



# Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat

## Newsletter 13, September 2022

### Foreword



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

Welcome to the 13th issue of the newsletter about the current joint programme of work coordinated by Montserrat National Trust and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, in conjunction with the Government of Montserrat. The current phase of *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* is now 10 months into its 3-year duration, as reported previously in *Newsletters 11 (November 2021) and 12 (May 2022)*.

During calendar year 2022 and the first 3 months of 2023, another project is running parallel to it, as announced in *Newsletter 12*. This is *From Blue Iguanas to Blue Vervain – Sharing the colonial histories from the UK Overseas Territories*. As reported in this issue, this was launched in Montserrat in July 2022, during a joint programme of work of both projects - to make the whole provide even more for Montserrat than the sum of the parts.

This issue focusses on the work that took place during that intensive period of activities, as well as the continuing work of local project officers, supported by the UKOTCF team in UK and elsewhere.

In the next issue, we hope to focus on some of the individual *Wildlife Homes* and *Adopters* who are participating in the project, introduce some of the other specialists who are helping and reports on their visits expected over coming months, together with items on some of the related work.

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

Please feel free to show or forward these newsletters to others. If anyone sees these and would like to be added to the circulation list, please send your email address to [m@pienkowski.org](mailto:m@pienkowski.org). Earlier issues can be accessed at: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/>. For more information on the project, the main contacts are:

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

**Right: Montserrat galliwasp lizard *Diploglossus montisserranti*, found only on Montserrat. Photo: Beano**  
**Below: Mountain chicken frog *Leptodactylus fallax*, found only on Montserrat and Dominica. This one was photographed in the Centre Hills, before the devastation of the population by the introduced chytrid disease. A major experiment is now trying to re-establish the species in Montserrat. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski**



## Joint project activity in Montserrat in July 2022



*Mrs Sarita Francis, Executive Director of Montserrat National Trust, opens the event.*



*Catherine Wensink outlines the Hidden Histories project. (All photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski & Catherine Wensink)*



A team from UKOTCF and other partners was in Montserrat in July working with local partners.

Activities included a launch (attended by both the Environment Minister Hon. Crenston Buffonge and the Acting Premier, Hon. Dr Samuel Joseph) of the Montserrat aspects of *From Blue Iguanas to Blue Vervain – Sharing the colonial histories from the UK Overseas Territories*, an update and further work on *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*, and some first activities for Montserrat National Trust's re-established kids' group *Monty's Messengers* (itself partly supported by the *Adopt* project), making use of the presence of specialist scientific visitors for work on the other two projects.

On this page and the next are some photos from the first day of public events during the visit, 6th July.

As reported in *SOS Nature of Montserrat 12* (April 2022), UKOTCF, working with other partners, has helped secure a grant from a novel fund for more research work in Montserrat, with funding going to Montserrat National Trust. It is a rare case of securing funding for the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) from research, rather than conservation, funds.

Funding is provided under the United Kingdom Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) as part of the new call: *Hidden Histories of Environmental Science: Acknowledging legacies of race, social injustice and exclusion to inform the future.*

The two lead UKOTs are the contrasting ones of Montserrat and the Cayman Islands. However, some elements will bring in other UKOTs, and we hope the project will open further opportunities for Montserrat and other UKOTs. This collaborative project is led by the UK Centre for Hydrology & Ecology with partners at the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, The Montserrat National Trust, Meise Botanic Garden, Belgium; Leeds Museum and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum.

The background is that British colonialist policies have had, and continue to have, significant social and environmental impacts throughout the UKOTs and former colonies. UKOTs are UK sovereign territory; their citizens are UK citizens. They have played a vital role in the UK's history and cultural development; they support important archaeological and built heritage sites and are home to the most globally important ecosystems and species for which the UK is responsible under international agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity.

This project will focus on the current impacts and the role of colonialism on the UKOTs to understand the historical importance of non-native species in shaping the current cultural and ecological climate on the UKOTs. Through two case studies in Montserrat and the Cayman Islands, the project seeks to address three questions relating to re-discovering hidden knowledge on people, plants and animal species to empower data sharing between the UKOTs and UK.



