

FORUM NEWS 55

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

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

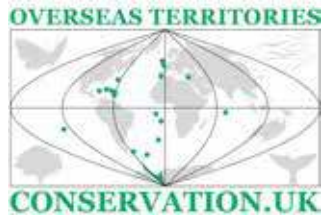


Views of one of the pilot "Wildlife Homes": Mr Dwayne Hixon's at Belham River Mouth. Left: view from Garibaldi Hill, showing the new golf-course area cleared of alien invasive Casuarina. Below left: one of the larger excavated ponds. Right: Two migrant shorebird species using the ponds at Belham River Mouth. These depend



on wetlands to enable fuelling for migration from their northern breeding grounds and survival. Above: the greater yellowlegs can be distinguished from the closely related lesser yellowlegs because its bill is much longer than its head, rather than about the same length. Below: Snipes use their famously enormous bills, in relation to their body-size, to allow them to probe deeply into the mud to detect and capture prey animals. Photos in this article (except as indicated): Dr Mike Pienkowski





UK Overseas Territories
Conservation Forum



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



MNT's Executive Director, Mrs Sarita Francis, hosts the launch.

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, at the time 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/



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

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.

At another of our pilot Wildlife Homes, Tim Orton's challenges in 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 area previously taken over completely by alien invasive plants, 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. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

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



Left: Newly appointed part-time Project Officer (Admin), Mrs Delmaude Ryan, closes the launch with a vote of thanks. Below: part-time Project Officers (Field), Ajhermae White (left) and Elvis Gerald. Lowest: Project Outreach Officer,

Venair Bass of 664Connect Media (left), and Work Experience Student, Antwone Sinclair (lower 4 photos supplied by subjects).



Hon. Crenston C. Buffonge, Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment, welcomes 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 his strong support for the project and delight that it had received a major contribution towards funding from UK Government’s Darwin Initiative.

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.”

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



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



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

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 (see photos earlier in this article).



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



Some prospective new Wildlife Homes: Above: Ann Pienkowski discusses with Mark Couch possibilities at Mark and Kathryn's newly purchased house. Right: Interesting sea-cliff, ghaut and field habitat at the future Government House.



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. Photo: 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



They and the other Project Team members were excited to by the interest from new potential Adopters and their proposed *Wildlife Homes* (see pictures on this page for some of these). There is more information in the current issue (11) of the project newsletter, *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/project-newsletter-1/>).



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. Photo: Ann Pienkowski.



UK Overseas Territories at COP26, Glasgow

The 26th Conference of the Parties (COP), of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was held in Glasgow, Scotland, United Kingdom, from 31 October to 13 November 2021.

It was attended by several governments and representatives of governments of the UK Overseas Territories as well as a youth delegation from the Cayman Islands (and representatives from the Crown Dependencies).

On Saturday, 6 November, to coincide with the event *Our Vision for Healthy Oceans* at COP26 in Glasgow on Nature Day in the UK Pavilion, the UK Overseas Territories agreed the *Overseas Territories Climate Change Pledge* (<https://www.sainthelena.gov.sh/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/United-Kingdom-Overseas-Territories-Climate-Change-Pledge-6-November-2021.pdf>).

A recording of the session can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/X8keWKNrTb0>

Immediately following COP26, several Ministers gave interviews and spoke about new opportunities in their territories.

An interview with the Gibraltar Minister for Education, Heritage, Environment, Energy and Climate Change, Hon. Prof. John Cortés, was broadcast on Gibraltar television outlining some of the discussion and progress being made: <https://www.gbc.gi/news/uk-overseas-territories-climate-change-pledge-aims-protect-fisheries-and-tackle-plastic-pollution>.

Minister for Natural Resources, Labour and Immigration, Honourable Vincent Wheatley announced that the Government of the Virgin Islands will be upscaling the mangrove nursery to a mangrove bank as it seeks to benefit from and participate in the blue-carbon market. In addition, the Government would also “strengthen legislation geared towards the protection of the environment, increase and encourage the use of renewable energy systems, electric cars and energy saving light bulbs”.

Honourable Walter Roban, Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs, Bermuda, announced that Bermuda would be the first Overseas Territory to join the UK Government’s *Blue Shield*



Left to Right: Environment and Conservation Policy Officer, Stephanie Martin of Tristan da Cunha; Parliamentary Secretary Quincia Gumbs-Merie of Anguilla; George Eustice UK Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs Walter Roban of Bermuda; Gibraltar Minister for the Environment and Climate Change, Professor John Cortés; Dejea Lyons (18), one of the founders of Protect our Future, who sat on the Oceans Panel as the student representative for all of the UKOTs; BVI Minister for Natural Resources, Labour and Immigration Honourable Vincent Wheatley.

Programme. Support will be provided by UK Government, as part of its *Blue Belt Programme* to combat illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing, and manage vessel activity and marine development projects, underpinning Bermuda’s existing protected areas management approach. He said: “I am very excited for Bermuda to be participating in the *Blue Shield Programme* and I thank the UK Government for their willingness to share vital technology that will help support the surveillance, protection and management of our marine environment. Bermuda will continue to align itself with the highest standards needed for the protection of our oceans. Following on from our leading participation in the Sargasso Sea Commission, our *Blue Shield* involvement further strengthens Bermuda’s role as custodian of one of the world’s foremost marine ecosystems.”

EcoPlay Park; a place to play and experience nature through art and other practical activities

Montserrat is a trail-blazer in many ways. Despite the challenges that remain some 30 years following the volcanic eruptions, which have devastated the economy in the long-term, they are leading a charge towards sustainability. This includes: providing geothermal energy to the island; rebuilding traditions of ‘back-yard’ farming to reduce imports; and the various approaches in our *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project (see pages 1-4). Montserrat National Trust (MNT) is now developing an exciting initiative to encourage people to spend more time in nature. Around the world, this is being shown to have many benefits to people and the environment.

MNT has identified the need for engagement of young children in its programme. In its recent Strategic Plan discussions with stakeholders, this gap was also highlighted, as it is important to understand how young people interact with nature and how

they can contribute throughout their lives to conservation, job opportunities etc. To this end, land adjacent to the Trust has been identified and acquired to develop an EcoPlay Park facility for children.

The MNT then sought guidance from the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) on the best way to develop the space and were put in contact with Yasmin Shariff of Dennis Sharp Architects.

Dennis Sharp Architects is a UK-based architectural firm who, from time to time, provide *pro bono* services to NGOs in developing countries. Since then, they have worked collaboratively with the MNT to produce the preliminary designs for the EcoPlay Park with input from a dedicated Committee formed within MNT to help provide a steer to the project.



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

The Trust has started its fund raising and the project is expected to cost around EC\$ 850,000 (about £230,000). It will contribute towards well-being and help build an understanding of the importance of conservation to the islands' unique biodiversity. It will allow children, as well as adults and visitors, to get involved in activities like artworks and growing their own vegetables – as well as spending time in nature. There is nothing like this on the island and it is expected to be a centre-piece for conservation efforts, not just in the region, but across the world.

The EcoPlay Park Project has been designed with the following facilities:

- Rooftop terrace: play, exploration, and observation.
- Ground floor: disabled facilities, toilets, kitchenette, classroom for 30 students, orchid growing wall for displaying endemic Montserrat orchids *Epidendrum montserratense*, outdoor terrace with swing-seat, communal table, pond and planting troughs.
- Lower terrace: sand play area for children 2-6 years, climbing wall and exploration area for 7- to 18-year-olds.
- Amphitheatre, seating up to 20 people and designed for storytelling and musical performances.
- Play terrace for musical play and a seesaw for younger children.
- Play terrace for physical play including a trampoline and swings for older children.
- Growing terraces with six raised beds for cultivating herbs and vegetables and medicinal plants. There are composting areas so that children can learn about whole-life cycles and all bio-digestible waste generated on the site is processed in this area.
- Pond to attract wildlife
- An area of natural habitat with a tree-house for observation.

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 early October, UKOTCF participated in the launch of the project, which took place at the MNT offices, with remote links.

Introducing the project to Montserrat's Premier, the Deputy Governor, media teams etc, 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".

Yasmin Shariff, Director of Dennis Sharp Architects, explained the ethos behind the project as "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."

It is possible to support the project by making donations via UKOTCF, which makes use of its PayPal charitable status at: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/appeals/eco-play-montserrat/>

Already about a third of the funding has been achieved but, in order to begin work (which is expected to take no longer than 6 months to complete), more funds are needed.

Bob Conrich

We were very sad to hear from local friends news of the death in July this year of Bob Conrich, a US citizen resident in Anguilla and someone with a long involvement in UKOTCF, which he supported strongly until his death. In addition to his long involvement in Anguilla and its conservation, Bob was interested in and informed about several other UKOTs. Bob provided a most valuable service for conservation, both by his own interventions in several UK Overseas Territories and via what we nick-named the “Bob News Service”, often providing us with the first notice (or spotting things we had missed) on important issues across the UKOTs. His amazing collation of material from the web and his own network of contacts were well informed – and often entertainingly highly opinionated in ways that we could not pass on! Mike and Ann Pienkowski, of UKOTCF, had the pleasure of meeting him in person some years ago during a visit to Anguilla.

A resident of Anguilla for over 25 years, Bob Conrich was a retired member of the National Panel of Arbitrators of the American Arbitration Association, where he specialized in hearing contract law and major construction disputes. He was a pioneer in the utility-scale wind-energy sector and a founding board member of the California Wind Energy Association in the 1970s. He had a background in law, business, construction, public works, government, history, journalism and politics. In this context, Bob did consulting work on issues in the UK Overseas Territories, primarily those in the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

Issues of interest to him included also parliamentary relations, governance, democratic institutions, open government, the environment, education, and corruption. He published several books and articles on these topics. He was a member of the American Public Works Association and served on the board of the Anguilla Archaeological & Historical Society.

Bob was a stalwart conservationist. We will miss him greatly, and have sent our sympathy to his geographically closer friends. UKOTCF officers and Council are hugely touched, honoured and grateful that he should value UKOTCF so highly, as became even clearer from some documents of which his executor advised us.



Bob on the beach and with dog. Photos: John Maton

Bertrand Lettsome 1962-2021

We were very sorry to learn of the death of the [British] Virgin Islands' first Chief Conservation and Fisheries Officer, Bertrand Bennette 'Washasha X' Lettsome, on 26 July 2021 at age 58.

Mike and Ann Pienkowski had first met Bertrand in 1997 when he was Director of Conservation and Fisheries of the British Virgin Islands. Following lobbying by UKOTCF, UKOTs were, until a setback in recent years, included in UK's delegation to international environmental Conferences of Parties (CoPs), and the BVI delegation (including Bertrand, who did much to raise the regional credibility of the UK government delegation) was the first to undertake this role, at the Ramsar Convention CoP 1999. He participated in the 1999 *Breath of Fresh Air* Conference held in London, organised by FCO with support from UKOTCF. He had, very powerfully, read the concluding statement on behalf of the drafting committee on which he sat. The key parts of this had been included in the educational video widely used in the UKOTs and which was re-shown at UKOTCF's online conference in March 2021.

In BVI, Bertrand has been hailed as a leader who brought vision, growth & direction to the Conservation & Fisheries Department (CFD) for many years. He retired from that role in 2011, and CFD has noted that he offered 27 incredible years of environmental stewardship to the Virgin Islands natural and human resources efforts, and “raised the environmental awareness of the people and importantly, decision makers at all levels, about trying to protect and conserve mangroves, sea grass, beaches, coral reefs, fish and other marine life for generations to come.”

He and his deep commitment to real conservation were very respected locally and more widely, and will be missed greatly in BVI and well beyond. Our condolences go to his family, friends and colleagues.



Bertrand Lettsome presents the conclusions of the Breath of Fresh Air conference, London 1999, as featured in the broadcast and circulated educational video based on the conference.

Cross Pollination – new Ascension Island and British Indian Ocean Territory projects collaborating

As many know, the UKOTs hold over 90% of the UK's biodiversity, with many species being found only on the UKOTs. The majority of this unique biodiversity is rich fauna of spectacular endemic invertebrates. Despite this incredible wealth of species on the UKOTs, it is estimated that many species on UKOTs are yet to be discovered – and this is where two new projects, that include invertebrates, are part of the story of discovery. The Ascension Island project (DPLUS134), led by Ascension Island Government Conservation and Fisheries Department (AIGCFD) is focused on the conservation of the island's unique invertebrate fauna, particularly its globally threatened endemics, which includes the giant pseudoscorpion *Garypus titanius* and an endemic genus of scaly crickets. The British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) project, co-led by the BIOT Administration and the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, will map species across Diego Garcia, with special interest on invasive non-native species. It will involve also capacity building around biosecurity.

It is the first time a strategically planned systematic invertebrate survey is being carried out on Ascension Island in the mid-Atlantic, and repeat terrestrial surveys are being carried out on BIOT (DPLUS151). Although superficially these islands are quite different, given the different geographic locations (see map), they do also share a lot of similarities in terms of the remoteness, the latitude and the links with the military. They both have under-recorded fauna and flora – although see examples of the great work on BIOT by Kew (https://biot.gov.io/wp-content/uploads/Kew_BIOT_Field_Visit_Report_Nov_2018.pdf) and ZSL (<https://chagosinformationportal.org/>) and our Darwin projects are looking to fill vital data-gaps through systematic and *ad hoc* species sampling.

Both projects will be undertaking DNA barcoding of the species identified, to help support future capacity with invertebrate identification as well as wider conservation work. Additionally, both projects will be undertaking capacity-building around biosecurity and invasive control, with government, military and civilian staff based on both Ascension Island and Diego Garcia (the inhabited island of BIOT). This includes preventing the arrival



Giant pseudoscorpion Garypus titanius. Photo: © Dr Nicola Weber

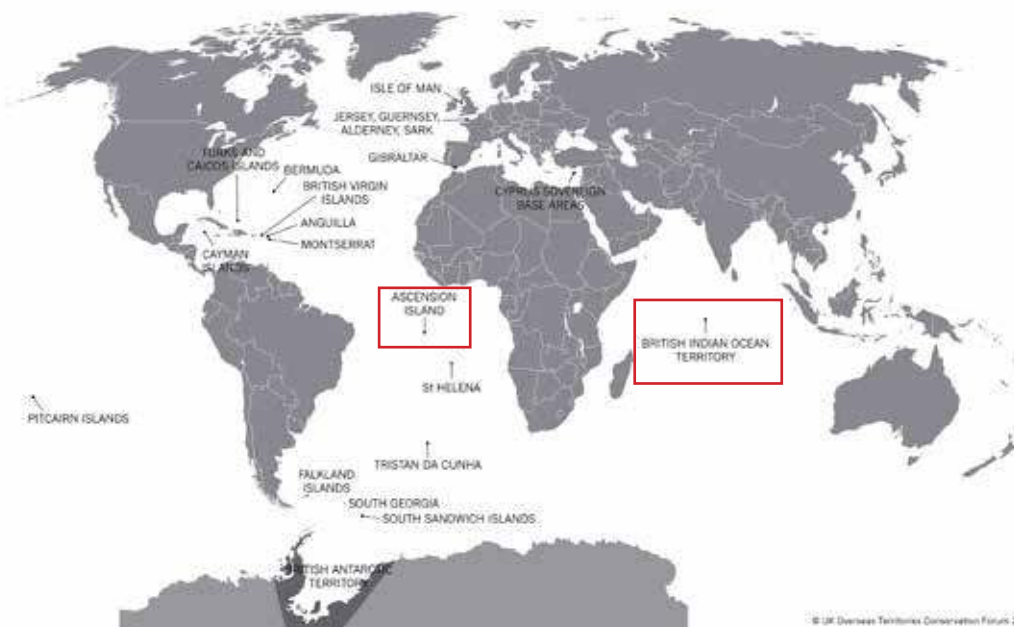
and impacts of invasive non-native species, plus undertaking control of *Pheidole megacephala* the big-headed ant on Ascension Island. Invasive non-native species are species that are introduced outside of their native range by humans, either intentionally or unintentionally. They cause negative impacts to biodiversity (for example, endemic invertebrates), ecosystem services, economy and/or human health or society. They are a major concern globally, especially on islands that are particularly vulnerable to biological invasions.

In order to raise awareness and build capacity, both projects will be carrying out events and developing outreach materials for these communities, on invasives, and also on endemic invertebrates on Ascension Island. Part of this capacity-building and outreach work will include a series of webinars for UKOT audiences that we are planning for 2022. DPLUS151 will also be undertaking plant and habitat structure surveys, amphibian and reptile surveys and also focussing in on ant-scale insect interactions (as this may impact plant communities on Diego Garcia). DPLUS134 will also be carrying out red-listing, embedding endemic species into Ascension Island Government's National Biodiversity Action

Plan and developing conservation action plans to secure these globally important invertebrates.

To help share ideas and methodologies around our planned invertebrate surveys, members of our two projects have met several times to help plan kit and sampling strategies. Both projects are undertaking a range of methods for the terrestrial invertebrate surveys, including suction sampling, malaise traps, pitfall traps and sweep-netting (amongst others). Our projects will work together to share knowledge on species identification –because one of the major challenges from sampling from remote areas is the fact there are not many taxonomic experts in the world who are able to identify the samples! We are really looking forward to

LOCATIONS OF UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES AND CROWN DEPENDENCIES





Across the lagoon at Diego Garcia. Photo: Jodey Peyton

working with experts across our projects to learn more about the biodiversity of these rich and beautiful UKOTs.

If you want to know more about this work, please contact Adam Sharp (DPLUS134) adam.sharp@ascension.gov.ac or Jodey Peyton (DPLUS151) joyt@ceh.ac.uk.

We thank the UK Government's Darwin Initiative for the funding for these two projects. We would like to thank the project team for their contribution to DPLUS151: BIOT Administration,



Ascension landscape. Photo: Vicky Knight

Gibraltar Botanic Gardens, GB Non-native Species Secretariat (UK), SWCA Consultants (Hawai'i), Natural History Museum (UK), University of Florence (Italy), INBO (Belgium), Fera Science (UK), Umweltbundesamt (Austria) and the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology; and the partners for DPLUS134: including AIGCFD, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, the Species Recovery Trust and the Natural History Museum, UK.

More UKOTCF Virtual Tours of UKOTs online

UKOTCF's *Virtual Tours* (a series rather like a slide-show under standard headings for each territory) was started at the request of students in Jersey, one of the Crown Dependencies, during UKOTCF's conference there in 2006. Although it received a little start-up funding, by far the majority of the work has been undertaken by unpaid volunteers – and so progress has inevitably been slow, especially as a great deal of work is required to put together each VT. In 2021, UKOTCF has published three new VTs. Anguilla was drafted by Dr Jamie Males and edited by Ann Pienkowski, and she produced also Gibraltar and Tristan da Cunha. We thank

UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM
Virtual Tours: Tristan da Cunha

Features of Natural Interest
The Atlantic yellow-nosed albatross *Thalassarche chlororhynchos* is known by Tristan Islanders as Molly. This sub-species of one of the smallest albatross species breeds only in the Tristan da Cunha Islands, where it is the most common of the three breeding albatross species.

Introduction
The island group supports 7 endemic land-bird species: 2 rails, 1 thrush and 4 buntings which evolved from South American finches. One rail and 1 bunting went extinct on Tristan before 1900.

Yellow-nosed albatross
© Dr Mike Pienkowski (Features of Natural Interest, 4 of 19 - Slide ref: 1557)

Tristan bunting on inaccessible island
© Dr Mike Pienkowski (Introduction, 6 of 11 - Slide ref: 1548)

Two of the many pages of the Tristan da Cunha virtual tour

the many local people who helped with each tour. All the published VTs can be viewed at http://www.ukotcf.org/1_vTours/intro.cfm.

This means that all UKOTs now have at least a first edition VT, and a few have also had revisions. This applies also to 3 of the Crown Dependencies. The final 2 of these are in progress and will be published in 2022, completing the set of 21 territories.

A flag goes home – UKOTCF links Montserrat and the Falkland Islands in an important exercise in cultural history



HMS Invincible, the flagship of the Falklands task force, with its Harrier strike aircraft, helicopters and crew are welcomed back to Portsmouth after the liberation of the Falkland Islands 1982. Photo: Royal Navy, OGL v1.0 (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Defence_Imagery_-_45149908_-_HMS_Invincible_returning_home.jpg) (<http://NationalArchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/1/>), via Wikimedia Commons). Crown Copyright.

The aircraft carrier *HMS Invincible* was the flagship in the war to liberate the Falklands Islands in 1982. Warships in battle fly a huge flag, the battle ensign, when fighting. This is a tradition maintained since the days of sail when it was dishonourable not to indicate the ship's nationality before firing.

Invincible had 3 battle ensigns, and these were raffled to the crew for good causes, on return to the UK from the Falklands in 1982. Tim Orton, an engineer on *HMS Invincible*, was one of the winners.

Mike and Ann Pienkowski met Tim in Montserrat, where he had settled, in 2016. He was already planning to restore the tropical dry forest – a globally threatened ecosystem – on his land. So he gladly accepted an invitation to become one of the first to join the UKOTCF/Montserrat National Trust project *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* (see pages 1-4).

During one of our visits, Tim explained how he came to possess one of the three battle ensigns of *HMS Invincible*, and asked us to investigate whether some institution in the Falkland Islands would like it.

Through the good offices of UKOTCF's local partner, Falklands Conservation, we contacted the Falkland Islands Museum's Director, Andrea Barlow. She was delighted at being offered the ensign, particularly as they were preparing a special exhibition in 2022, the 40th Anniversary of the Falkland's liberation.

Planned transportation was delayed for 19 months due to Covid-19 restrictions. However, during the visit in October 2021, Tim



Tim Orton, at his home in Montserrat's tropical dry forest, hands the ensign over to Mike Pienkowski for transporting to UK and then the Falklands. Photo (and others on this page): Ann Pienkowski

presented Mike Pienkowski with the ensign.

We made arrangements to take the ensign to the Falkland Islands Government Office in London, to hand over to the Falklands Islands Government Representative, Richard Hyslop. He would then liaise with the Museum to take it to Stanley in time for the special exhibition.



On return to the UK, Mike – with the help of his ex-military and usefully taller son-in-law, Ian Ballard – unfolded this huge flag to check it was still OK. We found enough space for this in one of Peterborough's cemeteries, appropriately in front of the war memorial.

Everyone is very grateful to Tim for generously donating the ensign to the Falkland Islands Museum.

UKOTCF is delighted that it has been able to make this rather unusual link between Montserrat and the Falkland Islands by helping the transfer of the battle ensign.



Mike hands over the ensign to the Falklands Islands Government Representative in London, Richard Hyslop.

UK Government reply to conference recommendations and statement by UKOT/CD Environment Ministers' Council

As agreed at the UKOTCF conference *Staying Connected for Conservation in a Changed World* in March 2021 (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/onlineconference2021/>), the conference conclusions and recommendations, stressing those directed to UK Government, were sent to Lord (Zac) Goldsmith, Minister of State at both Defra and FCDO (see *Forum News 54*: https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ForumNews54_May2021.pdf).

Lord Goldsmith acknowledged on 12 April:

Dear Mike,

Thank you for your letter of 11 March attaching the conclusions and recommendations from the recent UKOTCF conservation practitioners conference. I would also like to pass on my thanks to those who participated and helped support the preparation of the conference.

I am very much appreciative of all the hard work undertaken by the bodies involved in OT conservation and I remain fully committed to continuing to support the OTs in protecting their unique environments and will give full consideration to the conference conclusions and recommendations.

However, as they are to be considered at the forthcoming Environment Ministers' Council meeting it would be prudent to consider any further deliberations the Council may have before the Government considers and responds to these recommendations.

Thank you once again for your letter.

With best wishes,

Zac

The Rt Hon The Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park

The UKOT/CD Environment Ministers' Council meeting was held on 28-29 April 2021, and its closing statement (see pages 39-45 in *Forum News 54*: https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/ForumNews54_May2021.pdf) was sent to Lord Goldsmith.

The UKOT/CD Environment Ministers, who had the conference conclusions and recommendations in front of them at their Council meeting, supported most points and included aspects of many in their own statement.

On 13 August, Minister Goldsmith replied



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Foreign, Commonwealth
& Development Office

The Rt Hon the Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park
Minister of State

Hon Prof John Cortes
Minister for the Environment, Sustainability,
Climate Change, Heritage, Education and Culture
HM Government of Gibraltar

Our ref: PO2021/13982/MK

sabrina.carrara@gibraltar.gov.gi

13 August 2021

Dear John,

Thank you for your letter of 25 May setting out the conclusions of the recent UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council meeting. I note that your statement also picks up on the outputs of the preceding technical conference, "Staying Connected for Conservation in a Changed World", therefore please accept this letter as a response to those recommendations as well. I apologise for the delay in responding.

I am very sorry that communication problems prevented my attendance at your meeting and thank you for providing me with a copy of the agreed closing statement. I would like to reiterate that the Government remains committed to working together with the UKOTs through the provision of both financial and technical support to help protect their unique environments.

Like you, I remain convinced that by working together, the UK and its OTs and Crown Dependencies can make a major contribution towards the solutions to some of the largest challenges humanity faces, and I look forward to working with you and the other OTs and Crown Dependencies in taking this forward. Wherever possible I promote collaborative working and sharing of best practice to maximise benefits across the territories.

The Government has recently announced the commitment of £8 million funding for 31 Darwin Plus projects over the next three years along with the proposed changes to the Darwin Plus funding programme, subject to an approved business case. This will help deliver real environmental benefits on the ground, including the introduction of a funding stream that will be limited to UKOT Governments and UKOT-based NGOs only, to address concerns raised. For all future projects we will be asking applicants to clearly set out the rationale behind their budget, including how much funding will be spent in territory. I would also like to reassure you that those who have actual experience of running such projects are involved in assessing which projects are recommended for funding. We are looking at bringing in additional UKOT expertise to the Darwin Plus Advisory Group that assesses these projects. On the environment projects funded through the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, I can reassure you that the UKOTs are consulted on the proposed funded activities.

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London, SW1P 4DF
www.gov.uk/defra | +44 (0) 3459 335577



www.gov.uk/sustainabledevelopmentgoals

We have listened to the concerns made by the Official Development Assistance-eligible UKOTs about the perceived disadvantages in having to apply for funding from the main Darwin Initiative programme. Following recent discussion with those territories, we will now be taking steps to bring back the Official Development Assistance-eligible UKOTs within the Darwin Plus programme in advance of the next funding round, which will be announced shortly.

With regards to attendance at COP26, I should stress that we want all parts of the British family to contribute to a successful COP26, including the UKOTs with their unique perspective. We are currently developing the policy for those who will be included under the COP26 UK delegation. However, at this stage it is too early to confirm names.

The UK Government remains committed to engaging the UKOTs on the development of UK positions on the post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework, to be adopted under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). Officials have recently updated the UKOTs on the current UK positions and will continue to engage them in the run up to COP15.

As there is continuing uncertainty around the modalities of COP15, due to be held in China in October, I am unable to provide any certainty to the UKOTs about the UK delegation at this stage, but officials will keep you updated.

For those territories that wish to have CBD or other multilateral environment agreements extended to them, officials stand ready to assist.

to Professor John Cortés, as Chair of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers' Council, and copied it to UKOTCF's Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski as a response to the conference conclusions and recommendations. This letter is reproduced to the right.

There are obviously a lot more points in the conference recommendations than the Minister felt able to address in his reply. In addition, the reply is structured more in relation to the UKOT/CD Ministers' comments.

Accordingly, UKOTCF proposes to review the conference recommendations in coming months to assess where there has been progress.

Tackling the threat posed by invasive non-native species continues to be a key priority for the UK and we remain committed to supporting the UKOTs on improving their biosecurity capacity. This is why the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat is continuing to provide technical support to help prevent future incursions and develop management plans for established priority species. We are also continuing to provide financial support for the final stage of the Gough Island Restoration Programme.

I can assure you the UK Government has been working very closely with our UKOTs in the response to stony coral tissue loss disease, including through a collaborative Coral Reef Working Group, which has supported local and regional collaboration between Caribbean OTs. We have recently provided an additional £1.5 million of funding to further develop the strong collaborative approach to managing the disease between the Cayman Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands, and the British Virgin Islands. This funding will also support modelling approaches to inform adaptive management options, as well as knowledge exchange between all Caribbean OTs, and will foster a longer-term partnership to support coral reef resilience to future threats.

The Government recognises the importance of the terrestrial environment. For example, within the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund, we have recently agreed to fund the initial stage of the St Helena Cloud Forest Restoration Project to help restore this rare habitat, benefiting biodiversity whilst also increasing water security for the local population in response to the predicted climate change impact. For the next funding round of Darwin Plus, we will be looking for projects that focus on the terrestrial environment.

On the Blue Belt programme, the UK is committed to supporting all the UKOTs to enhance marine protection and sustainable marine management. We will continue to support those territories which have put in place marine protection, building capacity in those territories for the long-term management of their waters. We are also very keen to work with other territories interested in improving marine protection alongside sustainable marine economies.

Funding of £8 million has been confirmed for the programme for 2021/22, and we have funding available to support the territories not currently in the programme. The team in the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, as well as the programme delivery partners, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science and the Marine Management Organisation, are all very keen to discuss with territory teams what the programme can offer and what the long term objectives are. The Government is working hard to secure funding for the Blue Belt programme to continue in future years.

Nature-based solutions are vital in tackling the threats posed by climate change, which is why the Joint Nature Conservation Committee is working with the Caribbean OTs to increase resilience to natural disasters by demonstrating the monetary and functional value of the natural environment through the use of tools and data to make effective land-use planning decisions, as well as how nature-based solutions can mitigate the impacts of hazards, such as storm surges that are becoming more severe and frequent as a result of climate change.

With regards to Erasmus+, the Turing Scheme is the UK Government's replacement. It is backed by over £110 million and will provide funding for around 35,000 students in universities, colleges and schools to go on overseas placements and exchanges, starting in September. All UKOT organisations were able to apply for funding. Unfortunately, as the Crown Dependencies did not participate in Erasmus+, education providers were not eligible to apply to the Turing Scheme for funding. However, their students can participate in Turing Scheme funded mobilities if they are studying at an eligible UK institution. The UK Government is open to the future participation of the Crown Dependencies in the Turing Scheme, subject to the appropriate financial and legal arrangements being in place.

I understand that access to National Lottery Heritage funding has been a long-running concern, therefore I will write to the Culture Secretary. Despite the UK Government's efforts, the European Commission refused to negotiate a future relationship that included the UKOTs. We sought to change the Commission's position, but it declined to engage.

The UK Government remains unwavering in its commitment to safeguarding the interests of the UKOTs. The impact of the end of the Transition Period on Tristan da Cunha's EU-bound rock lobster exports may have been mitigated by the EU's commitment to unilaterally liberalise tariffs on imported lobsters, following trade talks with the United States. This will depend on the substitutability between lobster and rock lobster, as well as the ability to export rock lobster under the EU tariff rate quota at a lower tariff rate.

We continue to collaborate across the UK Government and work closely with the Falkland Islands, providing technical advice and support to help the Falkland Islands Government best manage the effects of new EU tariffs on its fish exports.

The Crown Dependencies and UKOTs are much-valued parts of the British family and we will continue to do all we can to protect their interests.

Thank you once again for your letter.

With best wishes,



THE RT HON THE LORD GOLDSMITH OF RICHMOND PARK

Cc: Dr Mike Pienkowski, Chair of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum.



South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands' entire land mass to be designated as territorial protected areas.

The Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) announced in June 2021 that it intends to designate the entire 3,800 square kilometre (nearly 1,500 square miles) landmass of the islands as terrestrial protected areas. This is in line with a recommendation made by UKOTCF in 2005 in its review for UK and UKOT/CD Governments of internationally important wetlands (*Review of existing and potential Ramsar sites in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies*. ed. by M W Pienkowski: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/conventions/ramsar-2/>).

GSGSSI said the designation would complement the marine protected area around the islands which is five times larger than the UK and includes a 283,000 square kilometre (109,000 square mile) fully protected reserve where all fishing is banned.

South Georgia's beaches teem with fur and elephant seals and vast colonies of penguins in summer.

The low-lying ice-free areas of the mostly mountainous landscape are home to birds including albatrosses, the world's most southerly songbird (the South Georgia pipit) and, also endemic, South Georgia pintails.



Above: South Georgia pipit; below: a pair of South Georgia pintails.
Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski



The Government says it wants to enhance the protection of the island's incredible wildlife, while allowing visitors to enjoy sustainable trips to the territory.

The extremely remote South Sandwich Islands play host to some of the world's largest penguin colonies.

GSGSSI plans to develop a South Georgia protected area which will focus on guarding the ecosystem and promoting its wildlife, facilitating scientific research, and allowing sustainable visits.

A South Sandwich Islands protected area will recognise their pristine nature, and the absence of non-native species introduced by humans, and strengthen the protection that arises from their inaccessibility, it said.

The Government will draw up management plans in consultation with partners, in preparation for drafting of legislation on the protected areas, while a second phase of the project will identify areas in South Georgia that need additional research, monitoring and management.

The move to further protect the islands' nature comes after the success of a £10 million rat and mice eradication scheme by NGO South Georgia Heritage Trust to protect native birds, which saw South Georgia declared free of the introduced rodents in 2018.

Introduced reindeer have also been removed from the island by a joint GSGSSI/Norwegian project. The island was once one of the major whaling and sealing bases, with many of the bases being Norwegian. There are ongoing programmes to remove non-native plant species.

Mark Belchier, Director of Fisheries and Environment at GSGSSI, said: "The move towards designating South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands terrestrial protected areas (TPAs) will further strengthen the protection offered to one of the world's most iconic biodiversity hotspots, home to millions of seals, seabirds and penguins.

"Increasing the legal protections and clear management objectives for the Territories' landmass complements our existing marine protected areas, whilst facilitating globally significant science alongside sustainable visits to the islands.

"This is a hugely important step forward for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, and for all the wildlife that call this special part of the world home."

The move has been welcomed by conservationists and scientists.

Chief executive of the UK's advisory Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Dr Gemma Harper, said: "The Government of SGSSI has shown real commitment to the protection of species such as albatrosses and petrels through its highly successful marine protected area and the intention to create territory wide terrestrial protected areas."



King penguin colony in front of glacier at Salisbury Plain, South Georgia.
Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

RRS Discovery Expedition to Ascension Island and St Helena

Defra's Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquacultural Science and UK Government's Blue Belt Programme have supplied the following article by Dr Paul Whomersley, Principal Scientific Officer, RRS Discovery Survey. It was written before departure in November 2021.

In November 2021, Blue Belt Programme scientists and key partners depart on a 9000-mile expedition to Ascension Island and St Helena in the South Atlantic Ocean. Currently finalising both the scientific objectives and preparing all of the necessary scientific equipment, the crew will depart Southampton onboard Royal Research Ship (RRS) Discovery on 26 November.

The ship is the fourth vessel to bear the name *Discovery*, the first being the barque-rigged auxiliary steamship built in 1901 which carried Robert Falcon Scott and Ernest Shackleton on their highly successful voyage to the Antarctic. The modern-day RRS *Discovery* is a purpose-built ocean-going research vessel operated by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). RRS *Discovery* is nearly 100m long, 18m wide and weighs 6000 tonnes. Fitted with the most up-to-date high-tech equipment and sensors, RRS *Discovery* is the perfect ship to undertake oceanic exploration in remote and challenging environments.



RRS Discovery. Photo: National Oceanography Centre

Adapting to Covid-19

This expedition was originally conceived early in 2020 when our initial planning began with a scheduled sailing date of March 2021, but we all know what happened next...Fast forward to the present day, and our new sailing date is fast approaching.

Since the initial plans were developed, several things have changed. Due to the potential impacts and risks that Covid-19 could have on an expedition of this type, we will now be sailing from Southampton all the way to Cape Verde, off the west coast of Africa. After refuelling, we will continue our journey to Ascension



The transit track of trip DY143

Island and St Helena.

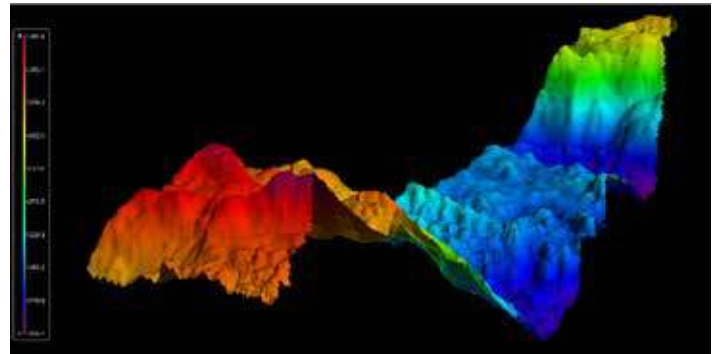
We will spend 10 days around each island, conducting scientific surveys and collecting data. Once completed, we will transit back to Tenerife to disembark. The whole expedition will take approximately 60 days to complete and cover over 9000 km, crossing the equator twice.

There will be 27 scientists onboard, including colleagues from the Governments of both Ascension Island and St Helena. We will also be supported by members of the RRS *Discovery* crew, and technical and engineering staff from National Marine Facilities.

Aims and objectives of the expedition

A main objective of the expedition is to collect new scientific data on how key habitats and species found within the biodiverse and near pristine Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) of both islands function. This increased knowledge will help inform the development of future sustainable management and conservation strategies.

Habitats of interest for the expedition will include previously uncharted hydrothermal vents, the Atlantic mid-ocean ridge and a number of unexplored seamounts. These different habitats support a multitude of important species, including cold water corals, tuna, billfish and sharks. Areas previously surveyed will also be revisited. By doing this, we can collect time-series data which will allow scientists and managers to begin assessing any changes identified and relate them to the effectiveness of existing management strategies.



Mid-Atlantic Ridge (DY100)

Time-series data are particularly key in helping scientists and the Overseas Territories understand the potential impacts of global ocean threats – such as climate change and non-indigenous invasive species – to these marine environments. Building baseline and time-series data will allow us to identify potential changes to these habitats, such as in water temperature or acidity, in the future. Growing this understanding will help Ascension and St Helena, as well as other Territories, to inform the mitigation of these impacts.

The *Discovery* expedition will also be an important opportunity to collect data on compliance and enforcement measures around the islands. For instance, the positional information of other vessels encountered by *Discovery* will be used to validate remote sensed satellite data that is currently used to monitor Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing (IUU) within the EEZs and MPAs of the islands.

During the survey, we're also excited to share relevant knowledge and experiences with colleagues onboard from both Ascension and St Helena. During the 10 days we spend around the respective islands, training and learning opportunities will be given on a range of sampling activities and a suite of data-collection methods.

This knowledge exchange will help to build capacity on island for future research activities.

What equipment do you need for a marine survey?

This expedition has been months in preparation, and we are now in the final stages of our planning. A container of specialised equipment will depart from Lowestoft in mid-November and travel to our departure port of Southampton. Alongside technical equipment, it will include essential items ranging from the personal protective equipment we need, to our supply of mince pies and Christmas chocolate...

The wide variety of equipment we'll use each serve specific purposes which will allow us to fulfil the scientific objectives of the voyage. Specific examples of equipment includes:

- Deep-water cameras which will be deployed to a depth of 3000m and capture footage of deep-water habitats and communities.
- A water sampling rosette (or CTD) which will collect water samples from the water column.
- Mid-water trawls which will catch sample specimens of deep-water fish, octopus, squid and shrimp.
- Corers will be deployed to assess sediment and infaunal community structure of deep-sea sediments.
- Passive acoustic units will be deployed to assess if this approach could be used to monitor for potential IUU fishing activity.



Deep water camera, able to function at a depth of 3000m

A wave glider (an autonomous, unmanned surface vehicle) will also be deployed on missions around the islands to survey pelagic fish abundances by using acoustics to measure the size



An example of BRUVS in action. Photo: Pitcairn Marine Survey 2021

of shoals. Baited Underwater Remote Video Systems (BRUVS) will also be deployed in the surface waters to assess the presence and abundances of large pelagic species, such as sharks and tuna. We will also be mapping the seabed using Multibeam Swath Bathymetry which constructs an image of the seabed using sound.

We hope to keep you all updated on how the expedition is progressing via *Blue Belt Programme* social media channels and our blog series, revealing any exciting discoveries we make along the way and introduce you to the crew and life onboard the ship. Please check back to follow our progress, and send through any questions you may have!

About the Blue Belt Programme

The *Blue Belt Programme* supports the delivery of the UK Government's commitment to enhance marine protection of over four million square kilometres of marine environment across UK Overseas Territories. The *Programme* is a partnership between two agencies of the UK Government, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (Cefas), the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) and seven UK Overseas Territories.

A big thank-you from UKOTCF to Iain and Bill

Two long-serving Council members stood down in 2021, and the remaining Council members and other UKOTCF personnel would like to express their gratitude for their efforts.

Bill Samuel, our Treasurer, kindly delayed his retirement from Council for some months to allow a smooth transition to his successor. In addition to his Treasurer role, Bill had served on the Personnel Committee. This rarely has things to do but, when it does, the issues tend to be major. Bill's wise advice had helped greatly so that all these had been navigated successfully.

Bill had first been in contact with UKOTCF when he was serving as the UK Representative of the Turks and Caicos Government, following earlier roles in TCI. After that, he played the key role in rescuing his family firm, Foyles, the famous London bookshop. Many will have enjoyed his outstanding book of that experience, *An Accidental Bookseller*. Now, Bill has published a sort of prequel on his time in TCI: *An Accidental Envoy*. It is available from www.billsamuel.co.uk.

A retired diplomat of the main stream (but certainly not conventional) also retired from Council, Iain Orr. Iain has kindly agreed to remain as an Advisor and help with links to Parliamentary officials. In addition to his long service on Council, Iain had preceded this by several years as UKOTCF's main contact in FCO, at the Environment, Science and Energy Department, later the Environment Policy Department. At the time, FCO and UKOTCF were the only organisations working routinely on conservation across all UKOTs. It was the time of closest working between UK Government and NGOs on UKOT conservation, sometimes with up to two phone-calls per day. This collaboration was highly productive, and it is a pity that FCO eventually terminated most of that unilaterally a few years later, leading to serious reductions in efficiency and efficacy.

RumPowered Research™ aboard the *Turks & Caicos Explorer II*

A report from the Turks & Caicos Reef Fund:

Explorer Ventures and the *Turks and Caicos Explorer II* crew joined forces with the Turks & Caicos Reef Fund (TCRF) for a truly unique expedition out to East Caicos in the Turks & Caicos Islands (TCI).



On 2 October 2021, *RumPowered Research™* became a reality when the yacht crew and TCRF volunteer divers departed for 6 days at sea, conducting surveys across the reefs of the Atlantic/Caribbean's largest uninhabited island and one of its largest anthropogenically unaffected reefs. During the week-long trip, researchers and volunteers revisited reefs previously surveyed around East Caicos in 2018, serendipitously monitored shortly before the arrival of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) in the TCI. The opportunity presented here, having already collected this comprehensive baseline data, was to see what, if any, are the differences in how SCTLD spreads across these unvisited, comparably healthy reefs. How impactful is the human element in the spread and veracity of this disease? This was a primary output of our expedition. We re-surveyed 10 of 16 sites from 2018, choosing the ones that had the densest coral cover to quantify the impacts of SCTLD on those reefs.



Alongside the re-visits, TCRF's Alizee Zimmermann and TCI Government (TCIG) Fisheries' Richard Archer trained and certified 7 new volunteers in Atlantic Gulf Rapid Reef Assessment (AGRRA) methodologies, increasing the nation's capacity for

conservation and monitoring. TCRF are ever thankful to TCIG Fisheries and Richard for working together for the greater good. Of course, without the volunteers willing to donate their time (and dime) to learning and helping the cause, none of this would be possible. A huge thank-you and congratulations to our new AGRRA-certified Fish and Benthic surveyors! Additionally, a huge, heartfelt thank-you to the team at AGRRA. They operate on a platform of open-sourced information and education, and continue to support our efforts in the TCI, not only through data-analysis and training materials, but also through consistent scientific advice

If that weren't enough work for the week, TCRF chose to use the opportunity afforded by our Scientific Research Permit to treat large, reproductive colonies being afflicted by SCTLD. How could we come all the way out to the Wild, wild East and not try to save as many colonies and genotypes as possible? In between the data-collection and training, we were able to treat individual colonies and tag them for future monitoring.

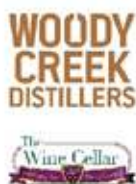


In 6 days:

- 80+ reproductive, large, priority colonies were treated across 3 dive sites at Drum Point, East Caicos.
- 20+ SCTLD roving diver surveys conducted
- 18 dives across 6 key areas on the northern and eastern reefs of East Caicos
- 11 volunteer divers + 6 incredible crew worked together to protect, preserve, & learn
- 10 sites from 2018 research trip were re-visited for comparative analysis.
- 4 volunteer divers were trained in AGRRA Fish surveys
- 3 volunteer divers were trained in AGRRA Benthic surveys (one of whom was a crew member who joined the classes at the last minute and balanced work & training to blast the exam out of the water with a high score!)
- 2 evening presentation sessions, 1 on coral disease and 1 on *Sargassum*
- 1 incredible expedition, 1 team, 1 boat
- *RumPowered Research™* filed as a trademarked name
- Explorer Ventures & TC Reef Fund begin discussions on future expeditions and the creation of 'meaningful tourism' itineraries.



#RUMPOWERED
RESEARCH



All of this was made possible by the incredible sponsors and volunteers. 2021 marks the inaugural *RumPowered Research™* trip and this year's



sponsors were; Woody Creek Distillers, Bambarra Rum, and Mount Gay Rum. We would also like to thank a local micro greens company called Fresh Products TCI for their sponsorship of one of our volunteer spots as well as to those who donated but wish to remain anonymous. Thanks to all of you this expedition was possible!

AGRRA and Ocean Alchemists Ltd. sponsored us through help with training and donation of treatment base, as well as sponsoring one of our volunteer spots and data-analyses capabilities.

Last but not least, Explorer Ventures, thank you. Thank you for believing in the project and sponsoring a large portion of this research trip. TCRF are looking forward to continuing to develop itineraries alongside them. "This was an exceptional opportunity to collect tangible quantitative data on the reefs of

one of the regions most secluded and largest reef tracts. The *T&C Explorer* crew were phenomenal and we're very excited about the idea of creating meaningful tourism itineraries that will be open to the general public" said TCRF's Executive Director, Alizee Zimmermann

It was great to have Operations Manager Nelson Riollano join the expedition. "Explorer Ventures tries to always operate in a responsible manner when it comes to the environment while still providing a service and experience that is safe and enjoyable to our customers. That is why we are always looking to work with the TCI Reef Fund to protect environment in the Turks and Caicos. The *RumPowered Research*™ charter created the opportunity to collectively discuss ways to work together on future projects. It also allowed our crew to learn more about the survey process and the efforts being made to protect the reefs. This valuable knowledge and experience will be shared with our guests week after week."

The [Explorer Ventures Liveaboard Diving Fleet](#) offers 7 destinations including the Red Sea, Maldives, Northeastern Caribbean (Saba/St. Kitts), Turks & Caicos Islands, Galapagos Islands and Indonesia. The *M/V Turks & Caicos Explorer II* also spends 10 weeks in the winter/spring offering snorkelling with Humpback Whales on the Silver Bank, Dominican Republic, under charter to Aquatic Adventures. Explorer Ventures has committed to enhancing sustainable operations and encouraging conservation worldwide through an environmental management policy called [Dive Green](#).

Founded in 2010, the [Turks & Caicos Reef Fund](#) is the only active environmental advocacy organization in the TCI. It is an all volunteer-run organization that provides funding for education, research and conservation programmes to individuals, organizations and agencies that help to preserve and protect the environment of the Turks & Caicos Islands. Our goal is to have at least 85% of all funds raised through voluntary contributions from divers and snorkelers visiting the Turks & Caicos Islands directed to the Fund's programmes. Anyone wishing to donate or assist the TCRF in any way can contact them through their website, www.TCReef.org.

A footnote on SCTLD from Montserrat

While UKOTCF personnel were in Montserrat to launch DPLUS155 project focused on terrestrial conservation via *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*, JNCC kindly invited Ann Pienkowski, in her role as Secretary of UKOTCF's Wider Caribbean Working Group to attend, if she could get away from other duties, any parts of their 5-day workshops on SCTLD, which happened to overlap in time with the UKOTCF visit.

Ann was able to attend the coral disease identification session (which she found quite useful) and the "treatment" session. Unfortunately, the lead presenter strongly discouraged the use of antibiotics, the only approach proven to work (see, e.g. *Forum News 53 & 54*: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/forum-newsvers2/>). Instead, she advised the use of the chlorine-based technique, repeatedly shown to be ineffective - and, remarkably, did not once mention the pioneering work of TC Reef Fund.

Montserrat then became the second UKOT where its government decided not to use the antibiotic treatment. Following JNCC advice, TCI Government had also opted for the non-antibiotic approach. Encouragingly, it has now authorised TC Reef Fund to use the carefully tested specially formulated and effective



antibiotic paste treatment (see above). All other UKOTs (which did not seek advice from UK Government) and other countries are following the scientific evidence and using the specially formulated antibiotic paste.

We shall return to this issue in future.

New Voluntary Conservation Officer for UKOTCF and Montserrat National Trust

We are very pleased to welcome a new Voluntary Conservation Officer, Maddie Heap. She will be helping to set up the project on *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* (DPLUS155) in Montserrat (see pages 1-4).

Maddie graduated with a BSc in Biology from the University of Bristol and completed an MSc in Global Wildlife Health and Conservation, also at the University of Bristol. Her MSc research explored the impacts of different grazing livestock systems on biodiversity.

Maddie's research interests include entomology, plant science and the relationships between plants and animals. She volunteers at the University of Bristol Botanic Gardens and Tortworth Arboretum, and has carried out fieldwork as a research assistant on the Dwarf Mongoose Research Project in South Africa.

She has also been part of the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution public engagement programme, leading and assisting workshops and providing support to young learners in challenging



learning situations with reference to STEM subjects.

Currently she works towards improving the environmental health of Bristol as an Environment Officer.

Darwin Initiative and UKOTs: successful reversal of a poorly thought-out change, and 2021 list of UKOT grants

Work in UKOTs is addressed in a separate part of the Darwin Initiative (Darwin Plus) from foreign countries (Darwin Main). This is both because UK has particular responsibilities in relation to its Overseas Territories and because Darwin Plus resulted from a merger of two pre-existing funds. These were the Overseas Territories Environment Programme of FCO & DFID, and the part of Defra's Darwin Initiative fund ear-marked for UKOTs. This ear-marking was a result of lobbying by UKOTCF, other NGOs and the UKOTs themselves, and was announced by a UK minister at UKOTCF's conference in Cayman in 2009.

A little before this merger, and as a result of the financial crisis of 2008-9, Defra's funding was reduced and it considered itself unable to fund the Darwin Initiative even at its modest level. The funding from DFID was considerably increased but, as a consequence, development objectives were added to the previously biodiversity ones - like the merger, without consultation.

Darwin Plus's creation restored the environmental priority to at least some extent. Darwin Main grants were set against UK's overseas aid budget, to help it meet its legislative commitment to spend 0.7% of its GDP on this. Darwin Plus grants to those UKOTs eligible for internationally defined Overseas Development Aid (ODA) were also charged to the aid budget, to aid reaching this total.

It is not at all clear why this arrangement was changed. However, without consultation with anyone (even UKOT Governors), in 2020 Defra announced that Darwin applications relating to ODA-eligible UKOTs would no longer be considered under the same terms as other UKOTs, but would instead be grouped with foreign countries in Darwin Main. Those making the change had not even thought in advance what should happen to applications that included both types of UKOTs.

Those having to apply to Darwin Main had to include poverty-alleviation targets which was impossible for some (e.g. those relating to islands important for conservation but without inhabitants). For others, it involved lots of extra work for each

application. Fundamentally, it meant that, for the first time since the initiation of FCO's Environment Fund for Overseas Territories (EFOT) in 2001, there was no UK Government Fund dedicated solely to environmental conservation, thereby breaching the Environment Charters of that year drafted by UK Government and agreed with the UKOTs.

The problems were repeatedly pointed out to UK Government by UKOTCF and others, including at UKOTCF's conference in March 2021. Finally, UKOTCF, together with several others including UKOTA, the Governments of St Helena, Montserrat and Tristan da Cunha, RSPB and MNT, wrote to the Defra minister, to whom representations were made too through other routes. The intervention at ministerial level succeeded in getting the decision to move projects in ODA-eligible UKOTs from Darwin Plus to Darwin Main reversed (see also pages 11-12).

Meanwhile, because Darwin Main is funded from the UK aid budget, which had been cut in 2021, decisions on applications relating to these UKOTs had been delayed by 3 months. As a result of the move back into Darwin Plus, those with successful projects were asked to use DPLUS T&Cs and project numbers. The delay also put Darwin Main and Darwin Plus out of phase, so that those returning to Darwin Plus had less than one month to put in new proposals for the next round.

So, a lot of effort had to be exerted to return to the previous better, but still problematic state. We hope that others of the constructive recommendations made by the conference may also be taken up before too long (see <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/ukotcf-online-conference-2021-download-proceedings/>, pages 279-292).

Darwin Initiative grants awarded to UKOT projects in 2021 (resulting from the 2020 applications round)

We list below the successful applications as given on the Darwin Initiative website. Unfortunately, this does not make the UKOT or the lead partner consistently available, but does list one of the

project leaders in some cases. Further information on each grant can be obtained at <https://dplus.darwininitiative.org.uk/project-search/>. For obvious reasons of decision-timing, the grants relating to ODA-eligible UKOTs are the last four on the list.

DPLUS120 - Spatial segregation and bycatch risk of seabirds at South Georgia - Victoria Warwick-Evans

Despite measures to minimise bycatch of South Georgia's globally important populations of seabirds, albatross and petrel populations are still declining, and at different rates across the archipelago. We will use biologging devices to track grey-headed ...

DPLUS122 - Biodiversity discovery and the future of South Georgia's seaweed habitats - Juliet Brodie

Seaweeds constitute a huge proportion of South Georgia's unique and charismatic marine biodiversity but are highly vulnerable to environmental change. To fill critical gaps in baseline knowledge of inshore seaweed-dominated habitats, this project integrat...

DPLUS123 - Fellow: Mrs Elli Tzirkalli -

Pollinators species such as Lepidoptera are threatened by land-use change, invasive non-native species and climate change. The proposed fellowship will enhance the knowledge of pollinators in the Sovereign Base Area of Akrotiri (on Cyprus) and will provid...

DPLUS124 - Fellow: Jakovos Demetriou -

Increasing awareness amongst people of the threat posed by invasive non-native species (INNS) is critical to inform decision-making. Through this fellowship we will increase local knowledge within the SBAs, Cyprus and beyond by providing accessible, user-...

DPLUS125 - Protecting Anguilla's biodiversity by building capacity in invasive plant management -

The project will build capacity in Anguilla to reduce the risk of introduction and spread of invasive plant species. Through a programme of "learning by doing", skill sharing and community involvement five priority invasive plant species will be tackl...

DPLUS126 - Advancing Falklands and region-scale management of globally important whale populations - Andrew Stanworth

Recovering populations of southern right whales and endangered sei whales occur around the Falklands. Informed management decisions are hindered by lack of knowledge of their local and region-wide occurrence. This project uses telemetry to track individu...

DPLUS127 - Improving reef resilience through sustainable fishery management on Diego Garcia -

Significant concerns exist over the sustainability of Diego Garcia's (DG) reef fisheries. We will conduct an urgent impact assessment of DG's two fisheries, quantify their true nature and extent, develop biological reference points and elucidate spawn...

DPLUS128 - Safeguarding Cayman's sister islands from invasive species - Sarah Harvey

The largely undeveloped Sister Islands (Cayman Brac and Little Cayman) are Cayman's environmental flagships, home to the Territory's only Ramsar Site and its most internationally significant wildlife. Invasive Alien Vertebrates (IAV) pose a major

yet ...

DPLUS129 - Understanding Ramsar wetland dynamics for marine conservation and environmental resilience - Katie Medcalf

The project will provide evidence of the dynamic resilience of Caicos Islands' wetlands, and how they support biodiversity, coastal protection, and natural capital. It will evaluate historic change, show how future climate could impact the wetlands, an...

DPLUS130 - Sustainable sargassum management in Anguilla, British Virgin Islands and Montserrat - Ainka Granderson

Sargassum influxes have had increasingly negative ecological and socio-economic impacts on Anguilla, British Virgin Islands and Montserrat since 2011. This project will implement a participatory and multi-level approach to manage sargassum influxes to pro...

DPLUS131 - A "B-Line" to Re-wilding: Anguilla's Pollinators Project - Farah Mukhida

This project takes a "joined up" approach to restore and conserve Anguilla's pollinators and degraded habitats. It joins-up habitats by creating rewilded pollinator pathways (B-lines) and joins-up people through collaborative, community-based action...

DPLUS132 - Monitoring albatrosses using very high resolution satellites and citizen science -

Monitoring the world's threatened albatross species is challenging because of their remote nesting locations, making ground or aerial surveys expensive, infrequent and often incomplete. In this project, we will launch a citizen science campaign, using 3...

DPLUS133 - Streamlining Ascension Island's Marine Turtle Monitoring Programme for long-term sustainability - Sam Weber

Ascension Island supports one of the world's largest green turtle nesting populations that has been monitored using standard methods since the 1970s. However, with exponential increases in nesting activity in recent years, existing monitoring commitment...

DPLUS134 - Repelling the invader: turning the tide on Ascension's Mexican thorn - Diane Baum

Mexican thorn is the most damaging invasive species on Ascension. This project will take a strategic and integrated approach to controlling thorn on Ascension including rigorous assessment of further biocontrol and improved chemical and mechanical treatme...

DPLUS135 - From pseudoscorpions to crickets: securing Ascensions Island's unique invertebrates - Diane Baum

This project will provide the first strategically-planned survey of Ascension's endemic and native terrestrial invertebrates, filling a major knowledge gap for the island's globally-threatened biodiversity. The data generated for endemic species will ...

DPLUS136 - Anguilla Shark Conservation: social acceptance, spatial protection and legislative reform - Peter Richardson

Anguilla Shark Conservation (ASC) is a multidisciplinary project that will increase knowledge of Anguilla's shark populations, their habitats and conservation needs, while developing local ownership of conservation interventions through comprehensive co...

DPLUS137 - Transforming Anguilla's Marine Parks: institutionalising sustainable and collaborative management solutions - Kafi Gumbs

This project adopts a multi-stakeholder approach to establish sustainable management practices for Anguilla's marine park (MP) network by focusing on formalising informal co-management arrangements while identifying and developing sustainable revenue me...

DPLUS138 - Filling knowledge gaps to enable rewilding of the Chagos Archipelago - Peter Carr

The seabirds and corals of the Chagos Archipelago are inextricably linked. Seabirds provide nutrients that help the corals survive but, on some islands, because of the presence of invasive rats that eat seabird eggs and chicks, seabirds have disappeared, ...

DPLUS139 - Improving Falklands marine management effectiveness for marine higher predators - Dr Alastair Baylis

A cornerstone of effective MPA management is how boundaries protect globally significant populations of marine higher predators (MHP; seals, seabirds, cetaceans). DPLUS0071 identified limited MHP tracking data impeded fine-scaling FI Marine Managed Areas ...

DPLUS140 - Assessment and conservation of Cayman Islands' deep-water reefs and fishes -

The Cayman Islands lie adjacent to deep ocean trenches, yet little is known of its marine life below 50m, or whether its deep reefs offer a refuge from climate change. The project will undertake surveys of Cayman seabed habitats down to 2000m and evaluate...

DPLUS141 - Habitat restoration and wise use for Akrotiri and Cape Pyla - Martin Hellicar

The project aims to restore key wildlife habitats within the Cyprus SBAs, focusing on Akrotiri wetlands and native scrub on Cape Pyla (Dhekelia), while also developing eco-tourism opportunities to support the local economy and encourage wise use. On Cape ...

DPLUS142 - Bathymetry, and seafloor habitats within Ascension Island's nearshore waters -

The nearshore habitats of the Ascension Island Marine Protected Area (AI-MPA) comprise high biodiversity and are most at risk from anthropogenic development and climate change. This project will determine the character, distribution, and extent of these k...

DPLUS143 - What goes thump at night: managing bird-strike in South Georgia - Dr Megan Tierney

Seabird population declines on South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI) may be attributed to factors including bird-strike: the collision of birds in flight with vessels resulting in physical injury or death. Currently, however, factors leading to...

DPLUS144 - Protecting South Georgia's terrestrial communities from climate change-invasion synergies -

South Georgia's unique terrestrial ecosystems are vulnerable to invasion by non-native plants and invertebrates that will benefit from climate change. Our project will generate information immediately applicable to conservation management in a warming c...

DPLUS145 - Assessing the mobile fish biodiversity of Bermuda's deep seas - Timothy Noyes

Though the use of innovative methodologies, this project will fill critical knowledge gaps on Bermuda's mobile deep-sea biodiversity and support both the Bermuda and UK Government's strategic biodiversity conservation priorities. The complimentary use...

DPLUS146 - Red Listing can protect OT marine biodiversity -

Antarctic and adjacent faunas are extremely vulnerable to global warming. Marine molluscs represent a diverse group with high commercial and ecological significance, under-represented in conservation planning. We will incorporate climate stressors to IUCN...

DPLUS147 - Collaborative approach to managing coral disease in UK Overseas Territories -

Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease is spreading rapidly across reefs in Caribbean UK Overseas Territories (OTs), threatening biodiversity, tourism, food security, livelihoods and disaster resilience. An urgent priority, this project will develop a strong col...

DPLUS148 - Climate change resilience in Falkland Islands fisheries and marine ecosystems - Dr Paul Brickle

Small nations can mitigate climate change impacts locally. The project will focus on key species that support fisheries and ecosystems. Physiological experiments will establish tolerances of key species. It will establish the first Ecosystem Approach to F...

DPLUS149 - Resolving ecosystem effects of the South Georgia winter krill fishery - Martin Collins

Competition between fisheries and predators is a global conservation issue and mitigating this requires an ecosystem approach to fisheries management. The South Georgia krill fishery is restricted to winter, but information about krill stock dynamics and ...

DPLUS150 - Ecosystem sensitivity and climate vulnerability for MSP in the BVI -

The marine environment can be effectively managed using Marine Spatial Planning (MSP - similar in concept to planning on land). However, extra tools are required to consider the impacts of human activities on marine habitats. This project translates exist...

DPLUS151 - Building knowledge on invasive non-native species in Diego Garcia - Jodey Peyton

Terrestrial biodiversity on Diego Garcia is under-recorded and at risk from invasive non-native species (INNS). Our project surveys amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates and plants, creates distribution- and risk-maps. We will produce an updated inventory o...

DPLUS152 - Coastal Resource Atlas 2021 and Temporal Analysis for the BVI -

Marine habitat maps provide vital information on 'what is where'. Consequently, marine habitat maps are necessary for understanding the distribution of impacts, the planning of sustainable human activities at sea and the placement of protected marine are...

DPLUS153 - Conserving tropical marine ecosystems in TCI through science-based fisheries management - Tara Pelembe

The balance between sustainable tropical marine ecosystems (TME) and Sustainable Small-scale Fisheries (SSSF) is delicate. SSSF require robust evidence-based management, which in TCI is impeded by insufficient fish landings and life history data for stock...

DPLUS154 - Sustainable management planning for St Helena's National Conservation Areas -

St Helena's iconic, and highly endemic, biodiversity is of international importance. The Island's 'nature' National Conservation Areas (NCA), cover 38% of the island, helping protect the 502 endemic, and 38 globally threatened native species. To s...

DPLUS155 - Securing Montserrat's threatened endemic species and natural capital through community-action - Dr Mike Pienkowski

"Adopt a Home for Wildlife" (already successfully piloted) enables Montserratians to undertake informed decisions and actions on land they manage, via training and advice to 100 individuals, so Montserrat's unique wildlife and ecosystems thrive. Liv...

DPLUS156 - Tristan da Cunha solid waste recycling -

Tristan da Cunha is the most remote inhabited island in the world. Solid waste is currently burnt. This puts at risk marine and seabird life around the island. The project would have multiple impacts: by recycling plastics it would reduce the risk of plas...

DPLUS157 - Managing the pathogens threatening St Helena's biodiversity and food security -

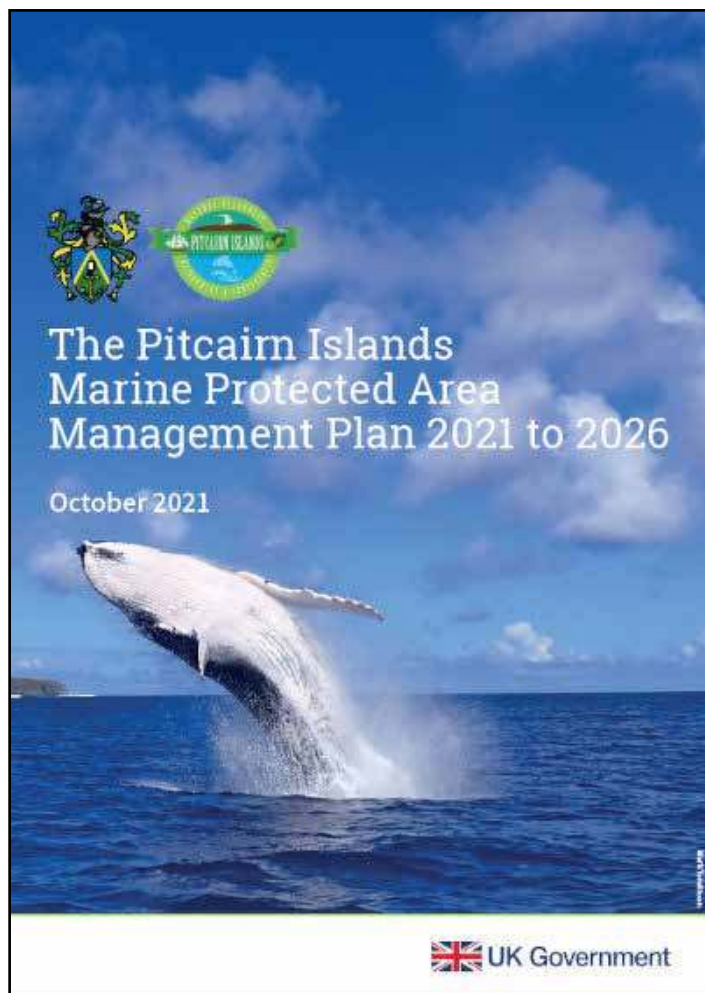
St Helena's endemic trees, insects as well as crops are threatened by unidentified introduced pathogens, or changes to endemic pathogens through climate change. This project will survey and identify pathogens associated with tree death (including nurser...

Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area Management Plan published

The Government of the Pitcairn Islands (<http://www.government.pn/>) published in October 2021 its management plan for the Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area, which can be downloaded:

The Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area Management Plan 2021 to 2026 Non-Technical Summary - October 2021

(pdf - 3.6MB): http://www.government.pn/3783%20Pitcairn%20Exec%20Sum_WEB.pdf



The Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area Management Plan 2021 to 2026 - October 2021 (pdf - 11.3MB): http://www.government.pn/3783%20Pitcairn%20MPAMP_WEB.pdf

Inter-Island Environment Meeting held online in 2021

The Jersey Biodiversity Centre (JBC) and Government of Jersey's Natural Environment team jointly hosted the online meeting this year. The two-day meeting ran from Thursday 21 October to Friday 22 October.

One of the highlights was a presentation on the Channel Islands bat survey, which generated huge volunteer contributions. It had some interesting and surprising results on how many different species of bats utilize the landscape, which may inform future decision making.

Other presentations touched on biological recording, conservation research, citizen science, and the importance of sharing technology, knowledge and expertise. They are available here: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrqtZnD902R9ZIVeYELfGTg>

Participants shared their experiences using the hashtags #IIE2021 #IslandsConnected on social media.

UKOTCF needs your help

UKOTCF's only focus is on helping achieve effective conservation, environmental education and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. This has a great advantage in that we always follow the priorities of the territories for conservation, rather than having to decide whether their priorities or those from other places, such as domestic Britain, need our attention.

It also has disadvantages, too. Organisations with wider involvement have income streams relating to those activities, potentially giving some buffering at times when funding for UKOT conservation is limited. As well as focussing on particular projects requested by territories, much of UKOTCF's work is coordinating across territories and pushing for their interests with UK Government. Indeed, the UK Government funds for UKOT conservation (Environment Fund for Overseas Territories, Overseas Territories Environment Programme, and the Darwin Initiative's earmarking some funding for UKOTs) all resulted in part from UKOTCF working with UK Government and Parliament. The same applies in relation to European Union institutions in the setting up of BEST, following years of lobbying by UKOTCF and its equivalent French and Netherlands umbrella bodies for their territories. All this coordinating work is not amenable to fund-raising, as most funders like to focus on local issues and particular projects.

We know our work is valued. For example, two comments we received from UKOTs recently were: "Thanks so very much for keeping us all informed about what's happening across the territories" and "Great meeting... it shows the value of UKOTCF and its WCWG to bring folk together to tackle issues."

This increased current difficulty in raising funds for non-profit organisations providing wide support for others was brought home to us a couple of years ago. We were shocked when *Arkive* closed down due to lack of funding. This made available still and moving images of wildlife provided by photographers, and was much used by many organisations, including IUCN's Red-List (which now lacks images). This loss of funding was despite the high profile of *Arkive* and its support by names such as Sir David Attenborough.

UKOTCF tries to keep its costs very low. Personnel work from home, absorbing office costs (thanks to understanding spouses!). Council members and advisers are unpaid. The Chairman works full-time for UKOTCF but is unpaid for this core work, and his wife donates almost as much. Currently, four others routinely donate large amounts of time to UKOTCF core roles, and many others donate time to projects. In addition, our few paid personnel donate extra unpaid time.

However, some things still need paying for. This was well recognised by UK Government officials in the early part of this millennium, when they recognised that UKOTCF provided support for UKOT conservation that UK Government might be expected to provide (and is done by some other states with overseas territories) but which it could not and still cannot, despite some increase by its agencies in work in the UKOTs.

However, at the time of the financial crisis, in 2009, UK Government's average annual funding support for UKOT conservation paid via UKOTCF fell by 76%, and never recovered. Although it is said that this financial crisis is now over, this

funding has not been restored – and, in fact fell further, so that the decline in UK Government support via UKOTCF for UKOT conservation declined for several years by 100%.

Of course, UKOTCF has looked, and continues to look, for other sources of funding – but there are limited opportunities in respect of funding for conservation in UKOTs and CDs. We are grateful for a very generous annual donation from a Council member which helped hugely in four recent years before that had to end.

How you can help

Clearly, if you have links with funding institutions, an introduction would be welcome! Please contact Catherine Wensink (cwensink@ukotcf.org) or Mike Pienkowski (m@pienkowski.org). However, even if you do not, there are several ways in which you could help:

Friends of the UK Overseas Territories

Friends was initiated some 20 years ago, at the request of individuals who wished to contribute to UKOTCF's work. If you would like to join, this is easiest to do online at <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/become-a-friend-of-the-ukots/>. The minimum annual contribution remained unchanged at £15 for some 20 years, but larger contributions are welcome, and existing Friends may like to consider an increase. Please note that, if you are a UK tax-payer, UKOTCF can increase the value of your contribution by 25% by reclaiming the tax you have already paid as Gift Aid; the forms include an option for this. There is also a version for corporate supporters.

Other donations

Other donations are probably most easily made via our website (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/donate/>) or contact Catherine (see above).

Donate while you shop - at no cost to yourself

UKOTCF is a charity registered with [easypfundraising.com](https://www.easypfundraising.com). This means that, if you buy from a wide range of traders, a small contribution (at no cost to you) is made to UKOTCF. All you need to do is to register UKOTCF as your chosen charity at [easypfundraising.com/ukotcf](https://www.easypfundraising.com/ukotcf). Then, when you are shopping, start at [easypfundraising.com](https://www.easypfundraising.com) and select your trader through that site, rather than going directly to the trader's site. There are various settings that you can adjust as to whether or not you want to receive emails from easypfundraising.com

Amazon is no longer in that scheme, but has its own, *Amazon Smile*. On your first visit to smile.amazon.co.uk you need to select UKOTCF to receive donations from eligible purchases. Then, when Amazon recognises you, it will offer to transfer you to Amazon Smile when you enter their site. The same choices and prices are on Amazon Smile.



Endemic Montserrat orioles, October 2021; from left: adult male; female; young male.

Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski