digits, or 4 for Amex)

If used: Start date: / If used: Issue number: Signature: Date:

5. UK taxpayers are requested to complete the following **Gift Aid Declaration** to allow UKOTCF to recover the 25p tax they have paid for every £1 donated:

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

Please treat as Gift Aid all qualifying gifts of money made today and/or in the future . (Please tick all boxes you wish to apply.)

I am a UK taxpayer and understand that if I pay less income tax and/or capital gains tax than the amount of gift aid claimed on all my donations in that tax year it is my responsibility to pay any difference.

Donor's details

Title First name or initial(s).....Surname.....

Full home address (incl postcode).....

Date.....Signature.....

Please notify UKOTCF if you:

- Want to cancel this declaration
- Change your name or home address
- No longer pay sufficient tax on your income and/or capital gains.

If you pay Income Tax at the higher or additional rate and want to receive the additional tax relief due to you, you must include all your Gift Aid donations on your Self Assessment tax return or ask HM Revenue and Customs to adjust your tax code.

Send this form to UKOTCF, Icknield Court, Back Street, Wendover, Bucks. HP22 6EB, UK

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