



Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat

Newsletter 11, November 2021



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

Foreword

Welcome to the 11th issue of the newsletter about the current joint programme of work coordinated by Montserrat National Trust and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, in conjunction with the Government of Montserrat. This is a celebratory issue. After our successful pilot work in the 2 years 2016-18, which was rated as successful by the funder's independent assessor, we were disappointed to be unsuccessful in several annual funding round to build on this. In the meantime, UKOTCF tried to keep some continuity without funding, and we are grateful to three of the initial *Adopters of Homes for Wildlife* to stay with us during that period when we could offer only minimal support. We were delighted to hear at the end of August 2021 that our fourth annual attempt (in addition to unsuccessful ones to other sources) was successful, after a long application process that had started in July 2020. The Darwin Initiative has approved a 3-year grant from UK Government. The partner organisations leading this project leapt into more dynamic action to reschedule work (as the grant award announcements were 3 months later than had originally been scheduled).

Mike and Ann Pienkowski had already booked a replacement trip to that cancelled 19 months earlier (to keep flight costs as low as possible by early booking), to continue earlier work – and in the hope of a positive grant decision.

So, with permissions from the Government of Montserrat, double Covid injections, lots of tests and after 5 days in quarantine, they were able to work with Montserrat National Trust and other local partners to launch the project and get lots of things started at the end of October and start of November.

This issue of the newsletter is devoted to the start of this project and introducing some of the players, as well as reporting some related initiatives. The next issue will introduce more of the wider team, including both some of the *Adopters* and others in Montserrat, as well as some of the outside specialists helping to transfer skills to Montserrat.

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

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

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



Purple-throated carib hummingbirds. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski



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



*MNT's Executive Director, Mrs Sarita Francis, hosts the launch.
Photo in this article (except as indicated): Dr Mike Pienkowski*



UKOTCF's Chairman, and project joint leader, Dr Mike Pienkowski, outlines the project. Photo: Montserrat National Trust

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 29th October 2021, they launched 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 (Mr Tim Orton, Mr Dwayne Hixon, and the Cork Hill team) 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 Montserradians, 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



Some of the participants at the project launch in MNT's meeting room at the Botanic Gardens.



Mr Tim Orton, one of the first “Adopters” of a “Wildlife Home” in the pilot study, describes some of experiences and encourages other to participate.

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



Hon. Crenston C. Buffonge, Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment, welcomes the project.



His Excellency Andrew Pearce OBE, Governor of Montserrat, expressed his strong support for the project and delight that it had received a major contribution towards funding from UK Government’s Darwin Initiative.

environment.

The Project Officers (see following article), based at the Trust Office in Salem, will be the first point of contact for anything to do with the project.

In welcoming the project, Hon. Crenston C. Buffonge, Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment, declared “The environment is no-one’s property to destroy, but everyone’s responsibility to protect. This is why the Adopt a Wildlife Habitat project offers the opportunity for each of us to do our part in conserving Montserrat’s unique biodiversity.”

His Excellency Andrew Pearce OBE, Governor of Montserrat, expressed “This project *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* is, for me, an absolute classic example of the best way that we, as individuals and small communities, can play our part in all this. People coming together, giving a little bit of their time and efforts, to protect and nurture the wonderful heritage we have here.”



A question from Ms Nevissa Golden, Discover Montserrat, during the public question-and-answer session. In foreground, Hon. Claude Hogan MLA



Newly appointed part-time Project Officer (Admin), Mrs Delmaude Ryan closes the launch with a vote of thanks.

Adopt a Home for Wildlife team

In this section of our newsletter, we introduce some of the team working on the project. In this first issue of the new phase of the project, we include those who planned and are setting up the project and some of the core team fulfilling the project officers role. In later issues, we envisage featuring some of the *Adopters*, as well as more core team members joining and visiting specialists transferring their skills and knowledge.

Sarita Francis OBE

Executive Director, Montserrat National Trust

Sarita holds a BA in Geography and Linguistics and a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education from the University of the West Indies; as well as Diploma and Certificate in Environmental Management from Manitoba



Institute of Management, Canada and ICCE, UK, respectively; and Certificate of Public Service Law, Commonwealth Secretariat.

Sarita Francis took up the position of Director of the Montserrat National Trust in 2013 after retiring as Deputy Governor in the Montserrat Public Service.

Her career in the Public Service spans some forty years during which she worked in Education as a Geography Teacher and Deputy Principal until 1993. She served as Montserrat's Director of Housing from 1999 to 2001, where she developed a Housing Register for displaced persons and Housing Allocation Criteria, as well as coordinating the development and implementation of the Housing Strategy.

Mrs Francis was appointed Permanent Secretary to the Office of the Chief Minister in 2001, and was responsible for Government Business, Sports, Information, Culture, Protocol & Regional Affairs, as well as coordinating relationships and communication with the Governments of the Caribbean, British Government, other Overseas Territories and the European Union.

She was promoted to Chief Establishment Officer/Deputy Governor in 2007 and was instrumental in delivering the Public Service Reform Programme across Government. Mrs Francis played a pivotal role in the implementation of the changes brought about by the New Montserrat Constitution in 2008.

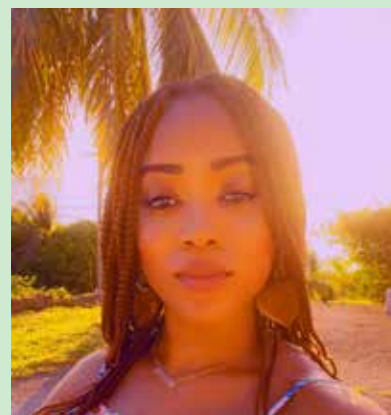
As Deputy Governor and Head of Public Service (2009-2012), Sarita also deputised for the Governor of Montserrat in his absence from the island, as well as chairing the Disaster Management Committee which plans and implements strategies for Disaster Preparedness, Response and Mitigation. She was also responsible for managing Consular matters including processing Passport & Permanent Residence and British Overseas Territories.

Sarita Francis became involved with the Montserrat National Trust in 1985, and headed the Environmental Education Committee. In 1994, she was transferred to the Trust to work on

Environmental Education. She was President of the Trust during the height of the volcanic crisis and had to assume management of the organization and was instrumental in relocating the Trust Office and Museum from Plymouth to its new headquarters in Olveston.

Venaire Bass (664Connect Media) Project Outreach Officer

Venaire Bass is a highly motivated and innovative entrepreneur and talk-show host. She is the CEO of Bass Consultancy Services and she is also recognised locally and regionally for working tirelessly to raise the profile of Montserrat and the Caribbean.



Venaire earned a Bachelor's Degree in Business and Business Law from the London Metropolitan University and, over the years, she has also developed a keen interest in digital marketing. She was recently hired to manage the marketing campaign for Montserrat's Remote Worker Programme and her work also extends into project management, strategic management, policy planning and implementation, culture, heritage, the arts and tourism.

664Connect Media was founded by Venaire on 8th February 2020 and it is a culture, entertainment and destination brand about Montserrat and the Caribbean region. 664Connect Media 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 provides regional news, creates 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. BSC also provides supporting services like business branding, graphic design and web design.



Delmaude C Ryan (MNT), Project Officer - Admin

My environmental bodies call me the 'Nature Girl' as I enjoy exploring the natural habitats wherever I travel, and mostly in Montserrat where our trails are safe and welcoming even for a solo hiker.

My love for the outdoors journeyed with me from a child exploring Amersham Mountain every Saturday, venturing to Hearts and Spring Ghaut, South Soufriere and Great Alps Waterfall, and hiking to Foxes Bay from Richmond Hill to spend time wandering through the Bird Sanctuary. Wanting to know more about nature influenced my subject choices at school in Geography, Science and Agriculture. Although my career path led me in the area

of governance and being the first appointed Deputy Governor at the age of 39. My love for nature was not obscured by these roles. My experiences exploring caves, viewing active soufrieres, zoos, safaris and botanical gardens, lakes and trails across the world testifies of my love for nature; my trip is never complete without interacting with one of these. Harrison Cave, Barbados, tracking up the Pitons, St Lucia, Botanical Gardens and Zoos in Christchurch, New Zealand, Red Sand Beach of Malta, Victoria Falls, Zambia, and many other beauties of nature, foster my love even more. Embracing my love for all things natural and the skills learnt through my careers, as a holder of MA in International Development Public Policy & Management from the University of Manchester, a BSc Honours in Public Sector Management-Special and a Certificate in Business Administration with the University of the West Indies, and several executive training in management, I come equipped with skills in Project Finance, Project and Programme Management that are essential to bringing out the outputs, outcome and impact of conservation projects such as the one we are embarking on. As Project Officer Admin, for *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*, I look forward to adapting my knowledge of Montserrat's fauna and flora and my project management and administrative skills in bringing alive, over the next three years, a project that contributes to thriving wildlife on Montserrat, and which also contributes to maintaining a therapeutic environment, provide opportunities for livelihoods and most importantly conserving our natural heritage.



In these first weeks of the project, I am currently exploring and designing mechanisms to capture the implementation in the most nature friendly way; making data-collection, reporting and the administrative tasks completely technologically based. I look forward to supporting my colleague Project Officers in making our experience memorable and bringing along our *Adopters* and community of all ages as part of this exciting opportunity to enhance the beauty of our Emerald Isle.

Thanks to the UKOTCF, Darwin Plus and all other partners for making this possible.

Ajhermae White (MNT), Project Officer - Field

Being a born and bred Montserratian, I feel connected to the island's natural environment. In fact I have always been passionate about preserving Montserrat's natural flora and fauna.

While reading for a BSc degree in Environmental Science at the University of Birmingham in the United Kingdom, I knew it was my vocation to return



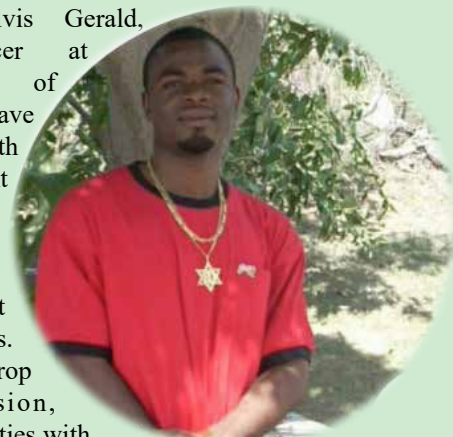
home to contribute to the conservation of Montserrat's unique biodiversity. As an Environmental Officer within the Ministry of Agriculture I have gained a vast amount of knowledge about the island's plants and animals, especially birds. In this position, I have been able to contribute to the development of green spaces and wetlands while also monitoring and surveying different animal species and plant species.

In my spare time, I enjoy bird watching and taking pictures of interesting wildlife, like insects and mushrooms. As an avid nail technician also, I enjoy incorporating the natural environment in my nail artistry by blending nail designs to match our birds, plants, fruits or general flora and fauna. .

I am very excited to be a part of this *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project because this project will feed my passion as an environmentalist and allow me to help foster a greater appreciation for wildlife among Montserratians.

Elvis Gerald (MNT), Project Officer - Field

My name is Elvis Gerald, Agricultural Officer at the Department of Agriculture; I have been working with the department for over 16 years now. I started out as a veterinarian assistant, doing that role for about 6 years.



I then went into crop production/extension, doing outreach activities with farmers, quarantine inspection at all ports of entry, cold container inspection, supervising the seedling nursery, and working with the primary and secondary school farm programme. I am also currently supervising the onion and Irish potato production project, plantain propagation project and the aquaponic project.

I have experience and training in most areas of agriculture to include pest and disease management, agronomy, soil and water conservation, quarantine inspection, crop production, bee-keeping, animal husbandry, marketing, hydroponic/aquaponic, greenhouse/shade house production, insect identification, and extension *etc.*

My love and passion is agriculture, and my goal is to see Montserrat self-sufficient in a number of foods crops and have these available at all times on the market, at an affordable price.

I am currently working on my own exotic fruit garden and it is going very well; I also grow a wide range of vegetables and supply to local restaurants weekly.

Antwone Sinclair (MNT), Work Experience Student

My name is Antwone Jeremiah Sinclair. I was born in Guyana and came to Montserrat when I was one year old. I am 17 years old, soon to be 18.



My hobbies are playing cricket, playing the instruments for my church, reading books, playing

only a little bit of video-games, watching animals in my spare time, and I like to be in nature. I have always wanted to become an environmentalist, protecting the environment and making it better for us to live on. In the future, I wish to bring Pipers Pond back to life, teaching the younger generations the information that I have learnt over my time while I am young, and I hope to leave behind a legacy at the Department of Environment.

Catherine Wensink, Executive Director, UKOTCF (and Joint Project-Leader)

Catherine holds a BSc in Zoology from Queen Mary College University of London and an MSc in Conservation Biology from Manchester Metropolitan University. During these years, she studied marine invertebrates, herbivores in Kenya and the management of protected areas in Tanzania. She has worked for the Environment Agency in the UK and for the World Conservation Union (known as IUCN) in their Offices



Catherine discusses issues with Larry, the famous Downing Street cat, after a visit to the UK Prime Minister's Office. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

in Brussels, where she was involved in the organisation of the important conference in Paris in 2006 on Biodiversity in European Development Cooperation – which involved a strong element on Overseas Countries and Territories.

Since 2007, she has worked with UKOTCF on a variety of projects. Some highlights include: major roles in the organisation of three conferences for conservation practitioners from all the UK Overseas Territories in Cayman (2009) and Gibraltar (2015) and the first held online (2021), and a supporting role in the organisation of the four meetings of the Environment Ministers' Council of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. She always tries to speak up on issues relating to global biodiversity loss, particularly using opportunities in the UK. As part of this she has provided written and oral evidence to several UK Parliamentary Committees specifically on the UK Overseas Territories.

Specifically for Montserrat, she has led on a series of projects involving the use of traditional methods of rainwater harvesting to showcase sustainable use of natural resources for this and another territory, and facilitated many partnerships. She made several visits to Montserrat, and on one of her first trips she helped author the guide to natural and other heritage sites *Birding in Paradise: The Caribbean Emerald Isle of Montserrat – A guide to bird-watching, nature and heritage sites*, as well as contributing to publications on other islands. More recently, she has provided some assistance to the Montserrat National Trust with the EcoPlay project (see pages 13-14 in this issue), particularly in sourcing the technical support provided by the architects at Dennis Sharp in order to design a concept for the space acquired by the Trust. After many years of laborious grant-writing, she says she sees the value of asking questions and seeking new avenues to get things done. This was certainly one

of those occasions and she has been delighted with the results.

Catherine has taken on several other interesting projects in addition to her work for UKOTCF in the last few years. Her family opened a bar and restaurant in Nottingham, UK, in 2018; expanding into the next property with a café/coffee shop the following year. As well as managing the company's finances and administration, she tries really hard to ensure that any business decisions consider how they impact the environment. for example: all the electricity they use is generated from wind turbines in nearby Leicestershire; used cooking oil is collected and then used to create biofuel. She admits that there is still a long way to go.

With so much exciting work ahead over the next three years, and such a fantastic team to work alongside, she hopes to be able to build up some of the information and data obtained through the project to work towards a PhD. With two children now at secondary school, but still needing lots of encouragement and support, she certainly likes to keep busy.

Ann Pienkowski, Honorary Environmental Education Coordinator and Secretary Wider Caribbean Working Group, UKOTCF

Ann hunts birds in the forest for video photography.



Ann holds a BSc in Biological Sciences from the University of East Anglia, and a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education from

the University of Durham. She has participated in research on shorebird migration at Durham University, on a project led by the late Professor Peter Evans, and research on curriculum development at Moray House College of Education, Edinburgh.

Ann worked as a primary school teacher in Peterborough, UK, from 1986 until her "official" retirement in 2010. Combining her interests in ecology and education, she voluntarily took on the role of Environmental Education Co-ordinator for UKOTCF in 2006, and has worked particularly with partners in the Turks and Caicos Islands but also elsewhere in the UKOTs/CDs to develop environmental education resources.

These have included the curriculum-linked *Wonderful Water* environmental education materials for the Turks and Caicos Islands, which used examples from TCI to deliver required objectives for upper primary and lower secondary schools in TCI. She has produced the Virtual Tours for Montserrat, Turks & Caicos Islands, BVI, Pitcairn, Gibraltar and Tristan a Cunha, and has trained other UKOTCF personnel on the production of the other Virtual Tours.

Since October 2010 she has been Secretary of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group. She has organised and chaired the Environmental Education and Public Awareness sessions at the UKOTCF-organised conferences in Cayman in 2009 and Gibraltar in 2015.

Ann's other interests include ski-ing, walking and video photography.

Dr Mike Pienkowski, Chairman, UKOTCF (and Joint Project-Leader)

Mike donates most of his time, unpaid, to running UKOTCF, to enable it to achieve its aims in supporting territory conservation bodies, by remaining engaged with its member organisations at all levels from policy to on-the-ground projects.

Mike holds a PhD in Zoology, from Durham University, on the feeding ecology and behaviour of visually foraging shorebirds (plovers) as compared to tactile foragers; and comparative breeding biology in Britain and Greenland, 1973-1976; and a BSc in Biological Sciences, University of East Anglia (UEA) 1969-72.

He has been involved in research and conservation for over 55 years, and in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies for over 26 years. Early research and conservation work was on waders (shorebirds): organiser and leader of Cambridge-London Iceland Expedition 1970, UEA Expedition to Morocco 1971, and UEA Expedition to Tarfaya 1972, to study migration systems and conservation requirements of coastal birds; joint organiser, scientific co-ordinator and leader of advance party and base-camp team for Joint Biological Expedition to NE Greenland 1974; Chairman of international conference in Ukraine in 1992, resulting in the Odessa Protocol on international co-operation on migratory flyway research and conservation.

He held research posts at Durham University 1973-1984 centring on coastal ecology, ecology & behaviour of coastal birds and migration systems. He joined the Nature Conservancy Council (UK Government's then nature conservation agency and adviser) as Head of Ornithology; amongst many other initiatives, he established and managed the programme to re-introduce red kites (birds of prey) to England and Scotland (described recently in a statement from UK Government's statutory advisor as possibly "the biggest species success story in UK conservation history"): Chairman (J)NCC/RSPB project team 1987-95. He chaired also the sea-eagle reintroduction team 1988-92. He managed and expanded the *Seabirds at Sea Team*, initiated a first programme on what became known as High-Nature-Value Farmland (where traditional approaches beneficial to wildlife are maintained), and negotiated and managed the major UK Government contracts with, and supervised the work of, the British Trust for Ornithology and the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust (1984-91).

He was also a leader in perhaps the largest conservation struggle in Britain in last 50 years, the natural peat-bogs of northernmost mainland Scotland. This was ultimately successful but at the cost of losing what had probably been UK's most successful official conservation body, NCC. The story has recently been told more fully than before in a chapter in the book *Nature's Conscience* (edited by Thompson, Birks & Birks, Langford Press, UK 2015): pp 401-440 *The Flow Country: battles fought, war won, organisation lost* by David Stroud, Tim Reed, Mike Pienkowski & Richard Lindsay.

He became Assistant Chief Scientist of NCC in 1990, and was



Mike, in a rather colder UKOT

simultaneously Head of the Implementation Team (1990-1) for the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (NCC's successor body). As JNCC's Director Life Sciences 1991-95, he was responsible also for overall resource planning and management.

Co-Chairman international conference on lead-poisoning in wetlands, Brussels 1991; Chairman UK Government's group to end the use of gunshot lead in wetlands; and a member of Steering Group for Special Programme on large-scale processes in ecology & hydrology, for Natural Environment Research Council/ Scottish Office (1994-9).

Mike has written or edited over 20 books, and written well over 200 published scientific journal papers and articles. Senior Editor of the international *Journal of Applied Ecology* (1994-9) and, earlier, *Ringing & Migration* and the *Wader Study Group Bulletin* (now *Wader Study*).

Mike has worked on various roles in the voluntary sector (e.g. Head of International Legislation & Funding Department, RSPB 1995-1997; Director, European Forum on Nature Conservation & Pastoralism 1998-2001.) Voluntary roles include Vice-President & Council, British Ornithologists' Union (1991-2003); Programme Committee, WWF-UK (1992-2002); Council, British Ecological Society (1993-1999); Council, Wetlands International (1988-1998); President, International Wader Study Group (1992-2009); Environment Committee, Institute of Petroleum (1994-5); Vice-President, Advisory Committee on Agriculture & Environment to Directorate-General Agriculture, European Commission (1999-2001); UK Executive Committee, IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) (2006-present); Expert Panel advising Ministers in UK Dept of Culture, Media & Sport on UK's Tentative List of World Heritage Sites (2010-11); previously consultant to FCO & DFID on Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP).

Dr Pienkowski has managed UKOTCF's programme over 25 years, and involved in projects in Montserrat for most of this time. He has managed projects in support of several UKOTs as well as cross-territory, e.g. facilitator to the Governments of the Turks & Caicos Islands and of St Helena on the development of pilot strategies to implement Environment Charters, with advice on this given also to Falkland Islands, Ascension, Pitcairn, Alderney and others. Consultant to UK Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to review actual and potential Ramsar Convention Wetlands of International Importance in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (2004-5); Expert consultant to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance (2001-2). He co-ordinated the successful application to the EU Regional Fund for the project on Management of Protected Areas to Support Sustainable Economies (MPASSE) to provide major funding for the British Virgin Islands, TCI and the Cayman Islands. He was also the British lead in securing EU Research funding for Net-BiOME, a project embracing French, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and British overseas entities in coordinated biodiversity research in EU Overseas entities. He led NGO effort, in support of FCO (and later DFID and Defra) in developing the Environment Charter agreements between HMG and the UKOTs. He led pilot facilitation of local strategy development to mainstream these, and later collated and publishing information from the territories to monitor implementation.

Mike has been an External Examiner for: University of Durham BSc degrees in Environmental Sciences (1995-1999); and higher degree examiner or consultant for the Universities of Simon Fraser (Vancouver), Cape Town, Durham, Anglia and Wales.

Progress in Montserrat “Wildlife Homes”

One of the most pleasing aspects of the unwelcome gap in funding after the pilot year of *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* was the fact that three of our *Adopters* stayed committed and active even though we did not have resources to continue the supporting Project Officer role.

During their visit in October-November, Mike and Ann Pienkowski had very interesting meetings on future needs with representatives of the Cork Hill Reunion Committee. They were also able to discuss matters with the other two Adopters and visit their sites. Here are updates on the two *Wildlife Homes* visited.

Dwayne Hixon’s site at Belham River Mouth, Old Road Bay

Dwayne is developing a golf course, not far from (and several metres of ash above) the pre-volcano golf course. He is using natural vegetation, instead of imported grass, and natural trees for cover. He has cleared away large areas of the alien invasive Australian pine *Casuarina*, which not only shades out natural vegetation but also poisons it by secretions from its roots. He has excavated several hollows in the ash to provide ponds at various levels, so that flat mud areas are available at various levels of the water-table. These provide important feeding areas for shorebirds migrating to and fro between North American (including arctic) breeding grounds and “wintering” areas in South America. These are particularly needed because of the natural or human-caused loss of almost all earlier coastal wetland areas on Montserrat.



One of the smaller ponds/channels.



Snipe, migrant shorebird using the pond. Its famously enormous bill in relation to its body-size allows it to probe deeply into the mud to detect and capture prey animals (below).



*Above: Belham River Mouth area from Garibaldi Hill, showing the new golf-course area cleared of alien invasive *Casuarina*. Below: one of the larger excavated ponds. All photos in this article: Dr Mike Pienkowski*



Another migrant shorebird at Belham River Mouth, also depending on wetlands to enable fuelling for migration and survival, the greater yellowlegs. It can be distinguished from the closely related lesser yellowlegs because its bill is much

longer than its head, rather than about the same length.



Also at Belham River Mouth, species of herons, such as the great egret (above) also depend on wetlands for food. Its relative, the green heron (below) also favours wetlands but makes use also of other habitats,



Flocks of another heron species favouring wetlands but less tied to them, cattle egrets, can usually be seen feeding on the golf course and other locations in Montserrat. This species is a famous wanderer. Originally restricted to the Old World, in the 1950s, a group flew across the Atlantic, probably from West Africa to Brazil, from where they colonised the Americas.

Early exercisers at 6am, such as Governor H.E. Andy Pearce and Mrs Pearce (above), may be rewarded with sightings of less common visitors, such as this Osprey (below) which flew overhead as we met.



Visitors at any time have a good chance of seeing American kestrels, which are breeding residents.

Tim Orton's site at Garibaldi Hill

One of the most threatened ecosystems in the world is tropical dry forest. It is also one of the slowest to regenerate after damage. The project – and Montserrat – are fortunate that Tim Orton has acquired, as his home, a relatively intact piece of tropical dry forest and, as part of the project, is restoring it. It serves as a great example, and it would be wonderful if other parts of the very limited remaining areas of tropical dry forest could be protected by the Government as a nature reserve.

Because the ecosystem is naturally dry (and therefore slow growing) and prone to drought (and consequent sapling death), this is one of the most challenging ecosystems to restore – and Tim points out that he will not see the end of the process, but wants to set the process well on the way for Montserratians.

Other individuals can help too. Many of the settlements of Montserrat are on what was originally tropical dry forest, probably because this may have been the most comfortable zone in which to live. That means that conditions in many gardens are still suitable for the plants native to tropical dry forest. Therefore, planting patches of native trees and bushes, and allowing natural processes to continue as these establish, can be significant contributions to the conservation of Montserrat's special features.

Tim's experimental work is helping us learn the best ways of helping this ecosystem slowly recover – and this is novel work, so we need to learn.



Tim has identified a major mistake early in the project. The area nearest the house was heavily infested with invasive acacia bushes. These needed to be removed. However, we now know that it would have been better to leave the acacia temporarily in place (but under control), to provide cover for native seedlings, which normally develop in the shade of the forest, and do not do well in open sunlight.



As an aside, you may be able to see the edges of some of the solar panels on the house roof (previous page). Tim's experience includes electrical engineering and has made his house completely powered by solar energy. The other component of this, the batteries and control units are being shown here to Ann Pienkowski.

Young trees growing in the shade, or partial shade, of the forest (right) do rather better than in the open.

Invasive species can then later be removed after the native saplings are sufficiently well grown in their shade. For example, Tim has killed this invasive tree (in centre of image below) by ring-barking.



In order to try to give his latest young plants in the open (left) a better chance of survival, Tim is experimenting with planting a tube alongside the stem (close-up below) so that water can be supplied closer to the roots. Will it work? Watch this space and we will let you know!



The challenges of regenerating tropical dry forest are exacerbated by the huge thickness of fresh ash covering the older rock and soil in this area. Whilst after many years volcanic ash is a component of rich soil, in its fresh state it does not hold water. In the cleared area, Tim has been trying all sorts of techniques to allow native plants to survive, whether planted as seedlings from MNT's nursery or self-sown. Despite high mortality, Tim has nurtured several young trees. He has recently noticed that some survivors, after growing very slowly for several years, have suddenly grown to become even taller than him (tall young trees on the right of picture). He suspects that their roots have at last reached through the new ash to the soil and old rock below.

Other Wildlife Homes

We hope to report soon on the continuing work of the Cork Hill Reunion Committee. They have a challenge on almost the same scale as Tim's. Because they could not access their village for 20 years, the black-berry – a useful fruit-tree when in its place and managed – could not be managed and has taken over everything including the houses, which are definitely not its place! We look forward to reporting progress in addressing this in future issues.

In future issues, we will feature also new *Adopters of Homes for Wildlife* and their *Wildlife Homes*. Some of these are already recruiting and discussions are in progress on others.



Ann Pienkowski (right) meets representatives of the Cork Hill Reunion Committee (from left: Samantha Duberry, Anne Thomas & Sonya Smith) at Brades Public Library. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Getting things started



The signatories of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of Montserrat, UKOTCF, MNT and the Governor's Office, pictured at the project launch event: (from left) H.E. Governor Andy Pearce, Dr Mike Pienkowski, Mrs Sarita Francis, and Hon. Minister Crenston Buffonge MLA. Photo: Annesta Fergus, Governor's Office

The first stage in getting work restarted was in securing funding. We will not bore readers with an account of the detailed work in making about 10 funding applications to various bodies over the past 5 years. This has taken a great deal of time of UKOTCF and MNT personnel, and that of various proposed partner organisation (which varied as different combinations of project work were included, repeating the same proposal rarely proving successful). We would like to thank also H.E. Governor Andy Pearce, Hon. Minister Crenston Buffonge MLA, former Minister (at the time of the pilot study) Hon. Claude Hogan MLA, and their colleagues and teams, which we think were key to securing the grant this time.

Since hearing of the success of the grant in late August (but not being allowed by the funding body, UK Government, to announce it then), the project partners have been rescheduling (because the timing was 3 months later than the Darwin Initiative had intended), rebudgeting, and planning, so that the project could get off to as good a start as possible. Much of this load was taken by Mrs Sarita Francis of MNT, and Mrs Catherine Wensink of UKOTCF.

Dr Mike & Mrs Ann Pienkowski of UKOTCF, together with Sarita and her colleagues, were able to build on this during



First Project Committee meeting (with some participants on Zoom)



*Undoubtedly one of the new Wildlife Homes: Project Team, MNT Council and the Hon Minister visit the land donated to MNT by the Piper family. Above right: rare picture of Ann and Mike Pienkowski in the same photo. Photos: Montserrat National Trust
Below: Group photo of the visit, with the truck that UKOTCF helped MNT purchase (but UKOTCF's logo has faded more than MNT's). Photo: Ann Pienkowski back on photographer duty*



Mike & Ann's visit to Montserrat in late October and early November. The 9 days between being released from 5 days of quarantine and departure back to UK were exhausting for all, including Catherine in UK. In this time, meetings were held with H.E. The Governor, the Hon. Minister, the *Adopters* of the three existing Wildlife Homes, the lead project partners (several times), and the newly formed project committee. A launch event was held. This and three interviews were broadcast, some on several platforms. Most of the part-time Project Officers were recruited. Site visits were made to five potential new *Wildlife Homes* as well as to two of the existing ones, and Ann and Mike managed, very early one morning, to visit the forest with James 'Scriber' Daley, together with Andy and Pornpun Pearce ("Mr & Mrs Governor"), and take some more photographs of Montserrat orioles which have already appeared on the Governor's Office Facebook page. We enjoyed also another informal dinner, hosted by the Governor, for some of the environmental workers to exchange ideas. These have been a very productive feature of UKOTCF visits to Montserrat.

The UKOTCF team, now back in UK, continue to liaise closely and frequently with the team in Montserrat. Exhaustion is likely to continue for a while as we continue to get this complex but excitingly promising project set up. As we move towards the turn of the year, organisational matters should start to be replaced by operational ones on the ground.



Some prospective new Wildlife Homes: Above: Ann Pienkowski discusses with Mark Couch possibilities at Mark and Kathryn's newly purchased house.

Below: Interesting field, ghaut and sea-cliff habitat at the future Government House. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski



Future issues of this newsletter will detail more. Meanwhile, thanks to all who have helped, or are helping, in any way.



Just before Mike and Ann dashed off to the airport, they accepted the Governor's kind invitation to participate in his regular press conference, which resulted in major press coverage as well as live-streaming. Above, from left: Ms Annesta Fergus chairs; Dr Mike Pienkowski; H.E. Governor Andy Pearce. Below: Press questions from Bennette Roach of The Montserrat Reporter (in front of Governor's desk), Dwight Sampson of D.S. Media (by extinguisher); and lower photo), James White of ZJB (speaking on right, below), and Milykhia McKenzie Weekes of Alliouagana Express News (closest to camera).

Top 2 photos: Ann Pienkowski; lower photo: Governor's Office



Male Montserrat oriole seen on the Scriber-led walk with Mike & Ann Pienkowski and the Governor & Mrs Pearce.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

EcoPlay Montserrat



Architect's impression of completed EcoPlay building and gardens. Image: Dennis Sharp Architects

Earlier this year the Montserrat National Trust acquired the lot of land adjacent to the botanical gardens and on the corner of the Northern Main Road and Olveston Estate Drive, to provide wholesome activities for the young children on the island.

UKOTCF has been delighted to help Montserrat National Trust in this other current project, including by identifying and putting them in contact with *pro bono* architects, Dennis Sharp Architects, by other support and by providing an online donation route for contributions from outside Montserrat (https://www.paypal.com/donate?token=yA9BqroD7FugNCCuLCALT6ubr3zmtHg1htNAPXg9az4qiTxS30evxd_OQuy02S9-6UlwarnfxX09s-5).

Dennis Sharp Architects is a UK-based architectural firm who, from time to time, provide *pro bono* services to NGOs in developing countries. Since the introduction, they have worked collaboratively with MNT to produce the preliminary designs for the EcoPlay children's park.

EcoPlay Montserrat aims to connect the community with its ecological roots through innovative architecture. The striking endemic Montserrat oriole is its inspiration.

The space is connected to the Montserrat National Trust's botanical gardens and adjacent to a school. It will provide facilities for young children under the age of 6 years, as well as older children, adults, families and visitors to the island.

A multi-functional building at the top of the site incorporates disabled facilities, and a room for playing and learning, as well as a small kitchenette. Eco features include naturally ventilated spaces with solar hot water and high levels of daylight to minimize the use of electricity. A roof terrace provides a secure play area for young children and breath-taking views across the tree canopy to the Caribbean Sea.

Young people are actively encouraged to interact with the

building and its natural features. An 'orchid wall' in the learning space will showcase some of the island's unique orchid cultivars, including the endemic Montserrat orchid *Epidendrum montserratense*. The treehouse, climbing wall and musical play are inspired by the island's cultural and natural heritage. At the heart of the scheme lies an amphitheatre for storytelling and events. Growing terraces encourage young people to get their hands dirty and get involved in cultivation of a variety of plants, e.g. healthy food, medicinal plants, endemics.

Help Montserrat National Trust reach their goal. They have already received pledges of about one-third of the funds needed.

Out of the ashes of the tragic volcanic eruption that devastated most of the island and completely obliterated the capital city of Plymouth, the intention is to use EcoPlay to bring hope and opportunities for regeneration and inclusiveness for young people and the wildlife of Montserrat.

A video has been produced of what EcoPlay Montserrat will look like when it is complete; it is available to watch here: <https://www.facebook.com/MontserratNationalTrust/videos/234288075238935>

In addition, Mrs Sarita Francis and Ms Vernaire Bass produced a 'walk-through' video of the site, which gave a real flavour of how the space will be used and its connection to the Trust's work. This can be viewed here: <https://www.facebook.com/MontserratNationalTrust/videos/586966789170930>

The Trust now has established a Committee to bring the project to life. An important part of this is getting out and speaking with groups and individuals about the project. In October, Mrs Francis gave a presentation of the project, as well as some of the other exciting work of the Trust, to the Rotary Club of Montserrat, which was very well received.



Impression of part of the interior of the building

The project was officially launched at the Montserrat National Trust at the end of October. In advance of the launch some of those involved spoke about the project.

Director of Dennis Sharp Architects, Yasmin Shariff said:

“Montserrat EcoPlay brings a very special creative architectural approach that expresses who we are and where we live in a way that local people and visitors can learn from and enjoy – supporting the wellbeing and success of future generations.”

The island’s Governor, H.E. Andrew Pearce, commented,

“Nature, especially in Montserrat, has been a great joy in my and my wife’s lives. This imaginative project launched by the National Trust will, we hope, engage the island’s youngsters and nurture in them the skills and values they will need as the next generation of custodians of our incredible planet. This Children’s EcoPark in Montserrat is a step on that journey for us all.”

Premier of Montserrat Hon Joseph E Farrell MLA also stated:

“EcoPlay contributes directly to Montserrat’s development goal of sustainable use and management of the environment and natural resources. The Government of Montserrat highly commends this initiative, spearheaded by the Montserrat National Trust, to preserve our rich biodiversity and heritage assets in a playful and creative presentation for our young people”

Director of the Montserrat National Trust, Mrs Sarita Francis, said:

“For over 50 years, the MNT has been involved in providing opportunities for residents on island to appreciate and interact with Montserrat’s rich biodiversity. We have always worked with our partners on island and overseas to carry out our mandate of ‘Preserving the Past, Protecting the Present and Enriching the Future’. This Project is about investing in future generations who will have a safe, dynamic space created for learning and playing”.

Mrs Catherine Wensink, Executive Director of UK-based NGO, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, said:

“Many of the future custodians of the extraordinary and unique wildlife found on Montserrat will have some of their first sound, taste, smell, touch experiences of nature at EcoPlay. They will

be given the freedom, in those important early years, to see the joy, inspiration and other benefits humans can gain from time in nature. As a long-term partner, we are delighted again to help Montserrat National Trust in this exciting project and are pleased to welcome others in supporting conservation in UK’s Overseas Territories.”

Caribbean Programmes Manager, Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Luke Jones, said:

“The MNT have been working in collaboration with the local government and international NGOs for decades in their mandate to conserve and protect the valuable heritage of this unique Caribbean island. This facility will provide countless opportunities for new generations of youth to engage and connect with both their natural and cultural heritage. Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust have partnered with MNT in developing novel opportunities and nature connection strategies to ensure youth and the greater community connect with the wildlife around them. This EcoPlay centre will be an excellent asset in ensuring that vision is met.”

This is a fantastic initiative but, assistance is needed to make it a reality.

There are many ways to donate, so check them out below:

ONLINE DONATIONS: bit.ly/Ecoplay

CASH DONATIONS: Visit the Trust at: Montserrat National Trust, Northern Main Road, Olveston, Montserrat.

CHEQUE DONATIONS: We are only able to accept local cheques (Montserrat banks only) and these should be made payable to the Montserrat National Trust.

WIRE TRANSFER DONATIONS: Please send an email to info@montserratnationaltrust.ms for further instructions.

BUILDING MATERIAL DONATIONS: If you would like to donate materials towards the construction of the building, please send an email to info@montserratnationaltrust.ms

Alternatively, you can give us a call on +1 664 491 3086.



Mrs Sarita Francis, Executive Director of Montserrat National Trust, at the site of EcoPlay.

The current phase of *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project (DPLUS155 *Securing Montserrat’s threatened endemic species and natural capital through community-action*) is currently resourced by the following organisations:

