

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Annual Report April 2021 - March 2022

Report of Council

Overview

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum exists to promote awareness and conservation of the rich and unique biodiversity, natural environment and related heritage across the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (UKOTs and CDs). It is the only body devoted solely to this. For well over 30 years, it has worked in partnership with a wide network of bodies in the UK and UKOTs/CDs, many of which are Forum member and associate organisations, as well as individuals with relevant expertise. We work with some of the most vibrant communities with some of the most unique and precious biodiversity in the world. With a small team, made up of some paid staff and many volunteers, UKOTCF fulfils a wide variety of roles in support of the tireless work of conservation bodies in the UKOTs and CDs.

This year, we have started two exciting new projects in addition to our regular activities and ongoing work. They make best use of UKOTCF's knowledge and experience, network of conservation practitioners and their long-established working relationships with local communities in the UKOTs. Cross-over between these projects allows us to make best use of available resources and work more efficiently. Funding nature conservation work is never easy, but we have had some modest success this year. As such, we have set some ambitious targets for our partly externally funded project work, which we will be implementing over the next few years. *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* has created its target 10 sites for nature restoration/recovery and created a Kids Club within the Montserrat National Trust to lay the foundations for future conservation on the island. The *Blue Iguana to Blue Vervain* project has developed plant lists for Montserrat in order to document traditional and medicinal uses to ensure knowledge is not lost and has developed education material for use in Cayman on invasive species.

In addition to our work at grass-roots level, we are also bringing people together at high-level level meetings. The UKOT & CD Environment Ministers' Council meetings, for which UKOTCF acts as secretariat, took place at the end of April. It was attended by over 20 Ministers, equivalents and officials. It helped build up some momentum in advance of UNFCCC COP26 in Glasgow, which took place in November.

Future conservationists (and researchers) also need to be supported and so we continue to build and maintain relationships with new and existing research and education institutes. A bursary has been established with the Jersey International Centre for Advanced Studies (JICAS) and is being used this year by a student carrying out a research project in a Caribbean UKOT.

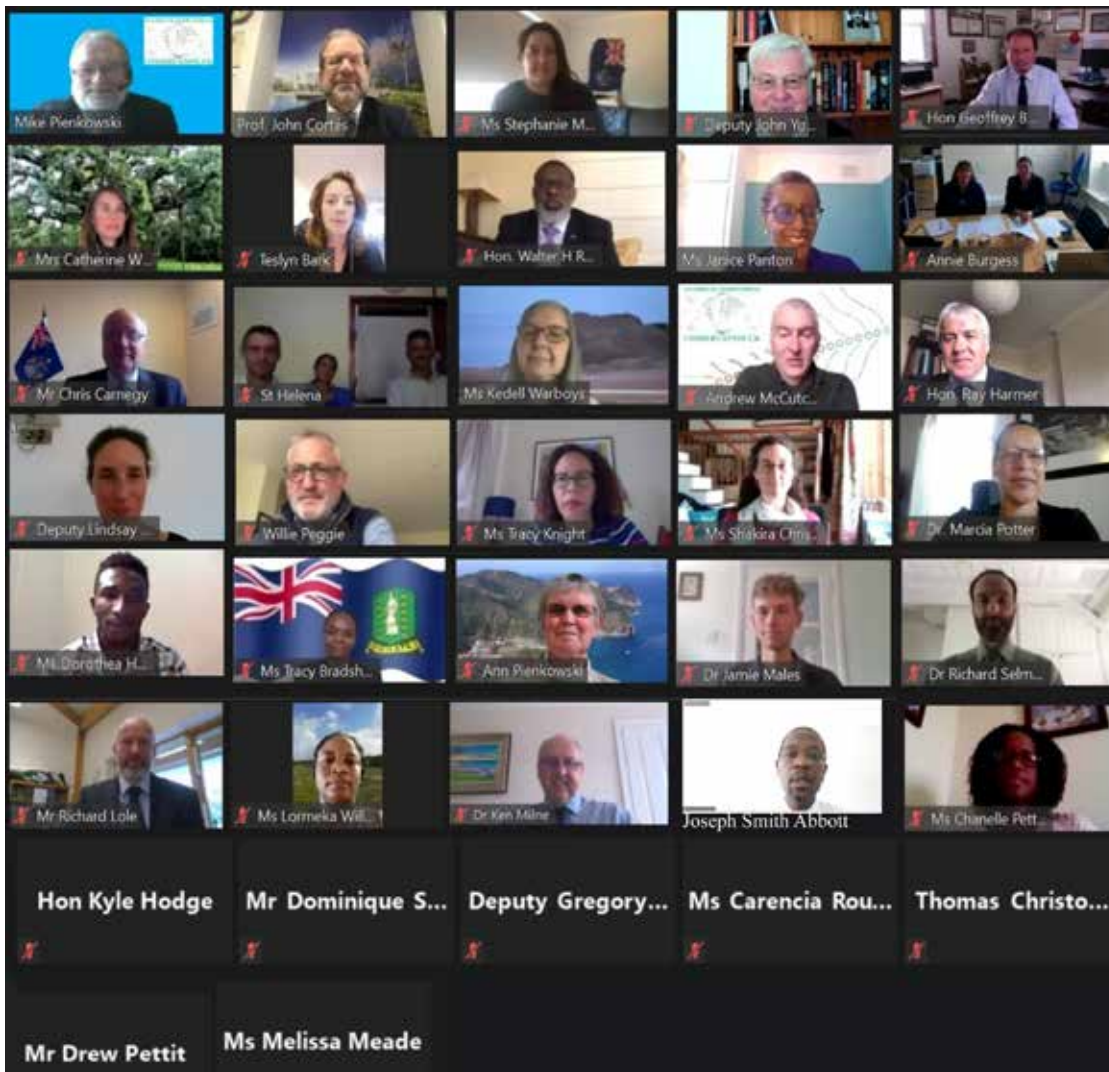
Our engagement with the wider world, as part of our awareness raising and information sharing activities, continues to grow. In some ways it is easier than ever before to do this, but in other ways it is important to maintain our current well-established ways to communicate. The newsletter *Forum News* is circulated initially to over 300 individuals and organisations – and we know is read by many others – and our website gets many hits from around the world. Social media platforms regularly engage with nearly 2,000 followers.

When pressure needs to be applied urgently as a result of immediate threats to biodiversity, we do not shy away from this. As such we have been following the crisis affecting corals in the Caribbean UKOTs from a novel disease, Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease. We ask questions and support our partners wherever possible, but also celebrate successes of those working to prevent utter devastation. Some of this support has been through UK channels including UK Parliament.

In the coming year, we have major work to do on projects to meet requests from territories and to continue to seek resources to enable other such urgently requested work. This is especially in regard to terrestrial conservation, which territories agree has been rather under-privileged for some years in UK Government grant-funding. There is real urgency for governments and voluntary organisations to create renewed momentum on the deliberations of both Climate-Change CoP 27 and the postponed Biodiversity Convention CoP, to ensure that climate and nature recovery gets prioritised – and nowhere more so than on the UKOTs that contribute so much to UK biodiversity. UK and the UKOTs, with the support of many NGOs and others, have been making great strides in protecting



Group photo of Montserrat's Minister of Environment (right of logos), some of Montserrat National Trust's council and staff, and UKOTCF Chairman visit land donated to MNT by the Piper family. This was during the first visit in the new phase of the Adopt a Home for Wildlife project. UKOTCF had earlier helped MNT purchase this truck (but UKOTCF's logo has faded more than MNT's). Photo: Ann Pienkowski



Officer, Agriculture, Countryside & Land Management Services (ACLMS)
Isle of Man: Hon. Ray Harmer MHK, Minister for Policy and Reform
Guernsey: Deputy Lindsay de Sausmarez, President of the Committee for the Environment & Infrastructure
Jersey: Mr William Peggie, Director for Natural Environment
Turks & Caicos Islands: Ms Tracy Knight, Representative and Head of London Office
Sark: Ms Shakira Christodoulou, on behalf of Conseiller Helen Plummer (Chairman, Agriculture and Environment Committee of the Chief Pleas of Sark)
(British) Virgin Islands: Dr Marcia Potter, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources, Labour and Immigration
Anguilla: UK Office (British) Virgin Islands: Ms Tracy Bradshaw, UK Representative & Director of London Office
Secretariat: Mrs Ann Pienkowski, Honorary Environmental Education Coordinator; UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Secretariat: Dr Jamie Males,

UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council meeting, 28-29 April 2021: Zoom group photo of participants (from left to right, then top to bottom):
Secretariat: Dr Mike Pienkowski, Chairman, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum
Gibraltar: Hon. Prof. John Cortés, Minister for Education, Heritage, Environment, Energy and Climate Change
Tristan da Cunha: Ms Stephanie Martin, Environment Policy Officer
Jersey: Deputy John Young, Minister for the Environment
Isle of Man: Hon Geoffrey Boot MHK, Minister for Environment Food and Agriculture
Secretariat: Mrs Catherine Wensink, Executive Director, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum
Falkland Islands: Hon Teslyn Barkman MLA, Deputy Portfolio Holder for the Environment
Bermuda: Hon. Walter H Roban, JP, MP, Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs
Montserrat: Ms Janice Panton, UK Representative
Alderney: States Member Annie Burgess, Chair of Economic Development Committee (left) and Ms Catherine Veron, Policy Assistant
Tristan da Cunha: Mr Chris Carnegie, UK representative
St Helena: Some of the team from Environment, Natural Resources and Planning Portfolio (ENRPP) – (left to right): Rhys Hobbs, Marine and Fisheries Conservation Manager; Isabel Peters, Chief Environmental Officer; and Darren Duncan, Head of Department, Agriculture & Natural Resources Division
St Helena: Ms Kedell Warboys, UK Representative
Guernsey: Andrew McCutcheon, Principal Environment Services

Voluntary Conservation Officer, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum
Isle of Man: Dr Richard Selman, Ecosystem Policy Manager, Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture
Isle of Man: Mr Richard Lole, Chief Executive for the Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture
Turks & Caicos Islands: Ms Lormeka Williams, Director of Environment & Coastal Resources
Isle of Man: Dr Ken Milne, Director of Environment, Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture
(British) Virgin Islands: Mr Joseph Smith Abbott, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources & Labour
Anguilla: Ms Chanelle Petty Barrett, Permanent Secretary (Economic Development)
Anguilla: Hon Kyle Hodge, Minister of Economic Development, Commerce, Information Technology & Natural Resources
Gibraltar: Mr Dominique Searle, UK Representative
Jersey: Deputy Gregory Guida, Deputy Minister for the Environment
Anguilla: Ms Carencia Rouse, Director of Natural Resources (Environment)
Bermuda: Thomas Christopher Famous MP, Observer
Bermuda: Mr Drew Pettit, Director of Environment and Natural Resources
Anguilla: Ms Melissa Meade, Chief Natural Resources Officer

Please note that (1) for those participants with their web-camera switched off, Zoom shows their registered name (or part of it); and (2) not all participants were present when the image was captured.

the seas around oceanic UKOTs – but we must not forget that, in terms of biodiversity, it is the terrestrial habitats in the UKOTs that hold the greatest levels of endemics for which the UK is responsible on the international stage, and funding for this is needed urgently.

Project work

The proceedings of the UKOTCF online conference (held in March 2021) were published on the website in July 2021 and circulated to participants. Overall, the team is pleased with the results and the amount of positive



Just before Mike and Ann dashed off to the airport at the end of the October visit starting the project, 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.

feedback received on the conference as a whole, and already on the proceedings.

The UKOT & CD Environment Ministers' Council meeting took place online on UKOTCF's Zoom platform at the end of April. Timing, by its Co-Chair, Hon. Prof. John Cortés in consultation with UKOTCF as the secretariat, was deliberate so as to have conference conclusions and recommendations as input for the ministers to consider. Some elements of the online conference were re-used, e.g. music, slides, some selected recorded presentations and speakers (with permission from them). Some work was necessary to facilitate the Ministers in considering a draft statement agreed at the meeting. UKOTCF, in close consultation with Minister Cortés, organised and ran the meeting for the ministers. The final statement was published online, as was some visual material from which territory governments could extract material to support their own publicity. Subsequently, as directed by the Ministers, the Secretariat helped with a letter of support sent to St Vincent and the Grenadines in light of the volcanic disruption, a letter to Alok Sharma (UK minister chairing the Climate-Change Conference of the Parties) with regards to UKOT representation at the forthcoming UNFCCC CoP, and a letter to Lord Goldsmith on the recommendations of the Ministers' Council. The response from the UK Government Minister of Environment, on both the Ministers' Council statement and the UKOTCF conference recommendations, was published in full in *Forum News* with agreement by the UKOT/CD Ministers' Council co-chair.

UKOTCF and MNT were successful in securing a grant under the Darwin Initiative and could start the project in October. Despite the delay in funding decision, this combined nicely with a postponed trip by UKOTCF, so that the launch could take place while they were on island. The project titled *Securing Montserrat's threatened endemic species and natural capital through community-action* and its local name, *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*, enables Montserratians to undertake informed decisions and actions on land they manage so that Montserrat's unique wildlife and ecosystems thrive. Livelihoods, based on sustainable-use of natural resources will be demonstrated and promoted. A network of community-led managed conservation areas will be established, stimulating action and engagement among Montserratians, addressing urgent challenges to the islands' biodiversity especially invasive plants.

During the visit in October and in the first few months that followed, the following was achieved: a Memorandum of Understanding was agreed and signed between H.E. the Governor, the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and Environment, Montserrat National Trust and UKOTCF; project launch took place at the Trust with the Governor, Environment Minister, MNT, UKOTCF and some participants speaking, and was streamed live on Facebook and on Montserrat radio; several visits to some of the sites (including the new donation of 13 acres of land); some new "Adopters" of "Wildlife Homes" recruited; some visits to existing sites; restructuring of project team to several part-time posts agreed between MNT and UKOTCF to maximise local capacity-building and continuity beyond project end; project team assembled with 7 Montserratians employed part-time to share the training and experience; a project committee meeting; work programmes for the officers developed; some quotes secured for capital items that need to be ordered; half-hour radio interview on Montserrat radio and 1 hour on an online video station;

session at Governor's regular press conference resulting in live broadcasts and the project a main item on the radio news; draft list of *Adopted sites (Wildlife Homes)* developed.

Some additional capacity for the project was achieved via a volunteer, Maddie Heap, who joined in January to fill a need identified by MNT. Her role was getting the baseline vegetation and invertebrate surveys tested and made operational at the sites. Several persons were found after an advert was published online. After interview by MNT and UKOTCF, Maddie was welcomed to the team. Over the Christmas period, Maddie, UKOTCF and MNT dealt with paper-work and logistics. Maddie travelled to Montserrat in early January and integrated well into the team, despite having to spend her 5 first days in quarantine, as for all visitors then. As a result of all her hard work with the rest of the Montserrat team, they have been able to make a lot of progress on project activities. Back in UK, Maddie continues to help, especially with the development of management plans.

Several other partners, making best use of time and resources, include Montana State University and the Species Recovery Trust. (The latter's Vicky Wilkins, formerly of Buglife, has been instrumental in raising capacity of St Helena to undertake invertebrate conservation.)

The second main project currently active was awarded a grant at the end of 2021. This falls under the United Kingdom Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) as part of their call: "*Hidden Histories of Environmental Science: Acknowledging legacies of race, social injustice and exclusion to inform the future*".

The project is led by the UK Centre for Hydrology & Ecology with UKOTCF and other partners including: the National Trust for the Cayman Island, The Montserrat National Trust, Meise Botanic Garden in Belgium and Leeds Museum. The project runs from January 2022 until March 2023.

The working title for the project is: *From Blue Iguanas to Blue Vervain*:

Sharing the colonial histories from the UK Overseas Territories.

It focuses 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. It includes two case studies, in Montserrat and the Cayman Islands, 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.

UKOTCF has published a webpage for the project on its website (link above), including a project logo designed by CEH, under guidance from the two National Trusts. As well as inputting into all work packages, UKOTCF is responsible for implementing Work Package 2 "Develop best practice template for equitable biodiversity, ecological and biological research collaboration and data sharing between the UKOTs and UK".

Aside from specific funding for PhD studies, this does look to be the first project funded in this way from UK Research Council sources in the UKOTs and a significant milestone.

UKOTCF continues to provide additional support to MNT when it can. One request was to source possible designers who could draw up some plans for a small piece of land which the Trust had acquired adjacent to the Botanic Gardens. UKOTCF made some inquiries and an architect, Yasmin Shariff, at Dennis Sharp Architects, based in London, agreed to provide some *pro bono* design expertise to the Trust. The intention is to use the parcel of land, *EcoPlay*, to provide a space for children to enjoy nature and the outdoors. Continuing support includes helping with some aspects of fund-raising, so that UKOTCF has created a page on the UKOTCF website in order to facilitate PayPal payments from the US and UK to complement MNT's local fundraising. Around £300,000





Above left: Architect's impression of completed EcoPlay building and gardens. Image: Dennis Sharp. Right: 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. Contributions can still be received via PayPal at <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/eco-play-montserrat/>. Photo: Dr Mike Penkowski

is needed and about a third has been pledged so far (mainly from local sources). UKOTCF participated in the launch in October which included the Premier, Minister of Education, Deputy Governor and others.

The ongoing project to highlight the endemics species found in the UKOTs continues. In addition, IUCN personnel have made enquiries about access to this in respect of proposed Red Data listing work. As this is not an externally funded project, it continues as resources allow.

Some preparatory work has been completed during the year on progress in implementing Environment Charters, Aichi Targets, MEA, SDGs. This will enable several volunteers, who had agreed to help with this exercise, to undertake the first stages of data collection in their own time. This project also depends on the time availability of volunteers, its rate of progress is also variable.

The NatureBureau, is a long-established environmental consultancy, with book publishing arm, Pisces Publications. Together with Sara Oldfield, the author of *Fragments of Paradise* (in many ways, UKOTCF's establishing document) and subsequently UKOTCF's (as called then) first Coordinator and later Chair (until she managed to get Mike Pienkowski to take the role for his first term), made contact with UKOTCF. They asked if UKOTCF would be interested in working with them on a new publication – a sort of re-visiting of that book but in a style combining coffee-table photographs with referenced scientific content. UKOTCF, working with Sara is making a start on this. UKOTCF and Sara have final drafts of Chapter titles and outlines and are starting to make contact with potential authors and potential sponsors.

Awareness raising and information management

Forum News 54 was published and circulated in May and *Forum News 55* was published in November.

In April 2021, the tenth edition of *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* was published online and circulated. In November, Issue 11 was published and circulated. This outlined the successful grant awarded, the new Project team members and some highlights from the UKOTCF visit earlier that month.

Virtual tours of Gibraltar and Tristan da Cunha were made live during the year, making a complete set for UKOTs. Guernsey and Sark are in draft and it is hoped will be finished within the new financial year. This will complete the set for CDs as well. Other information and publicity materials which continue to be developed, include editing videos recorded while on Montserrat, will be made available and used throughout the current project.

The *Marine Biologist* magazine dedicated an issue to the marine environment in the UK Overseas Territories. UKOTCF were invited to provide an overview, with a view to including further articles in future. The readership of the magazine is over 5,000 and so it is a good opportunity

to raise awareness of the UKOTs in general. This was published online in January 2022 (*image below of part of the article*), the publishers deciding to make this article freely available to showcase the issue.

Influencing policy

UKOTCF has provided requested briefings for the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers' Council for other meetings, including of both UK bodies and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP26). Several governments and representatives of governments of the UKOTs, as well as a youth delegation from the Cayman Islands, were in Glasgow in November.

A screenshot of an article from the magazine 'The Marine Biologist'. The article is titled 'Big ocean, big opportunity, big responsibility' and is written by Catherine M. Wensink and Dr Michael W. Pienkowski. The article discusses the importance of marine biodiversity and the role of the UK in protecting it. It mentions that the UK has the world's largest marine estate and that marine biodiversity is essential for the health of the ocean and the well-being of many people. The article also discusses the challenges of marine conservation and the need for international cooperation. The article includes a photograph of a whale shark and a map of the UK's marine estate.

An event 'Our Vision for Healthy Oceans' was organised on Nature Day in the UK Pavilion, to coincide with the agreement of a 'Overseas Territories Climate Change Pledge'.

The international Leadership Pledge has now been signed by over 80 leaders, including some of the UKOTs and CDs.

In relation to Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD), a large Darwin Initiative grant on SCTLD has been awarded to JNCC for £496,257. This is in addition to the £200,000 already received and £100,000 from another source. UKOTCF follows this closely and has attempted several ways in which to ensure that NGOs desperately fighting this terrible disease are also supported to carry out urgent work, including raising the issue with the UK Minister of Environment. However, obtaining clear information from JNCC has proven exceptionally difficult, and UKOTCF remains concerned that only a small proportion of these funds have reached those bodies actually battling the disease in the field. Indeed, the NGO which first tackled this in a UKOT for over 3 years has still received no support from UK public funds, despite UK ministerial statements to the contrary. In addition, JNCC continues to advise against the use of the only control method to be found really effective.

The announcement of awards under Darwin Plus (until last year including all UKOTs) were made in early June. Without consultation, the UK Government removed the four UKOTs (Montserrat, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha, Pitcairn) eligible for Official Development Assistance (ODA) from Darwin Plus, and put them with foreign countries in Darwin Main in 2021. This thereby also removed these territories, for the first time in 20 years, from a fund devoted to biodiversity conservation (as other factors, such as poverty alleviation, livelihoods and gender equality, have equal weight and need to be addressed in Darwin Main). This seemed a very retrograde step, especially when UK Government is claiming a global conservation lead, and also a reversal of a governmental commitment. Although these other factors are very important, they do have other funds allocated to them, whereas biodiversity conservation does not. Alongside the four governments concerned, the Chair of the UKOT Environment Ministers' Council, RSPB, UKOTCF, MNT and CABI signed a letter sent to UK Government calling for a restoration of equal treatment for these four territories, with the others. The Governments of the UKOTs later informed UKOTCF that they had met virtually in August and, as a result, Defra agreed to the desire to move back into Darwin Plus with immediate effect and included in the 10th round of Darwin Plus launched in August 2021 – although rather too late to allow many applications to be prepared.

UKOTCF continues to look for any opportunities to raise awareness of the UKOTs & CDs within UK Parliament. One such opportunity was recently advertised through the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology. One of their roles is to provide briefings on emerging issues. These briefings called 'POSTNotes' are made available to Parliamentarians (as well as widely available online) on a variety of subjects. One such POSTNote during the year was on blue carbon. Given the interest in the UKOTCF online conference, particularly in UKOTs with seagrass meadows, mangroves and peatland, UKOTCF supplied some information relevant to the topic. This was published shortly after with some contributions from the UKOTs.

In the autumn, the UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Select Committee published its *Biodiversity and Ecosystems* inquiry report. There were elements from previous inquiries, to which UKOTCF had submitted evidence, that referenced recommendations for the UKOTs, e.g. the *Sustainable Seas* inquiry. Linked to this, the UK Parliament published a report online in October called "*The UK Overseas Territories: Climate change and biodiversity*". The report seemed to be an amalgamation of various reports over the years, to which UKOTCF had contributed and, as a result, it included several recommendations from UKOTCF including on the importance of biodiversity in the UKOTs, the importance of science-based decision-making, and the impacts of invasive species.

A response was submitted to the inquiry on Natural Capital Accounting. The UKOTCF online conference collated some information on this in 2021. This has now been published online.

Relations with UK Government and Government Agencies

Several key meetings took place during the year. In May a meeting was held with the Director of Strategy and Policy Government of South

Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (SGSSI), formerly Head of Defra's Marine Environment in the International Team. He has worked mainly on the High Seas Treaty and the post-2020 framework. Points of discussion included: building resilience, protected areas and new legislation for SGSSI.

Briefings for new Governors of the UKOTs continue. These provide information on the importance of biodiversity and UK's international responsibility towards them, background on the Environment Charters and active conservation bodies. In February a meeting was arranged with the new Governor of Montserrat, this at her request being UKOTCF's first meeting in London for over two years because of Covid precautions.



Mike Pienkowski and Catherine Wensink visited the Garden Museum in London (<https://gardenmuseum.org.uk/sowingroots/>) in March when visiting the Governor Designate of Montserrat. This Lottery-funded project looks at the "history of the gardening cultures and traditions that Caribbean people carried with them when they moved to the UK after World War II: from breadfruit, provision grounds, and botanical gardens, to chocho, ackee and the green spaces of South London." Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

As part of UKOTCF's growing partnership with the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (UKCEH), UKCEH invited UKOTCF to become their Business Associate in a bid to JNCC. This bid was successful, so that it could mean that UKOTCF may be involved in appropriate work for which CEH bids in future.

UKOTCF will try to attend meetings organised by others when invited. The UK Marine Climate Change Partnership (MCCIP), in collaboration with the UK Government and Agencies, the United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA) and Great British Oceans (GBO) launched the first comprehensive assessment of climate change impacts on the UK Overseas Territories. The meeting included a passionate address from Professor Cortés, using material from the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Statement and his address to UKOTCF's online conference.

In April, the UK Government held an online information session on its Blue Planet Fund. This is financed from the UK Official Development Assistance Budget with £500 million aiming to "help developing countries reduce poverty, protect and sustainably manage their marine resources and address human-generated threats across four key themes: marine biodiversity, climate change, marine pollution, and sustainable seafood". The Fund will be managed by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) and the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and will be launched soon. Sadly, it seems that the only way this could be accessed by UKOTs is to actively lobby or work with Governors Offices in the UKOTs as there is no call for proposals. It was clear that the requirement for poverty reduction will be included, thereby making support for biodiversity conservation even in the four UKOTs theoretically eligible (Montserrat, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha, Pitcairn) unlikely – despite Minister Lord Goldsmith highlighting this new fund in his speech to the UKOTCF conference.

Working for partners and responding to requests

Meetings of Wider Caribbean Working Group were held in April, June, September, November and February; and Europe Territories Working Group in April, July, November and March. Southern Ocean Working Group met in March 2022.

The most urgent issue reported by partners in the UKOTs during its WCWG is on SCTLD (see also above). While in Montserrat, UKOTCF personnel

attended a JNCC SCLTD classroom-based workshop. This provided some useful insights into the approach being taken and treatments being recommended by the technical advisors HMG has chosen to work with. This was disappointing in that the specialist appointed by JNCC advised strongly against the use of the proven method. UKOTCF continues to highlight the importance of NGO involvement and effective treatments and a flexible approach to this issue given its severity.

Consultancy eftec, has been implementing a Darwin Plus project for several years focusing on Natural Capital Accounting (NCA); a presentation was given at the UKOTCF conference on this. In the final stages of the project, which aimed to build a set of accounts and a practitioners' network, UKOTCF was asked to make a remote presentation at the final conference, held in part on Anguilla, on the importance of working with NGOs and experiences of UKOTCF as a long-time network.

Funding remains a key area of importance for many partners, particularly in those which have seen drastic falls in income during the pandemic. When new funding emerges, which UKOTs can apply for, details are circulated to members and associate organisations. This year the Mohammed Bin Zayed covid response call was providing two rounds of funding to support grass-roots conservation organisations with operating costs (a rare core grant). Two UKOTs have been able to benefit from this. The National Parks Trust for the Virgin Islands received a grant to assist with fieldwork costs on Anegada, and the Montserrat National Trust received a grant of \$15,000.

By invitation, UKOTCF attended a strategic meeting for the Montserrat National Trust (with a grant managed by the RSPB). A similar exercise had been undertaken at the Turks and Caicos National Trust, which was also attended. Some views and comments were fed into the process during and after the meeting, and MNT and TCNT indicated that these were useful.

Our networks

The Inter-Island Environment Meeting, a collective of conservation bodies in the Channel Islands, with participation by partners in the Isle of Man, UK, France and others, took place over two days from Thursday 21 October. Hosted by Jersey Biological Records Centre via remote communications, it included several presentations and discussion, in which UKOTCF participated. The keynote speech was delivered by the National Biodiversity Network (NBN). Other presentations included: an ecosystem-based approach to marine conservation and fisheries management by Sam Blampied, sea-fans of Jersey by Kevin McIlwee, results from the Bailiwick Bat Survey from Phil Atkinson and mainstreaming biodiversity and Natural Capital by Alex Herschel. These are all available via YouTube.

Other interesting workshops attended included the Blue Marine Foundation Blue Carbon conference titled *Blue Carbon – a new frontier for conservation?* held in June.

Co-ordinating with Others

UKOTCF chairman continues to sit on the Executive Committee of the UK National Committee of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN-NCUK Exco). During the year the IUCN-NCUK Protected Areas Working Group (on which UKOTCF chairman also sits) had requested some information on UKOTs and CDs. UKOTCF advised territories and this is being pursued.

UKOTCF continues to liaise with Jersey International Centre of Advanced Studies (JICAS) and research institutes based in the UKOTs. This year, JICAS, with support from UKOTCF (via a donation), made a bursary available for students to undertake research projects as part of their MSC courses. Two students visited Anguilla in summer 2021 undertaking research, one in the marine environment and one on iguanas. In addition, with information and contacts provided by UKOTCF, a summer course on island archaeology, featuring the Turks and Caicos National Museum, was organised.

The Small Islands Organisation (SMILO) is an NGO which assists small islands of less than 150 km² (of any nation) that wish to work towards managing their territory more sustainably. Their interim report mapping the world island networks and organisations, which UKOTCF fed some information into, was published http://www.smilo-program.org/images/Intermediary_report_Island_Networks_and_Organisations_2021.pdf.



The year started with the sad news of the death of Bruce Dinwiddy, former Governor of the Cayman Islands who, after his retirement, made major contributions on UKOTCF Council and as Chairman of our Wider Caribbean Working Group. An obituary appeared in [Forum News 54](#). He is pictured here with his wife Emma (to whom we send our warmest sympathy) on the boat field-trip at the end of UKOTCF's conference in Grand Cayman in 2009, during one of their return visits to the Cayman Islands. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Organisational development

Around the turn of the financial year, we lost the services of Voluntary Conservation Officer Catriona Porter. Catriona had done an amazing amount of work in the year that she was with us (about twice as long as originally envisaged). This had included re-invigorating the Southern Oceans Working Group and taking a lead in several other projects. She was fortunate enough to get a job in the field for which she was well qualified but found that the reduction in available time meant that she could no longer deliver the voluntary UKOTCF work to the high standard to which she set herself. We wish her well, and hope that she is able to re-engage with UKOTCF at some time in the future.

In addition to the core team, several volunteers have helped throughout the year. Paul Cawsey continues to provide support to a number of core activities, and has assumed the Secretaryship of the Southern Ocean Working Group, following Catriona, as well as some project work. He helped to coordinate the first SOWG meeting held since last year, which had generated quite a bit of interest. He also helped to write a paper on honey bee cultivation in stingless bees (*Melipona*) for the Montserrat project.

Maddie Heap, as Voluntary Conservation Officer to the DPLUS155 project (see above), is keen to continue working with the team and UKOTCF more generally, but with a view to re-visiting as resources allow (including an expression of interest in working on a PhD project).



During work with Montserrat National Trust on our joint Adopt a Home for Wildlife project, an exciting discovery was a natural hive of endemic native bottle bees Melipona lautipes on land of the Trust. Here, one leaves the hive while another waits to enter. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Maddie has proved to be an excellent addition to the team and UKOTCF is keen to ensure that she is retained either by the Trust, UKOTCF or a combination of both.

Following some very positive correspondence with the CEO of Falklands Conservation, with regards to the conference, but also on a number of matters over several years, a suggestion that they re-join UKOTCF as an associate organisation was made. This had been warmly welcomed by them. Paperwork has been signed and the website was updated.

Fundraising continues to be an important aspect of general organisational work. This includes: writing grant applications, handling legacy donations, exploring novel sources of funding and maintaining the existing

membership and individual subscriptions with where applicable, a Gift Aid top-up at no further cost to the person donating. A report to the Garfield Weston Foundation was submitted in November 2021 upon completion of the one-year core grant. A further application has been welcomed.

At the AGM in November, Iain Orr stood down from Council, but remains as an Advisor and link to UK 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 a highly productive time and much progress was made.

Bill Samuel also stood down having kindly delayed his retirement for some months to allow smooth transition to the new Treasurer. Bill had served on Council for many years. In addition to his Treasurer role, he had served on the Personnel Committee. Bill's wise advice had helped greatly so that some major issues could be navigated successfully.

Acknowledgements

UKOTCF Council would like to thank the individuals and representatives of member and associate organisations who have given numerous hours of voluntary time to the Forum, both in the UK and the Territories. These included: Dr Jamie Males, Catriona Porter, Paul Cawsey and Maddie Heap. Although all Council members donate time to UKOTCF, Council would like to acknowledge the very large quantities donated by Mike and Ann Pienkowski, on which UKOTCF depends and to Lady Dace Ground for continuing support to the Forum this year. We are also grateful to Anthony Leask for continuing to support conservation efforts in the territories. Sincere thanks to Iain Orr and Bill Samuel for their many years of service to the Forum as Council members and close supporters. We will miss you, but wish you the best. The Forum would also like to thank its members organisations and individual supporters who support us via our [Friends of the UK Overseas Territories](#) membership. Those who have an interest in the UKOTs/CDs are encouraged to join us. The Forum is very grateful for financial assistance from the UK Government's Darwin Initiative, United Kingdom Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) the Garfield Weston Foundation, Bill Samuel, those donating via EasyFundraising or Amazon Smile and anonymous donors.

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

	2022 Unrestricted Funds	2022 Restricted Funds	2022 Total Funds	2021 Total Funds
Incoming Resources				
Voluntary Income	116,129	98,738	214,863	302,146
Investment Income	7	-	7	45
Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities				
Project Income	149	50,591	50,740	
Total Incoming Resources	116,285	149,325	265,610	302,191
Resources Expended				
Charitable Activities	120,696	134,848	255,544	266,117
Governance Costs and Other Resources Expended	6,540	-	6,540	676
Total Resources Expended	127,236	134,848	262,084	272,878
Net incoming/outgoing resources	(10,951)	14,477	3,526	29,313
Balance brought forward at 1st April 2020	83,356	2647	86,003	56,690
Balance carried forward at 31st March 2021	72,405	17,124	89,529	86,003

Note: Incoming and outgoing resources include donated time and expenses of £207,628 (2021: £258,678).

Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

WCWG met 5 times via Zoom in the financial year 2021-2022

Much good conservation work has been achieved in the reporting year 2021-2022, some of which is noted in this report – but challenges, particularly related to funding, invasive species and the ongoing Covid situation, continue.

The proceedings of the online conference (*Staying Connected for Conservation in a Changed World*) held in March 2021 (as referenced elsewhere in this report) were discussed at WCWG Zoom meetings. Contributions from members of WCWG to the conference included: funding mechanisms for NGOs and alternatives to tourism; engaging people; the wider benefits of conservation and healthy ecosystems; facilitating local leads in conservation; coping with recovery after hurricanes and natural disasters by building resilience; nature-based solutions for the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration: terrestrial and marine; plugging the gap: innovative approaches and capacity-building. Participants were very positive about the content of the conference and recommendations which emerged. The proceedings were published on 30 June 2021. These proceedings and other conference information are available on the UKOTCF website.

Shortly after the conference, in April 2021, with UKOTCF providing the Secretariat, the 4th UKOT/CD Environment Ministers' Council meeting was held online. From the Wider Caribbean, representatives from Anguilla, Bermuda, (British) Virgin Islands, Montserrat, and the Turks and Caicos Islands took part. Apologies were received from the Cayman Islands Premier, Cayman just having its elections and ministerial portfolios not yet finalised. The Ministers expressed appreciation of the work and outputs of the preceding technical conference *Staying Connected for Conservation in a Changed World*, complementing those of the Council's own earlier meetings. Issues of particular relevance to the WCWG Territories highlighted by the Environment Ministers included: invasive species and biosecurity, fighting Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease, extension of the Blue Belt Initiative to the Caribbean UKOTs, building resilience to climate change, funding concerns and the vital nature of environmental education and championing.

Although the Ministers expressed concerns about the method of funding decisions, UKOTs are pleased to receive funding through the Darwin Plus Initiative. Many of these proposals are partnerships and collaborative efforts, and UKOTCF and its WCWG are pleased to have facilitated some of these partnerships through their network and conferences.

SCTLD and concern about spread and the support actions needed have been discussed at each WCWG meeting during the reporting period. During the financial year 2021 to 2022, SCTLD was affecting coral reefs in Anguilla, Cayman, British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands and suspected in Montserrat. Bermuda to date has remained free of SCTLD. There was concern that SCTLD could spread into the Pacific. The Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) was awarded a Darwin Plus Grant of £496,257.00 for a 3-year project titled *A Collaborative approach to managing coral disease in UK Overseas Territories*. This involved 3 UKOTs, Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands and Turks and Caicos Islands, and funding for workshops and a Collaborative Coral Reef Working Group (CCRWG – now renamed Coral Conservation Overseas Territories CCOT). The Chair of CCOT has attended several WCWG meetings and information has been exchanged on the work of CCOT and how funds are being allocated and spent. Additionally, UKOTCF Council Member Lord John Randall asked several Parliamentary Questions about the support UK Government was providing for SCTLD monitoring and treatment in the UKOTs, and the effectiveness of this funding. Much of WCWG discussions has focussed on the effectiveness of antibiotic vs chlorine treatments. At present, research work has demonstrated that antibiotic treatment is the only effective one, and this is critical as SCTLD causes very rapid death of stony corals. The importance of establishing land-based gene-banking facilities where healthy corals of the affected species could be nurtured, and used to re-populate reefs when SCTLD was eliminated was also discussed. The funding requirements for land-based nurseries are very high.

Anguilla

Eradication of invasive mice from Sombrero, designated a Ramsar Site in May 2018, began in June 2021. Baiting and monitoring took place

over a period of eight weeks to ensure that every mouse was targeted and removed, but there were no signs of mice 22 days after the beginning of the baiting period. Monitoring will continue.

In 2021 Anguilla was successful in several Darwin Plus applications:

DPLUS137 [Transforming Anguilla's Marine Parks: institutionalising sustainable and collaborative management solutions](#)

DPLUS136 [Anguilla Shark Conservation: social acceptance, spatial protection and legislative reform](#)

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

DPLUS130 [Sustainable sargassum management in Anguilla, British Virgin Islands and Montserrat](#)

DPLUS 125 [Protecting Anguilla's biodiversity by building capacity in invasive plant management](#)

Bermuda

Restoration work at Eve's Pond, on North Shore in Hamilton Parish, progressed very well, the pond already being used by both local and migrating birds. Much community support has contributed to this success, including construction of a new bird hide (blind). The official opening for this Buy Back Bermuda project will be in April 2022.



Buy Back Bermuda has installed a bird hide at Eve's Pond. Funds for construction were donated by Eddie Wright in memory of his wife, Yvonne. Photo: Buy Back Bermuda

The Bermuda National Trust launched an innovative "Rent a Living Christmas Tree" project. To cut down on the importation of Christmas trees, and contribute to a more sustainable option which would also help fight climate change, the Bermuda National Trust had 100 small potted Bermuda Cedar trees to rent. Renters returning the trees in January got their deposit back, and the returned cedars were planted on nature reserves, including Eve's Pond.

The Government held public consultations on the Invasive Species Act. A citizens' online portal enabled people to read the Act and make comments. The Act included 3 schedules: prohibited species, invasives already present and not to be encouraged, and acceptable plants. Bermuda had good border controls, but actions on undesirable plants already present were currently limited. In fact, nurseries were selling invasive plants. Hence the need for action. The consultation process had raised interesting points, including highlighting the need for education, particularly the identification of invasive species.

In 2021 Bermuda's successful Darwin Plus application was DPLUS145 [Assessing the mobile fish biodiversity of Bermuda's deep seas](#)

British Virgin Islands

NPTVI Flamingo Reintroduction Programme is still going strong. Thirty years after the Anegada flamingo reintroduction, staff from NPTVI and local volunteers observed 433 flamingos at Flamingo Pond, Anegada during the annual Christmas Bird Count on 5th January 2022. The flock was observed doing their courtship dance, and nesting mounds



Part of the flamingo flock at Anegada (above) and well grown chicks beside nest-mounds. Photos: NPTVI.



have already been built nearby. The reintroduction of greater flamingos *Phoenicopterus ruber* to Anegada is the most successful species reintroduction in the British Virgin Islands. A captive population of 18 birds were sourced from the Bermuda Aquarium Museum and Zoo in 1992 through funding from the Guana Island owners, the Falconwood Corporation. This reintroduction was a vision shared by The National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands (NPTVI), The Conservation Agency, and the Government of the Virgin Islands.

Identifying and Conserving Resilient Habitats in the British Virgin Islands: the National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands (NPTVI) and the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew have been collaborating for more than 20 years to document and understand the status of the unique plants in the British Virgin Islands (BVI). The joint survey work across more than 10 islands has led to a good understanding of where the most important sites are for wild plant diversity and the threats they face. This most recently resulted in the identification of a network of 18 Tropical Important Plant Areas (TIPAS) and the publication of a guidebook to these sites and plants. The latest project, funded by Darwin Plus, is trying to understand what makes a resilient habitat, and the RGB Team visited in February 2021 (after a Covid-enforced gap) to undertake further survey work.

In 2021 BVI were successful in 2 Darwin Plus applications:

DPLUS152 [Coastal Resource Atlas 2021 and Temporal Analysis for the BVI](#)

DPLUS150 [Ecosystem sensitivity and climate vulnerability for MSP in the BVI](#)

Cayman Islands

The National Trust for the Cayman Islands (NTCI) are partners in the *Hidden Histories* project described in the section on Montserrat. NTCI have several conservation projects. They celebrated their first International Blue Iguana Day in May 2021, and launched a 5-year action plan for the Blue Iguana Conservation programme in June 2021. They held a 6-week course to introduce the National Trust environmental and historic programmes to young people, which included guest lecturers, site visits on all three islands, and tour guide training. The public education programme about the importance of protecting mangroves and rich biodiversity areas continued, aiming to increase people's understanding and appreciation of the need for sustainable development.

In 2021 Cayman Islands were successful in 2 Darwin Plus applications:



Blue Iguana Day. Photo: National Trust for the Cayman Islands

DPLUS140 [Assessment and conservation of Cayman Islands' deep-water reefs and fishes](#)

DPLUS128 [Safeguarding Cayman's sister islands from invasive species](#)

Montserrat

UKOTCF visited Montserrat in October 2021 to launch, with partners The



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



The new wood-chipper provided by the Adopt a Home for Wildlife project to help make compost to help Adopters of Wildlife Homes re-establish native plants. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Montserrat National Trust and others, the partly Darwin-funded project DPLUS155 *Securing Montserrat's threatened endemic species and natural capital through community-action*. This builds on earlier work under the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* initiative and allows individuals, organisations, community groups and businesses to maintain and protect a public or private space, in partnership with the Montserrat National Trust (MNT). It is one realistic opportunity of safeguarding and restoring pockets of habitats, e.g. tropical dry forest, across the island. In January 2022 volunteer botanist Maddie Heap spent 6 weeks on Montserrat working on this project.

UKOTCF has supported the Montserrat National Trust with its *EcoPlay* project, which was launched in October 2021. UKOTCF had linked Montserrat National Trust with Dennis Sharp Architects who had designed the *EcoPlay* area and building *pro bono*. The project is connected to Montserrat National Trust's botanical gardens. It will provide facilities for young children under the age of 6 years as well as older children, adults, families and visitors to the island. The grounds are one of the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* sites, and the building will have disabled facilities, and incorporate energy-saving features. UKOTCF are supporting fundraising by providing a PayPal donation facility on its website.

In early 2022 funding was secured from the United Kingdom Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) as part of the call: *Hidden Histories of Environmental Science: Acknowledging legacies of race, social injustice and exclusion to inform the future*. It 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 & Galleries, and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum.

The mountain chicken re-habilitation project is showing encouraging results. Previous re-introductions had not been successful but the current project using a semi-wild enclosure with pools of different temperatures looks promising. The chytrid fungus seemed to be killed by warmer water. The semi-wild enclosure is on one of the pilot *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* sites, which demonstrates the value of co-operations and networking facilitated by UKOTCF.

Work on developing a Marine Turtle Action Plan for Montserrat, part-funded by Darwin Plus and led by Nicola Weber of Exeter University (previously a conservation officer with UKOTCF, when the idea for this was developed) continues. Community engagement and nesting surveys are revealing the importance of Montserrat for Marine Turtles.

Turks & Caicos Islands

The Turks and Caicos Reef Fund (TCRF) continued to monitor, and treat where possible, the SCTLD outbreak, using their own resources and sponsorship. They had been able to visit East Caicos in October 2021, with sponsorship from rum producers and the Explorer Ventures Fleet (RumPowered Research). The team had re-surveyed East Caicos Reefs previously surveyed in 2018. It appeared that SCTLD was progressing



Visit to East Caicos in October 2021, and treating priority corals there with amoxicillin in the approved base. Photos: Turks & Caicos Reef Fund.



more slowly there, possibly due to lack of human activity, but data were still being analysed. In addition to surveys, priority corals were treated with amoxicillin in the approved base. TCRF's research permit from TC Government allowed them to use amoxicillin.

TCRF had been awarded a John Ellerman Foundation grant for £124,000 to establish a pilot land-based coral nursery in Providenciales. TCRF are partnering with the Reef Institute from Florida, who will help set the nursery up and train staff.

Caicos pine tree recovery on Middle Caicos is looking promising, with evidence of more resistance to the scale insect, and indications of natural control occurring. Timing of another controlled burn is being considered.

In 2021 TCI were successful in 3 Darwin Plus applications:

DPLUS114 [Tropical Important Plant Areas and Important Plant Species in TCI](#)

DPLUS129 [Understanding Ramsar wetland dynamics for marine conservation and environmental resilience](#)

DPLUS153 [Conserving tropical marine ecosystems in TCI through science-based fisheries management](#)

Report of the UKOTCF Southern Oceans Working Group

Southern Oceans Working Group held an online meeting in March 2022, the first since February 2021, the gap being due to the unavailability of Group Secretary. The meeting was well attended and allowed representatives from SOWG to present an update on projects being undertaken and discuss cross-territory themes and issues. The latter enabled an update on Covid-19 impact. In the Falkland Islands access now has two flights per week from the UK; once on the islands, people must quarantine for a minimum of five days, with a hope of fewer restrictions, now these are being lifted elsewhere. The last direct flight to St Helena was the week following on from the meeting. Flights from Johannesburg to St Helena were to resume the following week and then every two weeks. On arrival, people must quarantine for ten days.

There then followed a discussion on invasive species. A team from the Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI) were on St Helena to provide support in delivering DPLUS157 – *Managing the pathogens threatening St Helena's biodiversity and food security*. This included St Helena's endemic trees, insects and food crops, fruit and forest trees that are threatened by unidentified diseases caused by a range of bacteria, fungi, and viruses or changes to diseases that are endemic to St Helena through climate change. There is a study being done on the unidentified pathogens that are attacking the endemic cabbage trees.

On the Falkland Islands, there is a project to eradicate feral goats on East Island, due to disturbance and grazing pressure

The interest of the Group in a seminar or workshop on dealing with invasive species to compare experience across UKOTs was underlined. Thank you to all that attended and those that provided an update.

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

Ascension

An Ascension Island project, 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.

Adam Sharp is the Invertebrate Project Coordinator employed through DPLUS135. The project is multi-faceted and has the following aims:

- To record and database the invertebrates of Ascension.
- To integrate invertebrates into long-term conservation planning
- To develop targeted biocontrol responses for potential and high-risk invertebrates.
- To raise awareness of Ascension's invertebrates.



Ascension's Critically Endangered and endemic giant pseudoscorpion *Garypus titanius*. Photo: Dr Nicola Weber

AIGCFD undertook several projects in 2021 including a shark forum meeting to discuss the issues of sharks around Ascension Island and completed a draft inshore fisheries management strategy along with completion of the MPA management plan.

The UK Government's Blue Belt programme provided support to Ascension Island government on the MPA management plan, research and monitoring plan and the financial plan as well as funding several key positions within the Ascension Island Fisheries and Conservation Department.

British Antarctic Territory

Covid issues had severely limited visits to BAT in the last year. The Blue Belt programme has supported work to underpin international negotiations relating to management of the krill fishery and provided continuing support for the monitoring of unlawful activity in the waters around BAT. This surveillance and monitoring deploy high technological solutions such as utilisation of satellite data, passive acoustic devices, RAF surveillance flights and the development of drone technology.

British Indian Ocean Territory

Natasha Gibson, Chair of Chagos Conservation Trust, was covering the Chief Executive post temporarily; a new person should be in that post by May 2022. CCT are continuing with their *Healthy Islands Healthy Reefs* programme after being successful with Darwin+ funding. This will allow them to employ a project manager for phase 2. It aims to rewild the 30 ecologically degraded islands of the outer atolls of the Chagos Archipelago, returning them to refuges for native species and supporting



thriving coral reefs. Research demonstrates that removing invasive rats is the highest priority conservation management action to restore species and build reef resilience, and is now the focus for CCT.

Several studies had already been carried out, including a ZSL plastics removal trip in August 2021. A PhD study at Imperial is looking at dating evidence to see when rats first got to the islands. This is using eDNA samples from rats and other rodents. However, there is a discrepancy as some of the samples were taken off the island and not from terrestrial areas.

Darwin+ funding will allow field work to take place in June 2022 to gather information – for example: how much bait coconut crabs steal; how to bait rats in mangroves and the like. There are a couple of islands where it was unknown if rats and/or mice were present, so these needed to be investigated as well. Baiting in the mangroves on Eagle Island had failed.

The *Chagossian Voices* project has received Chagos Connect funding and a website was currently being created.

Falkland Islands

UKOTCF has played a pivotal role in arranging for the donation and transfer of a battle ensign from the flagship of the 1982 Falklands Task Force from a member of crew now resident in Montserrat to the Falkland Islands Museum in time for the 40th anniversary events. The details are in the latest *Forum News* and a short video is to be found on the UKOTCF



With the help of Ann Pienkowski (left), Tim Orton checks the battle ensign which he generously donated to the Falklands Museum, in time for their 40th anniversary celebration of liberation. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

website (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/a-flag-goes-home/>).

Mike Jarvis is standing in as the temporary environment officer for Denise Blake, who is on maternity leave and there will be a team of three people in the environment department which is currently recruiting for two positions. There is a new port development underway, replacing the old port and an EIA process is in place. There is also a major problem with land drying up quicker than previously thought due to climate change and land-use changes.

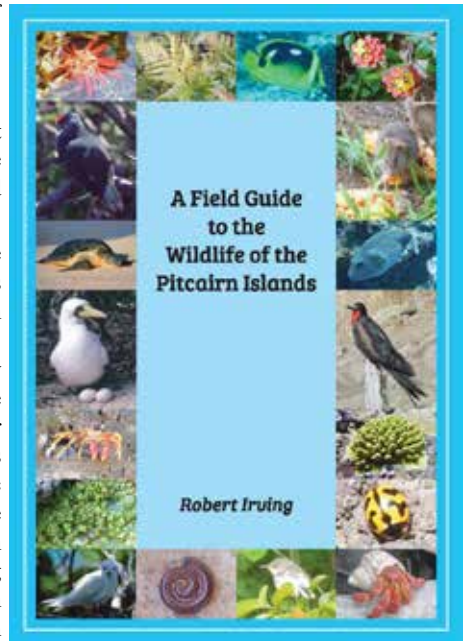
There is to be an environment conference in November 2022

Pitcairn

The 12th meeting of the Pitcairn Environment Group was held online on Thursday 24th March 2022. Items discussed included:

- Blue Belt Programme Update: Expedition to Henderson, Ducie and Oeno Islands. Because of Covid, it was near-impossible for scientists from the UK to travel. Members of the Pitcairn community made key contributions towards the research tour. The overall intention of the expedition was to monitor the impact of climate change on Pitcairn's near-pristine coral reefs, and collect data on fish prevalence.
- In October 2021 the Pitcairn Islands MPA Management Plan (2021-2026) was published on the Government's website. Melva Evans was appointed as MPA Officer – a post funded by the Blue Belt Programme – in November 2021. Satellite surveillance showed the incursions and high risk detections were fishing vessels.
- Deputy Governor Update (Alasdair Hamilton): Despite the pandemic, the past year has seen positive environmental conservation progress. In early 2022, the Royal Navy's offshore patrol vessel HMS Spey visited the Pitcairn Islands. As well as conducting patrols to deter and defend against IUU fishing, the vessel's crew: delivered Covid vaccines; provided dental services and advice on oral care; collected water quality and mapping data from across the MPA, to help scientists understand climate change in the area. Via FCDO, Pitcairn successfully bid to the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Special Climate Change Fund (SCCF). The grant has funded a marine science centre, with lab and limited accommodation. Equipment has been purchased and is already on-island. (The Ascension Island Government are establishing an environmental DNA (eDNA) laboratory using next generation sequencing (NGS) technology, to conduct efficient and effective biological monitoring of their MPA. This is part-funded by a grant from Pew Bertarelli Ocean Legacy.) Covid-free and with the majority of the community fully vaccinated, Pitcairn will open its borders to visitors from 31st March 2022. Regular passenger services on *MV Silver Supporter* between Mangareva, French Polynesia and Pitcairn are planned to resume in July 2022.
- *Field Guide to the Wildlife of the Pitcairn Islands* (Robert Irving): Financial contributions have been secured to allow Robert to complete the field guide. Photo submissions, with permissions, are

Provisional cover of the forthcoming Field Guide



welcome. Robert aims to complete the text by the end of 2022.

- Update from The Pitcairn Islands (Michele Christian and Melva Evans): 2021 was a busy year despite the island's border being closed. As well as the scientific expedition, the island has seen the GPS tracking of birds (with an especially high number found on Oeno and Ducie Islands), and the increase of whale sightings (with mother and calves spotted, along with pods of 3/4). There is a big difference between the number of shark sightings in 2012 (during the NatGeo expedition) and now. It seems that a significant number of sharks, that cannot be fished, are returning to the waters around Pitcairn, although not in the waters surrounding Oeno.
- Repopulation Plan: A steady number of enquiries and applications are coming in, but Covid has changed priorities and there are no longer plans to hold roadshows in New Zealand. Although the long-term population issue remains, the island's environmental profile will also ensure sustainability. Tourism is a mainstay, and the marine science centre will attract scientists and the like.

St Helena

The St Helena Government are in the 2nd year of the Darwin-funded invasive vertebrates' project, which is looking at cats, rats, rabbits and mynah-bird populations. There has been an increase in the bird population due to the eradication of cats and rats. However, the large rabbit population (45,000 – 50,000) is causing a big issue and there is not enough equipment available for trapping. It is difficult to trap the mynah-birds as they are clever, and training is being provided on the most efficient way of trapping them.

SHNT's invertebrate team has been very active recently as part of the cloud forest project. There has been progress on monitoring of habitats and the work to increase invertebrate populations. Several international partners have visited the project and that eDNA work on invertebrates is in progress. As part of the project, the Natural History Museum in the UK are helping to write identification keys for the invertebrates and a book on the terrestrial invertebrates of St Helena had recently been published.

The marine protected area implementation plan is ongoing, and the Blue Marine project has funding until June 2022. There is also funding in place for a head of marine and a marine officer. Funding has been obtained for a Zoological Society of London (ZSL) project to review the use of plastics on St Helena and Ascension. This project is a partnership of ZSL, Cape Town University, Ascension Island and St Helena to improve efficiency in plastic waste management on St Helena and Ascension. It includes reducing single-use plastics and thus reducing the impact of marine plastic pollution on wildlife. SHNT is to partner the project to monitor and assess the current impact of plastics on marine animals whilst working with the private sector and community to change habits of using single-use plastics.

Currently, funding is being sought to fund a historic buildings project. Funding has also been obtained from the British Library to fund an endangered archives project which aims to digitise the records of the British East India Company. UKOTCF has facilitated several UKOTs in accessing British Library support of this sort.

UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM

Virtual Tours: Tristan da Cunha

Introduction

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



Tristan bunting on inaccessible island

© Dr Mike Pienkowski (Introduction, 6 of 11 - Slide ref. 1548)

The Full Tour
Map
Introduction
Features of Natural Interest
Features of Other Interest, including Cultural
Threats / Problems / Issues
Projects / Conservation Actions
Opportunities
Organisations and Links
Tour Selection

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A page from the new Tristan da Cunha Virtual Tour. The whole tour can be accessed at http://www.ukotcf.org/1_yTours/tour.cfm?locn=TRIS&tourType=FULL&dbType=Live

South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands

South Georgia and the Sandwich Islands Government launched the delivery proposal the *Protect Sustain Inspire* (PSI) on 22nd April 2022. PSI contains a framework that ensures ongoing ecosystem recovery and sits on a foundation of four key values: Environmental protection, evidence-based decision making, sustainability and openness.

For more information on PSI please go to <https://www.gov.gs/docsarchive/Environment/PSI/PSI%20brochure%20final-220422.pdf>

Tristan da Cunha

A virtual tour of the island has been developed and produced (http://www.ukotcf.org/1_vTours/intro.htm). A big thank you to the people of Tristan and UK representatives that had helped with the virtual tour, coordinated by Ann Pienkowski. It is one of the longer tours made and, like the others, covers both the natural and historic environment. It is on the UKOTCF website and was done, like the others by voluntary effort without grant support.

In an update to the Gough Island Restoration Project, RSPB now confirm that there are now records of more mice seen and four individuals have been captured from different locations on the islands. These records unfortunately mean that the Gough Island Restoration project has not been successful in its primary objective to rid the island of every single mouse.

Report of UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group

Alderney

The Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT) has this year established the Alderney Biodiversity Centre, in partnership with Guernsey Biological Records Centre. It follows a model used on Jersey, which has been collaborating on its set-up. The aim is to bring together biological records in one place with pooled resources. AWT had a staff member who is working in collaboration so that efforts can be combined to understand records into the future.



Composite photo from BEEP

AWT are leading on the research required to support the Bailiwick Eelgrass Exploration Project (BEEP), given their expertise in this area. The spatial extent for Guernsey has been estimated and now the condition was being assessed. This is an important habitat for many other species, but also as it has potential to be a carbon sink.

Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas

A significant amount of the work has gone to ensuring that the policy and strategy will not have a negative impact on designated sites and species with the advent of non-military development. Monitoring and evidence/data gathering will be reviewed in 5 years' time.

A Darwin Plus grant led by Birdlife Cyprus with the Department as a partner is underway. 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 Pyla, it focusses on management to tackle invasive acacia and restore natural vegetation, while on the Akrotiri peninsula the focus is on sustainable reed-bed management, including through cattle grazing, and implementing an access management plan to tackle the disturbance threat for wildlife.

As a result of the recently formed 'Sustainability working group' set up by the Commander of British Forces Cyprus (CBF), funding from Foreign and Commonwealth Development Office has been awarded to undertake initial ecosystem services and natural capital assessments.

Gibraltar

In February, there was an oil spill involving an Iberian vessel while it was refuelling. Precautions were not taken and so oil washed up on the shoreline in an area where the rare Ribbed Mediterranean limpet *Patella ferruginea* is found. The Captain of the vessel was charged and the vessel was fined, but the damage was done. It is unclear how the limpet is fairing

UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES
UK OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM

Virtual Tours: Gibraltar

CONSERVATION FORUM

The Full Tour
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Features of Natural Interest

Gibraltar's waters are home to a vast array of marine life including dolphins and whales and the somewhat less charismatic – but no less important – sea slug. As a result, the Southern Waters of Gibraltar area has been established as a Special Area of Conservation with a unique management plan to protect the marine flora and fauna. In July 2013 Gibraltar's Government sank 72 concrete blocks into the sea to create an artificial reef as a haven for marine life.



Common Dolphins in the Strait of Gibraltar

© Eric Shaw (Features of Natural Interest, 4 of 6 - Slide ref. 1506)

A page from the new Gibraltar Virtual Tour published during the year: the tour can be viewed at http://www.ukotcf.org/1_vTours/tour.cfm?locn=GIB&tourType=FULL&dbType=Live

and only time will tell.

A 'bioblitz', run by the Nautilus project, with the Gibraltar Ornithological Natural History Society (GONHS), took place at the beach this year with a lot of children attending.

GONHS continue to campaign for a reduction in tuna fishing quota, which need to be more tightly controlled. Gibraltar does not have commercial fisheries. Nevertheless, people fish and sell tuna.

On International matters, the EU deal was expected in June, but nothing is agreed yet. An environmental element should be included with a joint coordinating committee on trans-frontier matters. A treaty was promised by Easter; however, this was thrown into doubt as there were currently larger issues for the British and Spanish Governments to deal with (Russia-Ukraine conflict).

The implications of this delay include, for example, delays in exportation of waste, permits which then accumulated. If there is no treaty, this could put the Government in a difficult position as there could be a reversal of environment policy and practices to survive.

Guernsey

The States of Guernsey have developed a work plan to deliver the Nature Strategy. This focuses on nurturing nature as well as reducing threats to it. The main deliverables are the marine economy supporting plan and the green infrastructure plan, including natural capital accounts. In order to deliver the Strategy, a huge amount of work will be needed especially with support from volunteers and community groups. A partnership group which includes the States of Guernsey and representatives of local NGOs has been established to discuss how they can work together. It contains 3 sub-groups for: sustainable agriculture, education and marine environment.

To deliver the strategy, an invasive species plan has been drafted, informed by horizon scanning and risk analysis with some implications for biosecurity on island.

As with the other Channel Islands, there is a focus on data-capture. A Bailiwick-wide bat survey is being undertaken. It provides a baseline

assessment of bats and how they use the landscape. A seabird census is being undertaken to inform some key future decisions on the seabird enhancement scheme.

The Bailiwick Eelgrass Exploration Project (BEEP), aims to increase knowledge on the presence, location and composition of Eelgrass beds across the Bailiwick, through citizen science. An advanced mooring system for the island is being tested as part of this.

The Pollinator Project is leading a campaign at the moment to reduce pesticide use. Educational materials and information is available on their website (pollinatorproject.gg) which has expanded to Jersey also.

La Société Guernesaise is focusing efforts on helping to shape environmental education and how to mainstream this into the education system. One aspect they are particularly interested in is identifying certain species, e.g. oak tree, wren to foster a life-long appreciation for nature.

Jersey

Local conservation bodies have been closely watching the Island Plan development process. A bridging plan for 3 years is in place, but it lacks strategic vision, with little mention of biodiversity loss or climate change. Amendments to plan included agricultural fields for housing, which could impact some wetlands.

There continue to be some problems with fishing licences in the Channel. Jersey is now able to set its own limits and set out its

own vision for its marine environment. The National Trust for Jersey supports a proposed marine protected area, championed by Blue Marine Foundation and others, as it sits well with Jersey's National Park proposal.

The use of an environmentally friendly mooring buoy is being explored. There is a desire to restore seagrass areas and explore blue carbon potential to help with economic planning. Jersey Marine Conservation continue to support wider engagement on marine conservation and scientific research to support this, particularly by working with Jersey International Centre for Advanced Studies.

In relation to COP26, as part of Jersey's climate emergency declaration, a climate change road map has been developed and some actions are being taken forward on getting to net zero carbon by 2030. Climate groups are being set up in each one of the 12 parishes to educate and encourage people to act on climate change. Related to this, the Jersey Tree Strategy is being developed.

GROW, a community gardening initiative which aims to promote sustainable agriculture and provide opportunities to overcome mental health issues continues to expand its activities.

The Jersey Biological Centre hosted the Inter Island Environment Meeting (IEM) from 20th-21st October. A link to talks is at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCrqtZnD902R9ZIVeYELfGTg>. The Channel Island pollinator project is an example of working together by sharing information at the IEM. Current and future activities include: mapping pollinator patches, pesticide/residue on bees and strawberry assays.

There are concerns over the quarrying of an active sand dune; the last place in Europe continuing this practice. Development pressures are driving this and a licence has been extended.

The Isle of Man

The Government's climate change action plan was published. It includes actions such as: enhancing nature with a woodland scheme, re-forestry and restoration of peatlands, natural carbon storage and building on the network of marine reserves.

A biodiversity action group had been set-up to promote the delivery of the

Biodiversity Strategy actions within the organisations represented in the group, the government and the wider community.

The Manx Wildlife Trust (MWT) has been announced as the delivery partner for the Agri-scheme. It is an opportunity to expand the area of land managed for nature. MWT will advise the government on applications by going to speak with farmers about land management and providing recommendations.

MWT education wildlife observer and gardening course had double the number of places this year.

The MWT bird team are trialling the use of a Motus receiver, US system antenna, to track Manx shearwater and other birds in order to understand more about their range. The hope is that other countries in the Irish sea will be included to gain a broader understanding of movements in the area.

Isle of Man now has a Seasearch coordinator, after receiving training from MCS. The aims of this initiative is to encourage citizen scientists to collect data on the marine environment. The popular Festival of the Sea event took place this year.

Some other progress includes: an Island Plant Strategy; Biodiversity Action Plans with priority habitats and species, heightened awareness of invasive species, action on single-use plastic.

As part of the UN Biosphere Reserve, businesses are encouraged to become involved in reducing impacts on biodiversity. The Government of Isle of Man has delivered a workshop encouraging businesses to adopt sustainable practices. A recent Dublin workshop on circular economies had been very useful to inform those discussions. Annual rewards to businesses will be announced.

Sark

As reported in *Forum News* 56, the sad passing of Richard Axton has been felt very deeply on Sark. His contribution to the community and conservation on the island in general was enormous. The division of tasks was beginning, but there are huge boots to fill.

Industrial fishing waste is one of the largest challenges. After the beach is cleaned, more waste washes up. It is a challenge to remove it continuously so the community have all contributed.

As part of the Pollinator project, there will be a visit this summer. It provides a nice community engagement activity. An example of the interest locally has been in the pesticide reduction and amnesty. Help is needed in getting it off the island. Recording opportunities are ongoing now with butterfly surveys, bat survey across islands led by Linda Higgins.

Some funds have been received to improve a small valley; a wet system. This will involve replacing sycamores with indigenous trees and an educational programme at the school.

La Société Sercquaise has been involved in habitat and breeding birds studies. They have been taking part in the rat eradication study, both in collaboration with the States of Guernsey.

Blue fin tunas are often seen around Sark, but information is lacking. Funding for a project is being explored.

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Membership

UKOTCF's current Member and Associate organisations linked to a particular UK Overseas Territory or Crown Dependency: Alderney Wildlife Trust; Anguilla Archaeological & Historical Society; Anguilla National Trust; Ascension Conservation Centre; Ascension Heritage Society; Bermuda Audubon Society; Bermuda National Trust; UK Antarctic Heritage Trust; Chagos Conservation Trust; National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, BVI; Jost van Dykes Preservation Society, BVI; National Trust for the Cayman Islands; Central Caribbean Marine Institute; Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre, Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas; BirdLife Cyprus; Falklands Conservation; Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society; La Société Guernesiaise; Société Jersiaise; National Trust for Jersey; Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture; Manx Wildlife Trust; Montserrat National Trust; Pitcairn Natural Resources Division; St Helena National Trust; La Société Sercquaise; National Trust of the Turks & Caicos Islands; Turks & Caicos National Museum; Turks & Caicos Reef Fund.

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