



**Press release: immediate**

## **Project launched to protect through community action Montserrat's animals and plants and the services they provide to us**

The Montserrat National Trust (MNT) and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) have worked in partnership for over 25 years, along with the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment. On 29<sup>th</sup> October 2021, they launch an exciting and ambitious three-year project, joined also by other local partners, including 664Connect Media, community groups including Cork Hill Reunion Committee, businesses and individuals, some of whom were involved in the earlier pilot work testing the approach. The project is part-funded by a grant from UK Government's Darwin Initiative.

The project aims to build on and expand the work piloted a few years ago to encourage and empower every Montserratian to do something which benefits the islands' unique wildlife – and the human benefits which result from it.

'*Adopt-a-Home-for-Wildlife*', was developed by MNT & UKOTCF in 2016, as part of their wider '*Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat*' programme, in response to local needs, and piloted in 2017. It encouraged removal of invasive plants and their replacement by native species (by natural seeding or planting saplings from MNT's Botanic Gardens), and other measures to help native plants and animals to thrive. These are a glory of Montserrat, some species occurring nowhere else in the world. Sites adopted (in some cases by their owners or by groups helping public land) have included several habitats, from globally threatened tropical dry forest, to coastal wetlands now so rare on Montserrat, to shallow coastal waters. The pilot project proved effective in achieving native biodiversity-restoration. It resulted additionally in one project adopter providing safe habitat for another project, led by Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, reintroducing the critically endangered frog, the Mountain Chicken.

Mrs Sarita Francis, Executive Director of MNT, said: "This community-led approach enables community-groups not otherwise environmentally engaged to take part – and eventually lead – in conservation. Its expansion will increase Montserrat's prosperity by fostering appreciation for the island's natural resources in restoring tourism, saving business-costs, farming, well-being etc, and provide opportunities to young Montserratians, vital to ensure they stay on the island."

Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF Chairman, currently meeting with the Trust and other partners on island, with Ann Pienkowski, UKOTCF's Honorary Environmental Education Coordinator, added: "This project has been several years in the planning and seeking of funding. Now, the new grant will enable us to roll out some of the work we have previously trialled successfully. But we are not just doing that, but are making significant additions during the project period. This includes an element on encouraging natural pollinators; this recognises the importance of the nature/sustainable small farming interaction. We also want to build on ideas explored in the pilot to involve young people more, both via schools and other routes. It is their future environment that the project looks to."

In essence, it is about helping the community harness its own resources to protect Montserrat's wildlife so that it can continue to help future generations. Everyone can do something – no matter how big or small. It can be by planting some native plants to encourage other wildlife on your land, a litter-picking day, stopping using inappropriate fertilisers or pesticides where better alternative methods could be used, removing an invasive species that has got out of hand etc. Through the

project, the Trust will provide help, advice on nature management, assistance and partnership with anyone who shares the same vision so that you can achieve your goal to share the space you live in with nature. The advice will come from a project-officer role which will be shared part-time by several local individuals, once appointed. By this means expertise will develop widely. Occasional visits by international specialists will reinforce skills in the team (project-officers and Adopters).

There will be many ways to get involved with the project, for example: joining as an Adopter; attending training events, workshops and presentations; speaking about the project; becoming a youth representative, a volunteer or a donor; responding to questionnaires; reading articles and social media posts etc. These roles will be defined more fully in the early stages of the project, as it is essential that they are tailored to local needs.

Nature has suffered at the hands of humans so rapidly in recent memory that we often say that it has suffered “death by a thousand cuts”. This project hopes to bring “life by a thousand community actions” at the present crucial juncture for the global environment.

The project-officers (once appointed), based at the Trust Office in Salem, will be the first point of contact for anything to do with the project.

#### **Notes to editors:**

**Montserrat National Trust:** MNT's focus is on environmental awareness and conservation.

Established by statute in February 1970, MNT has been at the forefront of preserving and conserving the cultural, historic and archaeological heritage of the Island.

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**UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum:** UKOTCF exists to promote the co-ordinated conservation and sustainable use of the diverse and increasingly threatened plant and animal species and natural ecosystems across all of UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and Crown Dependencies (CDs). It does this by providing assistance in the form of expertise, information and liaison between non-governmental organisations and governments, both in the UK and in the Territories themselves. More information at [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)

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**664Connect Media**, founded by Vernaire Bass in February 2020, is a culture, entertainment and destination brand about Montserrat and the Caribbean region. It leverages data and innovation to reach over 100,000 people in Montserrat, the region and internationally each month. 664Connect Media's cross-platform network includes its website, Facebook and Instagram pages, which provide regional news, create articles, competitions and a weekly entertainment show called *In The Hot Seat*. 664Connect Media is an offshoot of Bass Consultancy Services (BCS), a full-service marketing and business consultancy based in Montserrat. BCS provides business and marketing consultancy services, which focus on each clients' most critical issues and opportunities: strategy, marketing, organisational development, operations, technology, transformation, digital and advanced analytics. BCS also provides supporting services like business branding, graphic design and web design.