*Sofie Meeus (left) and Quentin Groom (right) provide an introduction to Bioblitz.*



*Delmaude Ryan, Admin Project Officer (right), describes progress in the Adopt a Home for Wildlife project, with project Communications Officer Vernaire Bass (left) and Mrs Francis.*



*Jodiaz Tye describes the forthcoming work on oral histories*



*Hon. Crenston Buffonge, Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment, welcomes the projects.*



*Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF Chairman, outlines the programme of events over the 2 weeks of the visit.*



*At the end of the event, the new wood-chipper provided by the Adopt a Home for Wildlife project to help make compost, was demonstrated.*

1. What is the role of colonialism in shaping the current perceptions of children and young people in Montserrat of “weeds and bush” known culturally as medicinal plants?
2. What is the role of colonialism in shaping conservation needs and local views on the endemic blue iguana on the Cayman Islands?
3. How are data and materials from the 16 UKOTs represented in overseas museum and herbarium collections, displays and educational materials? How best can they be shared between the UKOTs and UK to ensure equity in data use in informing education, research and nature conservation?

In answering these questions, we seek to address the loss of cultural and ecological heritage in the UKOTs whilst raising awareness of UKOT museum and herbarium collections, highlighting the lack of equity in funding to UKOTs and offering potential solutions to this.

## Funding *EcoPlay*

Montserrat National Trust’s exciting project for children, *EcoPlay* is planned for the land north of the Trust’s botanic gardens and opposite the school and college. UKOTCF helped by finding an architect prepared to work *pro bono*, and continues to assist by providing a route for donations. Whilst donations from Montserrat can be paid directly to MNT, this is difficult for payments from overseas. Accordingly these can be made via *UKOTCF’s website*, where contributions can still be received via PayPal at <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/eco-play-montserrat/>.



*During the launch of the Hidden Histories project, Carol Osborne, Chairperson of the EcoPlay project, receives a cheque from Catherine Wensink for the funds collected so far on this project via UKOTCF’s website. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski*



*Architect’s impression of completed EcoPlay building and gardens. Image: Dennis Sharp.*

# Bioblitz by Monty's Messengers

Before the volcanic disruption of the 1990s/2000s and subsequent challenges, Montserrat National Trust had a section for primary-school-age children, "Monty's Messengers". "Monty" is a popular name for the national bird, the Montserrat oriole, which occurs nowhere else than Montserrat.

MNT is now reinstating Monty's Messengers. UKOTCF is delighted that its joint project with MNT, *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*, has been able to contribute to the costs of this.

In addition, the joint initiative of this project and the *Hidden Histories* one in July provided extra opportunities for the young

people to work alongside international scientists. This was, in part, as a junior "bioblitz" on 6th July. (See later in this issue for more on bioblitzes.)

The enthusiasm shown by these junior citizen scientists was truly inspiring. And we would like to commend to the work of MNT's teenage interns and cadets for their great help to the visiting scientists and MNT staff in guiding, helping and encouraging the Monty's Messengers. Definitely, the future of environmental science and conservation in Montserrat looks very promising!

On this and the next page are photos of the junior bioblitz.



Monty's Messengers line up, keen for the late afternoon event.



Many keen to answer questions from Vernaire Bass. All photos in this article: Dr Mike Pienkowski. All parents gave permission to MNT for images to be taken and used for wider promotion of the initiative.



Vernaire with 2 of the 3 prize-winners in the competition to design a logo for Monty's Messengers.



A group of Monty's Messengers learn to prepare plants for herbarium collections, with Quentin Groom and Sofie Meeus.



4- to 7-year-olds make patterned cloths by pounding with flat stone leaves between 2 layers – the traditional Japanese tatakizomé (= hammer dye).





Above and below: Monty's Messengers work with David Clements to hunt insects and then view them under a microscope.



## SOS Nature of Montserrat team

In the previous two *Newsletters*, we introduced many of the local and visiting members of the projects. Here we give brief profiles of some of the scientific specialists contributing to the work.

### Vicky Wilkins



Vicky Wilkins is an international invertebrate conservation specialist, who is partnering with the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project via her role at the Species Recovery Trust. Vicky has a lengthy experience of UKOT invertebrate conservation, having been involved in St Helena invertebrate conservation since 2012, as well as currently supporting an invertebrate project on Ascension. She was involved in building invertebrate conservation on St Helena and now supports the invertebrate team on island and recently edited the island's invertebrate guide.

She is co-chair of the IUCN's (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) Mid-Atlantic Islands Invertebrate Specialist Group, where she advises on invertebrate conservation planning and projects on a wide range of islands and different invertebrate groups.

There has been fantastic specialist focused invertebrate work done on Montserrat, particularly on beetles, butterflies and flies but there are still huge gaps in knowledge on many invertebrate groups; for example very little is known about spiders, moths, true bugs *etc.* It is very likely that there are invertebrate species new to science to still be discovered on the island.

Vicky helped to develop the survey methodologies for the project and identified invertebrate equipment needed for Montserrat National Trust. She is currently working on collating the invertebrate species list for the island, which includes over a hundred endemic invertebrates. She is also providing feedback on invertebrate surveys and management plans for the project's sites.

## David Clements



*Vicky recruited David Clements to help with the invertebrate work on Montserrat as part of the Adopt a Home for Wildlife project. David writes:*

I have had a life-long interest in insects and entomology, which began at a very early age. I gained a degree in Zoology in the 1980s and, after a short period working in a museum entomology department, I worked for six years as an entomologist and zoologist for the UK's National Trust, surveying and assessing NT properties all over England and Wales. I subsequently moved into ecological consultancy, and since 1996 I've owned and managed my own consultancy practice offering a wide range of ecological and protected species survey and assessment services in the UK. This work has included many hundreds of insect and invertebrate projects, as well as strategic and applied research for public bodies and commercial clients. These include local, regional and national biodiversity action and management plans, Environmental Impact Assessment contributions, wildlife site designation strategies and conservation plans, as well as developing often large-scale mitigation strategies for large development and infrastructure projects. At the same time, I have maintained an active research profile in entomological taxonomy and biological recording. I run two of the UK's specialist national insect recording schemes, for big-headed flies (Conopidae) and picture-wing flies (Ulidiidae and related families), respectively. Flies (Diptera) are my main speciality and my first love! I have carried out entomological surveys in subarctic, temperate, subtropical and tropical environments in many parts of the world, using a very wide range of different survey techniques, often inventing new methods to sample hard-to-get-at species. In 2019 I obtained a Master's degree in ecology and conservation management, with a thesis which looked at the springtails (Collembola) of former coal-mining sites. I am now semi-retired from consultancy work and currently looking for new and exciting challenges - like coming to Montserrat!

*Our two other scientists new to Montserrat come via the project From Blue Iguanas to Blue Vervain – Sharing the colonial histories from the UK Overseas Territories:*

## Dr Quentin Groom



*Quentin writes:*

I work at Meise Botanic Garden in Belgium, though I am originally from the UK. I began my career with a degree in Botany from the University of Reading, followed by a PhD in plant physiology at Essex University. I then did various postdoctoral research jobs in the USA and UK, until I left academia for 7 years while I retrained and worked in the IT

industry, mostly programming and fixing software. Eventually I followed my wife's career to Belgium where I found a job with Meise Botanic Garden. At first this was a part-time job, but little-by-little I have worked my way up and now I run a small biodiversity informatics team in the Garden.

For people who don't know, biodiversity informatics is all about getting data on biodiversity to the people who need it, wherever they are based, and whether they are scientists, conservationists, policy makers or the general public. It is about making the data easier to find and easier to use, but also about digitising data that have traditionally only been available on paper.

I am passionate about botany and informatics and feel very privileged to have spent my career doing something I love.

## Sofie Meeus



*Sofie writes:*

I work at the interface of biodiversity research and informatics. My background is in evolutionary biology where I studied plant breeding systems and how they evolved. For this I used population genetics in different populations of plants across Europe. Later I started working on the impact of climate change on tropical trees,

trying to model what effect high carbon dioxide levels will have on the water use efficiency of plants.

I've done this work at universities in Belgium and Scotland, but for the past five years I've worked at Meise Botanic Garden, which funnily enough is very close to where I grew up.

In the Garden I work as the data steward, which means I help people digitise, standardise and publish their scientific data to global sharing repositories, such as the Global Biodiversity

Facility. I'm also interested in citizen science and how we can encourage the general public to learn more about our natural world and help us protect it.

## Entomology & Invertebrate Science on Montserrat – UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Visit, 4-15 July 2022

by David Clements

I was lucky enough to be asked to accompany the recent visit by the UKOTCF to the Caribbean island of Montserrat to contribute my skills as an entomologist and invertebrate scientist to the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* (AHFW) and *Hidden Histories* projects being run locally by the Montserrat National Trust (MNT). As a late-career ecologist/entomologist with a lifetime of fieldwork and curatorial experience, I was tasked with helping to develop the skills-base and build on-island capacity to carry out invertebrate surveys, identification and conservation work in the future. Although my professional career has primarily been in ecological consultancy, my first passion has always been for bugs of one kind or another, with many seasons of fieldwork, taxonomic and museum experience both in the UK and abroad. This was to be my first experience of Montserrat, however, as part of a team which also included botanists Dr Quentin Groom and Sofie Meeus, as well as bird-man and all-rounder Dr Mike Pienkowski and the conservation and sustainability specialist Catherine Wensink, and it did not disappoint.

Entomology and invertebrate science on Montserrat – the word ‘entomology’ technically only refers to insects but, for the purposes of brevity, I’m going to use it to cover all invertebrates as there doesn’t currently seem to be a single word which covers them all<sup>1</sup> - is still at a relatively early stage of knowledge and development. Historically the island has been somewhat overlooked by entomologists, although some excellent work has been carried out in recent years by Dr Mike Ivie and colleagues at Montana State University in the US, particularly in the high forests of the Central Hills area, as part of their studies of the wider Lesser Antilles archipelago, and in the 2016-18 UKOTCF project which piloted AHFW.



*Surveying aquatic invertebrates with local colleagues at Belham River Mouth*

Nevertheless, knowledge of the invertebrate fauna of the island as a whole is still very patchy with even such normally well-researched groups, such as the butterflies, moths and dragonflies (Lepidoptera and Odonata) being at quite an early and incomplete state of understanding. In keeping with remote and isolated volcanic islands the world over, there is a high probability of endemic species on Montserrat, especially in the relatively unmodified cloud forest areas which persist on the hill ridges and mountain-tops, and it is therefore important not just for the conservation priorities of the island itself but for the wider world as a whole that the invertebrate fauna is thoroughly audited and understood: you cannot conserve that which is not known to exist, and many of the species waiting to be discovered may turn out to be entirely confined to Montserrat, or to just a few islands of the Lesser Antilles system.

Entomological skills and capacity on the island are currently at an early stage of development, although there is no shortage of enthusiasm or ability. Key local specialists such as Delmaude Ryan of the MNT and Ajhermae White of the Montserrat department of the environment (MAHLE) – both now project officers in AHFW – have made good inroads in studying the fauna, despite being somewhat remote from technical support and resources. It is nevertheless to local scientists such as these, and others like them, that we should be looking in the future for specialism and expertise in the study of insects and invertebrates on the island, rather than having to rely on visiting specialists from off-island as has so often happened in the past. The 2022 visit was therefore intended to comprise an early step in helping to build and develop this on-island expertise.

The 2022 ‘tour’ was pretty intensive. In amongst visits to, and surveys of, a dozen or so of the AHFW sites, whose owners have pledged to undertake conservation management measures



*Typical entomologist posture! Head in the net to catch those tiny flies... All photos in this article: David & Anne Clements*

<sup>1</sup> ‘Aspondylogy’ perhaps? My classical Greek doesn’t really run that far!



*Explaining different invertebrate trapping methods during a training exercise for local staff*

designed to optimise them for native plants and fauna, there were also numerous training and capacity-building events. On the entomology side these were to include two ‘bioblitzes’, one for primary school children and one for adults and older students, an invertebrate field survey and identification training day, a higher education evening and a public lecture, although the latter had to be abandoned due to an incidence of covid amongst the study group.

There was also an interview on the ‘MAHLE Vibes’ strand of the local radio station ZJB and liaison with various local organisations and individuals with an interest in the subject. Through the good offices of MNT’s Executive Director Mrs Sarita Francis, and Mrs Ernestine Corbett and Stephen Mendes of MAHLE, I was also able to obtain a permit to collect invertebrates on the island while I was there, and so spent any free time sampling



*With the moth-trap on the veranda at Baker Hill*

in as many habitats as I could visit, collecting insects and other invertebrates for subsequent identification and study.

Although the UKOTCF visit lasted only two weeks, I had arranged to stay on for a further two weeks afterwards in order to permit some more relaxed investigation of the island and visits to key sites of interest. Part of the UKOTCF visit had included the delivery of basic field survey equipment to MNT such as sweep-nets, collecting tubes and other gear, which happily included a light-trap for surveying moths and other nocturnal insects. I was able to operate this over several nights at my accommodation, despite some high winds and heavy rains at night. Even in that short period, I detected a series of magnificent species such as the Leafy Sphinx *Xylophanes chiron*, the Tersi Sphinx *Xylophanes tersa* and the Tropical Wasp-moth *Horama panthalon*, all of which were hitherto unrecorded on the island. At present these and other finds on the island are being collated photographically using the iNaturalist app (<https://www.inaturalist.org/>), pending the hoped-for creation of a physical natural history collection on the island at some point in the future.



*Two species new to Montserrat. Above: The Leafy Sphinx moth; below: The Tropical Wasp-moth*



In the meantime, along with Ajhermae White, I co-wrote a simple pictorial guide to the known butterflies of the island for internal recording use by MNT & MAHLE and started work on a photographic database of the moths – a much larger task, and one which will doubtless need to grow extensively as the studies progress. There is also a simple pictorial guide to the known dragonflies and damselflies in the offing although, as with the butterflies and moths, there is a high probability that this will require frequent updating and expansion in the years to come. The collected material which I now have includes a large number





*Mesic and high elevation cloud forest on Lawyer's Mountain*

flies of the family Dolichopodidae by Justin Runyon (2020: <https://doi.org/10.3897/zookeys.966.55192>) detected some 63 species, all of which were newly recorded on the island. These include eleven species which were entirely new to science, and six which are thought to be endemic. Clearly, there is much work still to do!

Alongside my work with the UKOTCF visit, I was also able to soak up the atmosphere and landscape of Montserrat itself. This is truly a most beautiful and wild place, with a comparatively small human population and still with very little significant development, with some two-thirds of the island now effectively an impromptu nature reserve following the catastrophic eruption of the Soufrière Hills volcano in 1997. The smoking remnants of this are still all too visible from the state-of-the-art Montserrat Volcano Observatory. Wildlife has had the chance to reassert itself over much of the island in relative peace and isolation. Whilst there are undoubtedly conservation issues relating to matters such as invasive non-native species, which include all of the domestic and stock animals which had to be abandoned at the time of the eruption and which now range freely across the volcano exclusion zone, this is still a place which doubtless conceals many wonders still to be discovered. I can't wait to go back!

of bee and wasp species (Hymenoptera), as well as several hundred small true-flies (Diptera), a group in which I have a special interest. It is quite likely that these may include hitherto undetected – or perhaps even undescribed – species, as many of them appear to be in relatively obscure and complex families such as the Asteiidae, Ephydriidae and Chamaemyiidae. As an indication, a recently published study of the island's long-legged

## A herbarium is not just a collection of dead plants

by Sofie Meeus and Quentin Groom

While a herbarium is a collection of dead plants, these are collected and preserved with the intention of creating a resource that people can use to help them identify other plants and learn what features are useful in identification. However, there are lots of uses for a herbarium, at least 72, apparently: <http://www.virtualherbarium.org/vh/100usesaspt.html>.

Herbaria contain plants that are dried and pressed flat, then mounted on paper with labels that describe their name, and the details of who collected them, when and where. But herbaria can also hold seeds and fruits in containers, basically anything that might be useful to identify plants or to be used in research.

This year we have been working on the [From Blue Iguanas to Blue Vervain](#) project with the Montserrat National Trust and the Department of Environment to see how Montserrat could build its own herbarium and use it to support conservation and biodiversity monitoring on the island. One of the important themes of the herbarium will be a reference collection to the herbs and bush used in traditional medicine on the island.

As part of the project we ran a workshop on herbarium management and specimen mounting at Montserrat National Trust. Together, we mounted about 50 specimens. These included a variety of species. Some were native plants, such as *Canella winterana* (pepper cinnamon). Some were medicinal plants, such as *Stachytarpheta jamaicensis* (blue vervain), while others were weeds, such as *Synedrella nodiflora* (nodeweed). Perhaps one day Montserrat's herbarium will hold specimens of all of the plants that occur, and hopefully it can be used as much as possible to support conservation efforts. Montserrat does not have a flora to help people identify plants, so meanwhile the herbarium can really help, but perhaps one day the herbarium can help someone write a flora of the island.

*Right: Sofie demonstrates techniques, and lower right: mounted specimens. Photos: Catherine Wensink. Below: Jodiaz and Anya mounting specimens. Photo: Sarita Francis*



# My Experience during the Herbarium and BioBlitz Training

Text and photos by Alecia Allison, Student Intern, Montserrat National Trust



Me, at the beginning of the BioBlitz and introducing the iNaturalist app.

The BioBlitz was quite the experience. Over the short course of time, I managed to grasp an understanding of creating herbarium specimens. This aspect of the workshop has allowed me to strengthen my ability to distinguish different plants via their looks, smell, and various other details. Keen attention was paid to the processing of herbarium specimens whereby plant samples are collected, dried, and mounted with labels. This is an integral aspect as it serves as a guide within the field of research.

Another intriguing aspect of the BioBlitz was the entomology segment. It was fascinating to learn about the different types of insects and their various roles within the ecosystem. The workshop has inspired me to delve deeper into the ecological field. As the Montserrat National Trust, alongside its various other stakeholders, mould me into a well-rounded conservationist, I will do my best in striving for excellence within this arena of work.

The incorporation of apps in the field is pertinent to reach specific goals. Considering this, the iNaturalist app was utilized to aid in the identification of plants, moreover easing the process of identification. In conclusion, the BioBlitz was a stepping-stone for me as it gave me a broader and more independent view of a career with the field of ecology.



Above: Herbarium training with us dehydrating plants specimens. Below: An image of a mountain croton plant which I have mounted.



Catching invertebrate specimens in the BioBlitz.



# My Experience as a Visiting Intern at Montserrat National Trust during August 2022

by **Renee Brade** (a young Montserratian student studying in the UK and back in Montserrat on vacation)

I was heartily welcomed to the Montserrat National Trust. I was asked about my career choices and was given tasks that I would enjoy and align with my career path.

I was most interested in the wildlife conservation aspect; so I got an opportunity to work with some of the partners and on some of the projects of the Trust that got me involved in birding, vegetation surveys, propagation, researching medicinal plants, a Children Society Summer School BioBlitz and working with turtles and mountain chickens.

## Birding

While working with the birding team from the Department of the Environment, I discovered that there are more birds in Montserrat than I had originally expected. I observed smooth-billed anis, brown pelicans, great egrets, frigate-birds and even migratory shorebirds, like semi-palpatid sandpipers and spotted sandpipers. I learnt that birds directly reflect the health of the habitat they are living in. For example, if during a series of observations, we notice fewer and fewer purple-throated Caribs, it could mean that there is a problem with nectar flowering trees.



*Renee with Cavaughn observing Sandwich terns.  
Photos: Ajhermae White*



## Vegetation survey

Vegetation surveys are very important as they highlight vegetation types. They also help us to understand their differences. It also makes us more aware of the wide range of

biodiversity in Montserrat and where the different elements can be found. While doing vegetation surveys as part of the MNT and UKOTCF *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project, we used random points at the Adopter's plot which are generated by QGIS, to organise the observations. We then measure a 5-metre radius and take note of all the vegetation that we see in that area. We then categorise them into ground cover, shrubs or trees and estimate their coverage. We go on to research and record their Latin (scientific) and local names as far as possible. The skills gained during these surveys will be used in habitat surveys in one of my university courses.



*Renee with Project Officer Ajhermae, measuring the 5-metre radius for a vegetation survey at an Adopter's Wildlife Home.*

*Photo: Delmaude Ryan*

## Plant propagation

In order to propagate vegetation, we gathered cuttings of various types of plants, like lantanas, pentos, and the kangaroo ferns. We then carried them back to the propagation unit where we learnt how properly to cut the plants. We prepared the cuttings by trimming them near the nodes so that they would be able to sprout and grow again. The appropriate amount of soil was then used for repotting of the plants. Then they are placed under the irrigation



system to be watered. When the plants have grown to a suitable size, they would be removed from the propagation unit and placed in the nursery where they

*Propagating plants at the Propagation Unit. Photo: Delmaude Ryan*



Working on turtles, which come ashore at night to lay eggs, Photo: Renee Brade

- Measured the length and the width of the turtle
- Estimated the number of eggs laid
- Put a post to make the public aware that there is a turtle nesting

### Mountain Chicken frogs

The Mountain Chicken recovery programme included:

- Feeding insects a selection of pumpkin, spinach, chickpeas and potatoes
- Cleaning insect containers
- Feeding the insects to the Mountain Chickens
- Taking a Headcount of the Mountain Chickens; and
- Helping maintain their enclosure.

can be sold to the public or provided to Adopters in *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*. The knowledge that I gained from this experience would be utilised to better any hobbies or interests that I may have in the future.

### Hidden Histories Project

For the *Hidden Histories* project, we identified and learnt about medicinal plants, including the 15 plants selected for the project. This project was launched to gain and preserve the local knowledge about medicinal plants, such as how to use and prepare them.

I also had the opportunity to learn how to mount a collection of dried plant species on a sheet of paper for the herbarium which would be used for both educational and research purposes in the future.

### Turtles

Turtle conservation work with Exeter University included:

- Flipper tagging
- Pit tagging
- Nest temperature monitoring
- Waiting on the beach
- Beach surveys for turtle activity

My overall experience with the Montserrat National Trust was very informative and hands-on. It helped me prepare for the working world and with the university. I was also able to make friends and useful connections, which I can use along the way. Most of all I had fun during the entire experience.



Mountain chickens during the evening feed. Photos: Renee Brade.

## A bit more on *Hidden Histories*

Some of the above articles mention those aspects of the *Hidden Histories* project concerned with recording traditional knowledge. Another aspect of this project is being led by UKOTCF. This is to develop a *Framework on Best Practice in environmental and other research in UK Overseas Territories*. This aims to achieve better involvement of UKOTs in UK bodies' decision-making about funding environmental work and using results. A series of

wide consultations across UKOT officials and NGOs culminated in an online workshop on 26<sup>th</sup> July. From Montserrat, both Sarita Francis and Vernaire Bass gave presentations at that.

The resulting Framework can be accessed at:

<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/framework-of-best-practice.pdf>

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

Partners in earlier phases of the Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat programme included some of those at the top of page 1, plus:

