

FORUM NEWS 58

JULY 2023

•

www.ukotcf.org.uk

Building Horticulture Capacity in Montserrat



Left: the propagation house at the end of Leigh's visit, with one bench covered and full of cuttings. Right: a rejuvenated mist-propagation bench at MNT.

During May 2023 UKOTCF Council Member and Chief Executive Officer of the Manx Wildlife Trust, Leigh Morris, volunteered to use annual leave to visit Montserrat. The purpose was to help build the horticultural skills of the Montserrat National Trust (MNT). This was specifically to help develop the nursery plant propagation at the MNT botanical garden, to increase local plant production in order to support both the Adopt a Home for Wildlife project, managed by UKOTCF and part-funded by Darwin Plus grant 155 (pp 1-10) and the Planning Toolkit project (DPLUS192, see pp 11-13). In addition, he engaged more widely with the Montserrat Government Departments of Agriculture and Environment, local farmers, secondary school, and public.

This article is a summary extracted from Leigh's report. The full report can be read at https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/montserrat_ukotcf_report_may2023/.

The plant nursery at MNT had been set up well over 20 years ago, but over the years it has become in need of maintenance and good practices needed to be reinvigorated. Working closely with the MNT team, we made notable improvements to the propagation nursery facilities and techniques at MNT. The propagation benches were levelled and power-washed, mist-nozzles cleaned, electric leaf cleaned and put into use, the mist-unit controller explained to the staff, and capillary matting, polythene cover and, above all,



Collecting cutting material from the hedge of the endemic pribby in the MNT garden, and then transporting it in sealed bags containing some sprayed water to maintain turgidity of the material, inside a cool-box.



At the propagation workshop: above left: mixing one of the rooting media mixes; above right: filling a module/cell-tray with rooting media; below left: preparation of the pribby cuttings; below right: insertion of the pribby cuttings; most of the class who participated in the practical elements of the workshop. Bottom right: at the grafting & air-layering workshop, Hon. Crenston Buffonge, Minister of Agriculture, Housing, Lands & Environment, tries his hand at grafting. [Update from June: the Minister reported to Catherine Wensink and Mike Pienkowski that the plants he grafted were still growing well]



shade-netting added to the structure. There is now a clear system for propagation-tray washing, compost processing, and an agreed role-description drafted for the propagation staff, to ensure good hygiene levels are maintained in the propagation house daily.

I visited five diverse *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project sites (“Wildlife Homes”), and the opportunity exists to hone down the range of different plant species produced by MNT for the project. This was agreed and a Production List for the nursery was

formatted, and propagation recording re-instigated.

Chris Sealys had recently been appointed as the MNT Conservation Officer; he has a background in forestry, botany and horticulture in St Lucia. Chris was a great help to the capacity-building on the trip and he will help ensure that the upskilling will sustain after this visit. MNT staff member Samantha Paul showed great potential, and a new role-descriptor was drafted for her. Another staff-member, Mapi, a long-tandin staff member, has good local



Delivering classroom-based interactive session to MNT and Ministry staff in MNT meeting room

plant knowledge and this needs to be retained.

I delivered two focused propagation workshops, which provided useful sharing of knowledge and skills development. The first on vegetative propagation focused on all aspects of taking cuttings, and we set up a trial of pribby cuttings *Rondeletia buxifolia*, with six different rooting media, wounding and hormones all being tested. This was the most impactful capacity-building of my trip, which I believe has left a legacy to enable MNT to produce more plants, under Chris' leadership.

The second workshop, on Grafting & Air Layering, was delivered at the Government nursery and was attended by a wide audience, including the Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment. I believe the greatest benefit of this second workshop for MNT is the fostering of even closer working links with the Montserrat Government staff. There is a great opportunity for this collaboration to develop further to benefit the environment.

There was wide enthusiasm and invitations to engage with me from several groups during my trip. I visited the two Government nurseries, several farms, met with the Farmers Association, had a tour of the buried city of Plymouth (the volcano and eruptions of 1995-2010 still dominate Montserrat culture), delivered an evening horticulture session for the public, met with the Student Leadership Team at the secondary school (with the aim of setting

up links with an Isle of Man school), co-delivered a session for MNT's childrens' club, Monty's Messengers, and had four appearances on local radio talking about my trip.

In wider conservation, I attended a talk on turtle conservation, and joined two boat trips to survey seabirds with Dr Tom Hart, Oxford Brookes University and MALHE (Ministry) staff, and carried out scuba dives to participate in coral reef conservation projects run by Scuba Montserrat.

In addition to nursery and plant production, I made additional recommendations for MNT to:

- Work more closely with MALHE on the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project.
- Aim to bring agriculture and environment closer together to benefit food and the environment.
- Develop the MNT agriculture plot as a model farm, potentially with intercropping on show.
- Join Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI).

Overall, as well as building horticultural capacity, and facilitating more joint working and collaboration across the island, I personally had a wonderful time, and gained a broad understanding of Montserrat's conservation issues, which I believe will enhance my usefulness on the UKOTCF Council [see page 17 - Editor].



I engaged with the Montserrat Farmers Association on a few occasions, including meeting a group of farmers on 23rd May.



Above left: Montserrat farmer harvesting white potatoes, with Project Officer/Dept of Agriculture Advisor Elvis Gerald and MNT Conservation Officer Chris Sealys; above right: upland banana crop, also acting as a shelter-belt for the field vegetables; below left: a home-made pheromone trap for trapping adult weevils in the sweet potato crop; below right: Elvis in one of his farm-plots, with intercropping, mulching and drip irrigation systems.



Reflections

The main aim of my trip was to build horticulture capacity in the MNT ultimately to increase the production of native plants in the MNT nursery, to plant in *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project sites. This was carried out in two ways, firstly working with the MNT team to make improvements to the nursery propagation house, and secondly by staff training, both informally to the MNT staff and as part of the two workshops I delivered on vegetative propagation and grafting and air layering.

Working closely with the MNT team, particularly Chris Sealys and Samantha, we were able to make what I believe are significant improvements to the propagation nursery facilities and techniques at MNT. The propagation benches were levelled and power washed, mist nozzles cleaned, electric leaf cleaned and put into use, the mist-unit controller explained to the staff, and capillary matting, polythene cover and shade netting above all added to the structure.

There is now a clear system for propagation tray washing, and an agreed role description drafted for the propagation staff, to ensure good hygiene levels are maintained in the propagation house daily. A Production List for the nursery is formatted, propagation recording is now a key task for all, and the area for composting and the making of growing media for potting up plants has been tidied and reorganised.

The two workshops I delivered provided useful sharing of knowledge and skills development. The one delivered at MNT focusing on cuttings propagation was the most impactful, as I believe all MNT staff who attended gained a better understanding of the principles of successful propagation, and crucially knowing that small differences at all stages of the propagation process can

make a large difference to the success. Notably the importance of bags/water/cool box for cuttings collection, good hygiene at all stages, the need for oxygen in the rooting environment, and the need for good/clean tools.

The grafting workshop was more of a 'look see' and there wasn't such a strong output or legacy for MNT, although the knowledge level has raised, and new techniques were learnt. Grafting is a skill that is better taught to groups of a similar skill/knowledge, so ideally, I'd have delivered an advanced session for the Govt staff who already do grafting, alongside an introductory session for others. I believe the greatest benefit of the second workshop for MNT is likely the fostering of even closer working links with the Montserrat Government staff and I see great opportunity in this collaboration developing further. I believe that the MALHE staff enjoyed the two workshops, and their participation was excellent and added much to both sessions.

The lack of appropriate tools and resources hindered both workshops, particularly the grafting workshop as trying to graft without a specialist knife makes an already highly skilled and dexterous task even more challenging. I was delighted that the DoE nursery supervisor Kitty was impressed with my specialist budding knife and UKOTCF is arranging to supply her one of her own. Meanwhile the month after my trip, Catherine Wensink took a left-handed grafting knife to Montserrat for one of Kitty's team. A good relationship builder and I am certain the knives will be well used.

It was excellent and synchronous that Chris Sealys had commenced his role as Conservation Officer at MNT two weeks before my visit. I immediately got on well with Chris, and he has an excellent plant/botany/horticulture knowledge. We worked well together;

he understands plants and people, and through him I believe that the changes we made to the MNT systems will sustain. Samantha is another great member of the MNT staff, and I believe she has the potential to oversee successfully all the nursery propagation and production. Mapi is close to retirement, but he has a huge amount of local plant knowledge that would be difficult to replace. Perhaps there is a way that his knowledge can be retained, but Samantha is positioned to take day-to-day oversight of the nursery working under Chris. I believe this would work well, especially if another person could work with Samantha.

I was delighted at the overall sense of appreciation I received from several of the people I worked with and trained. The best example being one morning towards the end of my trip when I arrived at MNT. Johnson is one of the two Haitians working in the garden (typically carrying out leaf sweeping and other manual tasks) and he had attended three of my sessions. As I did every morning I arrived and said good morning to the two Haitians sat under a tree in the shade. Johnson gave me the now standard response of 'good morning sir', then as I was walking down the steps he called after me. I turned and he beckoned me to him. He then said in broken English 'the training sessions have been very good, and I want to thank you for your teaching of us. I hope you will come back'. This is without doubt the best praise I could have received from anybody. I was also delighted at the updates I've been receiving since my visit from Chris and Samantha.

In terms of my wider engagement during my trip. Overall, I believe that my schedule was too ambitious, and perhaps I should have simply spent more days working with the MNT team carrying out propagation and other nursery work. I understand, however, that many people wanted to engage with me and I believe everything I did was to some degree useful to MNT. I found the meetings with farmers very informative, and I was delighted at how some of them positively engaged with me and that they are keen to further develop their skills. I see opportunities for Montserrat food production to increase and further upskilling would certainly assist with that.

The meetings with the Student Leadership Team at Montserrat

Secondary School were inspiring and I will certainly aim to foster links for them with schools in the Isle of Man. There is a great opportunity to link young people across other UKOTs and Crown Dependencies and connecting to the Isle of Man will be a good place to start. The public session was a good showcase for MNT, as were the appearances I made on local radio.

I had hoped to see wider conservation (including marine) and the time I spent with Scuba Montserrat on weekends and the two seabird surveys I participated in, were both tremendously interesting and enjoyable. Overall, I believe that in the time I was in Montserrat I gained a broad understanding of the island's conservation issues, which I am confident will enhance my usefulness on the UKOTCF Council.

On the final working day of my trip a de-brief meeting took place at MNT, chaired by Director Sarita Francis, with Delmaude Ryan, Chris and four from MALHE (Stephon, Barry, Ajhermae and Elvis, the last two also being Project Officers in *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*). There was much positivity about my visit from Sarita and others, and Sarita was keen that MNT might twin with Manx Wildlife Trust, which I will suggest to my Board. Chris said he was pleased that the two of us are on the same page, but there is now a need for MNT to avoid complacency and the risk of regressing from progress made. Chris is keen that the two of us continue to work together and I encouraged MNT to loop me in as/when it could be useful, e.g. I'd be keen to join on-line meetings with MNT if/when I can.

There was enthusiasm about the interactions between the ministry (MALHE) and MNT during my visit, with one of the MALHE team stating this week was the best example of collaboration he'd seen to date and was keen to see more. MALHE identified the need for more upskilling, both for their staff and farmers. Pesticide use was one area they felt would be useful and I would agree. I have experience of delivering pesticide training and I see benefits to Montserrat both in terms of efficacy of use and health and safety of the operators. Another indicated the desire for more training resources, booklets, etc. and there was a suggestion that the annual MNT flower show could be linked to Garden Tours of the island.



Meet the *Adopters of Wildlife Homes* in Montserrat's *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project

Ann and Mike Pienkowski of UKOTCF visited Montserrat for the first half of December 2022. Much of the time was spent filming and interviewing *Adopters* on their sites (*Wildlife Homes*) – and, subsequently back in UK, editing to make many published videos. Some of these have now been published online (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/adoptahomeforwildlife/>; scroll down to Project Update) and others will follow. MNT has drawn attention to some of these in social media.

The *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project arose from an earlier 2-year project in 2016-18. In the first year of that project, we identified what we now call *Wildlife Homes* as an approach to address

some of the key challenges and opportunities of conservation in Montserrat. In the second year, we tested this successfully on a small number of pilot sites with our first *Adopters*. Three of those first sites stayed with us during the following three years while we tried to secure funding to employ local project officers, key to continuing. They became Wildlife Homes 01 (Garibaldi Hill), 02 (Belham River Mouth) and 03 (Cork Hill) in the continued new phase of the project. There are a number of videos about these (and a few other pilot sites) from the first phase still available. There are links to these at: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/sos-montserrat/>. We shall soon be adding new videos on these sites,

but meanwhile enjoy these videos of those who helped get the work started.

Adopt Home for Wildlife is a project which aims to protect Montserrat's unique biodiversity, ecosystems and natural capital through community action. It is being led by the Montserrat National Trust on island and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, which coordinates support from partners. *Adopters* are those local people or groups who volunteer and are accepted to manage an area of land (*Wildlife Home*) within the project. A network of sites across the island is being established where action takes place to improve conditions for biodiversity and, where possible, opportunities for people to improve livelihoods and well-being are provided. Preliminary ecological surveys of the sites are conducted and, with this information, a management plan is developed between the *Adopter* and the project partners. Management plans have been agreed for the first 10 Wildlife Homes and additional ones are being developed.

In the later part of this article, we outline some of the *Wildlife Homes* and *Adopters* for which videos have so far been published. A much fuller version of this can be read in our newsletter *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* 14, pages 2-12 (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/SOSnatureNewsletter14.pdf>)

Also during the December visit, the UKOTCF team had discussions also with Montserrat National Trust colleagues about project work present and future, including addressing some challenges. They met also with the Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment, Hon. Crenston Buffonge.

They participated in radio and streamed video shows, and held a meeting with *Adopters* to celebrate work so far, with presentations from Project Officers Ajhermae White, Elvis Gerald, Delmaude Ryan and Antwone Sinclair, and a contribution from Mike Pienkowski. They also explored possible new *Wildlife Homes* and *Adopters*.

In late January, UKOTCF's Catherine Wensink visited, mainly in respect of the project *From Blue Iguanas to Blue Vervain – Sharing the colonial histories from the UK Overseas Territories* (see pp 11-13), as well as further work on *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*. She was accompanied by Rebecca Machin (of Leeds Museums and Galleries), Jodey Peyton (of UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology) and Wolfgang Rabitsch (an experienced entomologist from Austria, volunteering his expertise to both projects).

Mike and Catherine were back in Montserrat again in June 2023. This was largely to be available to two personnel from Niras, the Darwin Secretariat, Victoria Pinion and Rebecca Beattie. They were conducting a mid-term review of the Darwin Plus grant 155, which is the main current funder of *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*. Among their meetings, they visited several *Adopters* at their *Wildlife Homes*, alongside members of the project team.

Wildlife Home 06: Lookout Primary School

Ann and Mike Pienkowski, as well as project officer Delmaude Ryan, greatly enjoyed their visit to Lookout School, to talk with Head Teacher Ms Denelta Weekes and some of her enthusiastic students.

We had explored the possibilities of including Lookout School during the pilot study in 2017-18. However, the lack of continuity funding to keep employing a local project officer meant that we could not develop that then. However, some



Mike interviews head teacher Ms Denelta Weekes, some of her pupils, and project officer Delmaude Ryan at Lookout School. All photos: Ann Pienkowski

aspects were picked up by the Department of Agriculture to help the school develop a vegetable garden.

So, we were particularly pleased that the school's patience was rewarded when we were able to rejoin them in the present main project phase.

The aim at this site is to maintain and re-establish nature ecosystems within the school grounds insofar as this is possible and to integrate this into the school's educational activities, with maximum involvement of students from all classes.

Ms Denelta Weekes, Headteacher, explained that she hoped the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project would create an ecosystem in this exposed site which would have native trees and shrubs to provide shade and decrease wind and salt-spray. The students would also then benefit by being able to study a developing ecosystem, as part of their studies.

A key early stage at this site will be to plant a hedge of sea-grape and Pribby along the boundary exposed to the ocean. The sea-grape occurs naturally along shores and is resistant to salt spray. The pribby is resistant to drought, wind and other adverse conditions. It is endemic to Montserrat. As the school students correctly recognised, "endemic" (in its ecological sense; the meaning is different in a medical context) means found naturally only here.

As these establish, they will provide some shelter to help other plants to establish. These could include management of the grasses and establishment of some native trees around the edges of the playing field, to provide shade for the pupils when out of the buildings.



The boundary of the site, beyond the playing field, is very exposed to high winds and salt spray.

The pupils looked forward to growing more vegetables and having fruit trees. Shade trees would make their playtimes more enjoyable. They were enthusiastic about the idea of having more animals and plants in their grounds, which they could watch and learn about. They were clearly aware that Montserrat had some very special plants and animals, such as the endemic pribby and Montserrat oriole. The students were keen to start growing their own plants. One of the students thought that they should develop their own botanic garden.

Project Officer Delmaude Ryan explained that initial surveys had identified native plants, such as pribby and sea-grape, which would survive well in the hot, dry environment of Lookout, and support increased biodiversity on the site.

One of the students spoke about the importance of water for the plants, and the animals that depend on them. She noted that this year (2022) had been a very dry year, and the plants had suffered. A suitable irrigation system for the plants around the perimeter, a long way from the school building, is being investigated.

Another student said he loved watching birds, and listening to them, and hoped that, when the school playing field had more trees and bushes, the students would be able to enjoy watching birds. He added that some of the younger children might be afraid of some of the insects, and that having the chance to look at these in the school grounds, they would be interested and not afraid.

Another of the students spoke with great enthusiasm about *Monty's Messengers*. This is MNT's club for primary-school-age children, which the project helped to re-start. One of the things she had learnt about was seed germination.

Wildlife Home 08: Hibiscus Drive (the Couch family)



(From left) Project Officer Ajhermae White, Mark and Kathryn discuss with Mike Pienkowski (All photos: Ann Pienkowski)

Wildlife Home 08 is the garden around the home of Mark Couch and Kathryn Kerge Couch. Kathryn and Mark had acquired the property when it was in quite a neglected state. They have done a lot of work in clearing the garden, and removing volcanic ash deposits to enable the garden to flourish. They like being Adopters because the surveys for the management plan gave them information about the types of native plants which would suit their situation, which plants and trees already in their garden they should keep, which should be removed or controlled, and what they should plant.



Ajhermae, Mark and Kathryn warily view and discuss the invasive ants.

WH08 is surrounded by coastal dry forest habitat, made up of shrubs, tall grasses and trees. On the northern side of the land, a waterway runs towards the eastern coast. This area to the north is owned by Montserrat National Trust and the mutual wildlife importance of these adjacent areas will be developed as the project continues.

On a tour of the garden, Ajhermae White, the lead project officer for this site, showed Kathryn and Mark some of the native plant species they already have, and some of the invasive plant species which need to be controlled. She also gave them advice about treatments for controlling the invasive fire ants.

The surrounding dry forest habitat hosts a variety of bird species including scaly-naped pigeon, grey kingbird and American kestrel. At the southern side of the house (at the time of the plant survey) grew medium-sized Guinea grass and herbs, like the tridax daisy which attracts different species of butterflies. A neglected plant patch on the north-western corner of the house grows pineapples and many wild herbs and weeds, such as the red tasselflower and the leaf-of-life plant. Two mature West Indian mahogany trees are on the property that provide shade for parts of the ground, while a few mature date palms line the eastern side of the land. Large ixora shrubs attract the island's smallest bird, the Antillean-crested hummingbird.

The intention now is to landscape the area in a way which is



Leaf-of-life and white peacock butterfly



compatible with native wildlife. The site should be aiming towards restoring dry/mesic forest with medium/large tree dominated vegetation >5m tall.

The objectives are to:

1. Identify and remove invasive, non-native species in the tropical dry forest and replace with native species that thrive in the conditions, either from the seed-bank or by planting saplings from the MNT nursery.
2. Encourage more invertebrate fauna found in this habitat by providing suitable micro-habitats, *e.g.* allowing small patches of tridax daisies to grow to attract sulphur butterflies
3. Establish a prickly/spike hedge (*e.g.* plant agaves) on the southern side of the property to deter trespassers, .
4. Control invasive pests that are impacting the ground:
 - a) control fire-ants by regularly using bait and insecticide such as Amdro and Ortho
 - b) control mole crickets.
5. Make the pool-deck aesthetically pleasing, *e.g.* by planting native flowers in the planters, such as lantanas.
6. Control invasive plant species, *e.g.* by maintaining the lawn with *Zoysia* grass to prevent invasive grasses and weeds from growing (like the guinea grass and the little ironweed).

Kathryn and Mark are delighted to have mature mahogany trees on their plot, and hope that as the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project becomes more widely known, developers on other sites will work to keep existing mature trees and other native plants.

Wildlife Home 12: Cassava Ghaut

Carol Osborne's Wildlife Home at Cassava Ghaut is on the edge of the mesic forest edge. The mesic forest typically consists of medium/large-tree-dominated vegetation more than 5m tall in mid elevations, with medium rainfall.

The forested ghauts (streams, usually in steep V-shaped valleys) in Montserrat are a discontinuous series of steep, forested streams that originate in the Centre Hills area. The Centre Hills and Northern Ghauts are proposed to be recognised as a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention and as Key Biodiversity Areas. They provide continuous riparian fringe of forests and are an important ecological corridor between the coast, riparian forests and the forests of the Centre Hills.



(From left) Project Officers Ajhermae White, Antwone Sinclair and Elvis Gerald, Project Leader Dr Mike Pienkowski, gardener Ishmael Farrell, and site-owner Carol Osborne discuss plans. All photos: Ann Pienkowski



Elvis explains the problem of invasive non-native vine, golden pothos.

The *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* team were delighted to interview Carol Osborne, the site owner, and her gardener, Ishmael Farrell, on site to learn about their work and future aims for the site.

Carol explained that, before the site became a Wildlife Home, the area was completely forest with many alien species, with no open areas. As Ishmael started clearing the forest of non-native species, native species which would contribute to increased biodiversity were discovered, and these would not be disturbed. As the area was opened to sunlight, they were seeing a lot more wildlife, including the Montserrat oriole, endemic to (found naturally only in) Montserrat, and listed as Vulnerable. Another threatened species endemic to few islands in the Lesser Antilles, with a sub-species endemic to Montserrat is the forest thrush, with another 8 species endemic to the Lesser Antilles: brown trembler, scaly-breasted thrasher, bridled quail-dove, Antillean crested hummingbird, purple-throated Carib, green-throated Carib, lesser Antillean bullfinch, Caribbean elaenia.

The aim was to create a forest clearing. Native trees such as *lignum vitae* and white cedar would be planted, as well as some others which would encourage wildlife, and provide fruit, both for wildlife and people.

Christmas-tree palms, with little red berries which the birds loved, had been planted. 30 of the endemic pribby plants, from the Montserrat National Trust plant nursery, had been put in at the boundary of the site, which would eventually create a hedge. The existing mango tree, although not a native species, would be controlled so that it did not become invasive, but it would not be removed. Some other fruit trees and pineapples had also been planted, but these would also be controlled, as advised by the lead project officer for this site, Elvis Gerald. All actions were designed to add to the biodiversity of the area.

The felled trees were going to be turned into charcoal, and intern Antwone Sinclair explained how the leaves and twigs were being turned into

compost. Ajhermae White explained the importance of having native vegetation on the sides of the Ghaut, to prevent soil erosion and soil wash into the stream. Additionally, native trees provided good leaf litter to the stream, supporting micro-organisms and small water animals, essential components of the food web.

Elvis Gerald demonstrated the problem caused by the invasive golden pothos vine which was killing mature trees, and explained that any removed pieces of vine needed to be burnt, as it was very aggressive, and could regenerate from the smallest piece.

If you would like to see and hear more about this Wildlife Home, there are links to 2 videos (lasting 9½ and 6 minutes) at <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/adoptahomeforwildlife/> (scroll down to Project Updates).

For this site, the aim is to restore a piece of mesic forest and forest clearing, to remove invasive species which are preventing native plants from establishing, and to provide a series of micro-habitats for invertebrates and other wildlife.

Wildlife Home 05: EcoPlay



Part of the EcoPlay area adjacent to the Montserrat National Trust botanic garden and offices

In 2021, the Montserrat National Trust became owners of a parcel of land adjacent to the Montserrat National Trust Botanic Garden, in the village of Salem. It is opposite the Montserrat Secondary school and is situated on the corner of a main road in a residential area. The area of the site is approximately 14000sq ft (about 1300 m²).

The site will be transformed throughout the project. The Montserrat National Trust has decided to dedicate the space as a place where members of the community, especially children and young people, as well as visitors could come and learn about biodiversity, ecosystem services and sustainability in a safe environment.

With the help of UKOTCF, the Trust secured the *pro bono* services of an architect to develop plans for the site, including the building necessary to fulfil its functions. Developing and implementing a management plan for this Wildlife Home therefore provides an opportunity to provide a model of how to develop an approved building while maintaining – and striving to enhance – the native wildlife and its importance to biodiversity.

The north-western area of the site (as well as borders) will provide space for exploring nature and sustainability by areas dedicated to nature including growing endemic species as well as cultivating food and medicinal plants. The aim of this management plan is to ensure that key natural features are retained and enhanced, and integrated with the physical development of this environmental education facility.



Sarita Francis describes some of the traditional foods, here sorrel, in the Creole Garden. Photos: Ann Pienkowski

In December 2022, the interview included information about special aspects of the site, such as near the south-eastern boundary where there are rows of established trees including birch trees, which shelter the site but are also being utilised as nesting and foraging sites for the endemic stingless bottle-bee *Melponia variegatipes lautipes*, and a tour of the Creole garden, adjacent to the EcoPlay site, where Monty's Messengers had been doing some practical planting. The aim of this exercise was to demonstrate that vegetables have to be planted, they don't just appear on supermarket shelves. Before the planting, they were told about seed germination, so they became aware of the process from beginning to end. The EcoPlay site will be a home for Monty's Messengers.

Already the site is being used to raise awareness of biodiversity, such as being the venue for a very popular bioblitz. Areas of the site are being left unmown, to encourage insect life. The adjacent Creole Garden is certainly benefitting from the large numbers of pollinators that the EcoPlay area hosts. Development of the site is being carefully considered, so that the construction work keeps as much of the existing vegetation as possible. Where important vegetation needs to be removed, seeds will be collected and cuttings taken, to be propagated in the Montserrat National Trust plant nursery, and replanted later. This careful development would hopefully provide a model for other building developments.

A key aspect of the EcoPlay project is it has been designed to be self-sustainable. The Montserrat National Trust is about 90% solar powered at present, and the EcoPlay centre will follow that.

Donations to fund the EcoPlay building (architect's preview below) are going well but more is needed. UKOTCF 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/>.



Pro-bono architect's (Dennis Sharp Architects) impression of the completed EcoPlay building, horticultural practice area and surrounding natural area.

Visit by Darwin reviewers to project



Above: Darwin reviewers, Victoria Pinion (speaking) and Rachel Beattie (far right) meet some of the students most involved at Wildlife Home 06 (Lookout Primary School) and their Acting Headteacher, with project officer Delmaude Ryan, and project leaders Mike Pienkowski (behind camera) and Catherine Wensink.

Below: On Lawyer's Mountain at WH07 (left) with Adopter Cherise Aymer and Project Officer Elvis Gerald beyond the reviewers; and at WH10 (right) with Adopter Veta Nicholas, at her home at the top of the road and adjoining the protected forest.

Bottom left: reviewers discuss with MNT Conservation Officer Chris Sealy outside the nursery with plants available for Adopters or sale.

Bottom right: Reviewers join Delmaude and (out of view) Catherine and Mike on MNT's weekly programme on national radio ZJB.

All photos this page: Dr Mike Pienkowski



Biodiversity and Well-being Toolkit: Sustainable Development addressed as part of new project on Montserrat

The UK Research Institute funded project *Blue Iguana to Blue Vervain* concluded in March (see *Forum News* 57). With ideas generated during this very productive project, an application was put together with partners and was submitted to UK Government's Darwin Plus (part of their Biodiversity Challenge Funds). The project titled *Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development* started in April 2023 and lasts for three years.

Land-use change is one of five main drivers of global biodiversity loss. For many UKOTs, including Montserrat, piecemeal development of land is seen as a major threat to biodiversity. For Montserrat, following the destruction of the largest town in the late 1990s volcanic eruption, development for housing is an ongoing necessity. Successive island-plans have recognised Montserrat's natural resources as important assets in economic growth and sustainability but, to date, there has been limited practical support or detailed guidance on how to integrate biodiversity conservation adequately into built-development practices, although a start was made in UKOTCF-organised projects in 2015-2018. Since 2010 when the last island development plan was published, there has been an explosion of research linking biodiversity with human health and well-being.

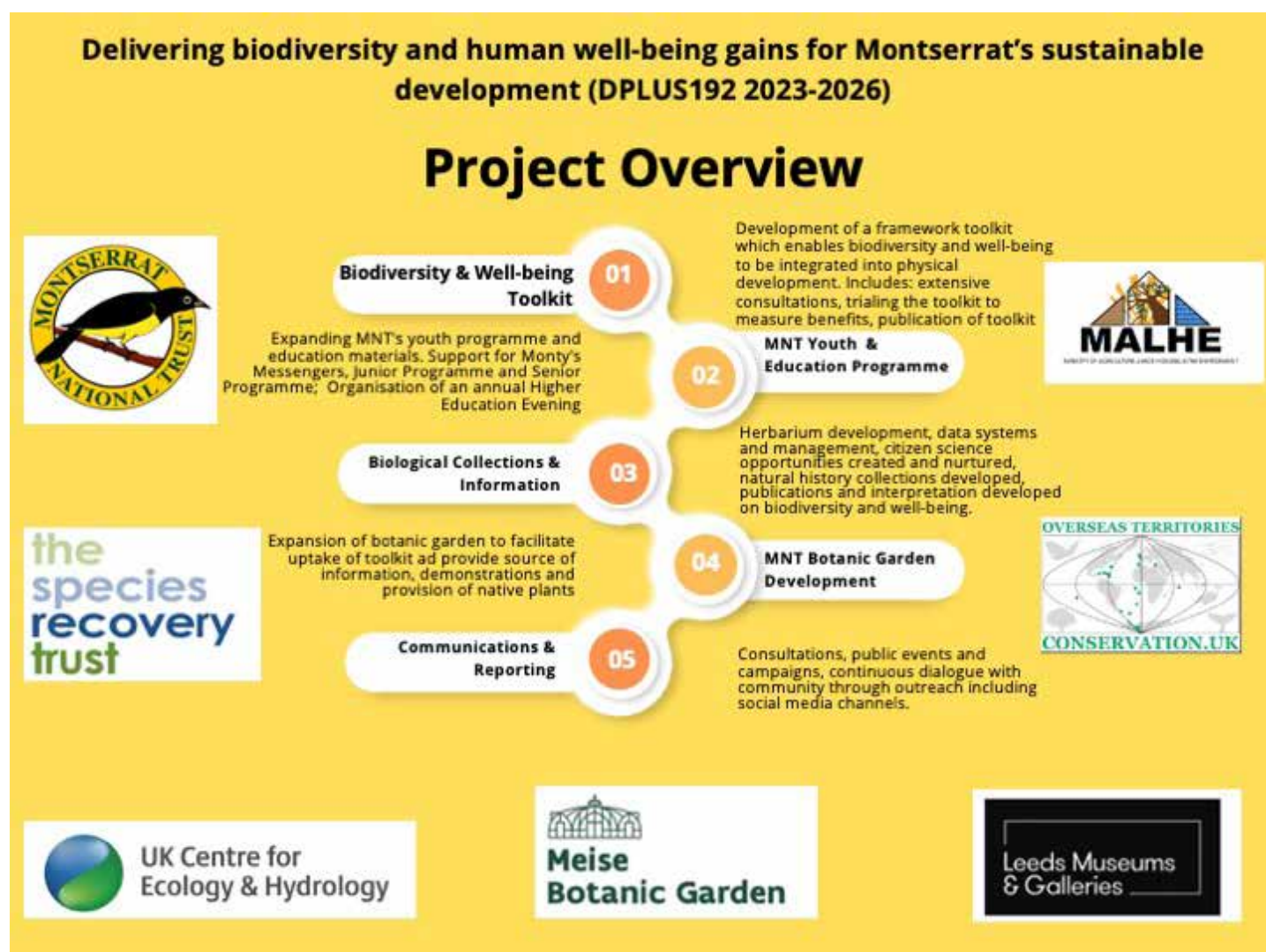
Built developments can provide an opportunity for biodiversity to flourish; however if not encouraged or widely promoted, they can result in localised biodiversity-loss (for example, Pipers Pond infilling in 2014 which destroyed Montserrat's only functioning mangrove habitat), and accidental or deliberate introduction of

non-native species that can ultimately become invasive (e.g. red fire ants introduced during construction of the airport post-2008), resulting in negative impacts on biodiversity and ecosystems, human health and the economy.

The project aims to put consideration for the island's biodiversity at the heart of decision-making, planning and built-development. This need was identified by partners on Montserrat, and follows a similar pattern to those needs identified across the UKOTs (particularly documented at the series of UKOTCF-organised conferences 2000-2021). With the Montserrat National Trust leading the project on island, they will ensure that the community have a mechanism to provide input into future planning and developments by: (1) bringing together voices that may not otherwise feed into public consultations; (2) creating a biodiversity and human-well-being toolkit for the community, physical planners and developers; (3) monitoring and evaluating outcomes for biodiversity and human well-being; (4) sharing outcomes with other UKOTs via existing knowledge-sharing networks.

The team will adapt pre-existing tools developed elsewhere, notably the UKCEH's biodiversity toolkit, which was developed in the UK for local Housing Providers. This will be used as a basis for the toolkit, but expanded and tailored to Montserrat's needs, circumstances, economic challenges and unique biodiversity. It will support developers and the community by providing practical ways to support sensitively constructed and landscaped developments in Montserrat's unique environment.

Project activities will extend the use of Montserrat's valued asset,





Above: MNT Executive Director Mrs Sarita Francis presided at the launch; below: Mrs Delmaude Ryan



the native plant nursery and its developing on-island herbarium, ultimately to promote and conserve the value of endemic and native wildlife.

The project was officially launched on 21st June with an event at the Montserrat National Trust. It was attended by the Deputy Premier Hon. Samuel Joseph; HE the Governor, Mrs Sarah Tucker; Chief Physical Planner, Mr Jerome Meade; Tourism Director, Mrs. Ineta Rosetta West-Gerald; and representatives from the Youth Parliament and the Montserrat Secondary School.

Mrs Delmaude Ryan gave an engaging introduction to the project, which was live-streamed via Montserrat's ZJB Radio.

UKOTCF's Catherine Wensink introduced the project partners roles and responsibilities and said: "A team, all members with certain technical expertise, has been brought together on Montserrat by the Montserrat National Trust. Over the next few



Above: Mrs Catherine Wensink; below: Mr Jerome Meade



years, you will hear a lot about the toolkit. Today we are here to give a flavour of this work so that you have some idea of what is being discussed when we talk about the 'biodiversity & human well-being toolkit' or just 'toolkit'.

"With this project partners overview you will get a sense of the number of partners involved and what they each will do. The project will stretch as far as it can in terms of involving people from across the island from the start and that is why we welcome you all today.

"If I may, I would like to say a little about each element of the project and who will be leading on it from the team we have assembled. We have never wanted to repeat or redo what others have done. We are mindful that work may have been explored within the lifetime of various endeavours that have gone before, but we acknowledge and build on this work.



A widely drawn audience, including on the front row HE Governor Sarah Tucker and Hon Deputy Premier Samuel Joseph, participated in the launch. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski



Ms Kadine Cabey

“The main elements of the project together with the project partners was outlined. These are shown in the slide from the presentation.” (see page 11)

Ms Jodey Peyton, fellow of the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, provided some technical information on the toolkit, developed by UKCEH, and how it could link with sustainable development on Montserrat.

Mr Jerome Meade, Chief Physical Planner, gave assurances that the Planning Unit would be an active partner throughout the project and welcomed the leadership being shown by the Montserrat National Trust and its linkages with the Government of Montserrat.



Ms Jo-Diaz Tye

Highlighting the importance of involving young people in the project, Ms Kadine Cabey, Montserrat National Trust’s Junior Conservation Officer, spoke about the challenges facing Montserrat, but how young people could be part of the solutions to protect what is important to them.

In closing, Ms Jo-Diaz Tye, Montserrat National Trust’s Conservation Technician gave a vote of thanks to those attending and outlined some of the synergies between the new project and work she and colleagues undertook as part of the *Blue Iguana* to *Blue Vervain* project.

Further reports on this project (DPLUS192) will be provided as the project takes shape.

Dr Eric Shaw 1946-2023



Eric Shaw FGS, FRGS (*above*) passed away in Gibraltar, after a short illness, in March, days before his 77th birthday.

Eric was a key figure in the development of nature conservation awareness in Gibraltar. With a lifelong interest in marine life in particular, and as a diver, he was the creator of what may have been the first artificial reef in any of the UK Overseas Territories, off the south-west shore of Gibraltar. As Head of the Marine Section of GONHS (the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society) he played an active and prominent part in the development of the Society and in successfully raising the profile of nature conservation and environmental protection in Gibraltar.

Eric was a key figure too in the devising of Gibraltar’s nature protection legislation. For many years Eric managed the Rock’s Barbary Macaque population, co-ordinating visits by researchers and broadcasters from around the world, and running the field centre and supporting students within the Gibraltar Nature Reserve.

Eric published on marine life, including dolphins, having dedicated many years to studying them in the Bay of Gibraltar on the vessel NIMO, acquired for the charity he founded, The Helping Hand. He also published on Barbary macaques, with which he had experience both in Gibraltar and Morocco. He was a prolific broadcaster, with many series particularly on Gibraltar Television, but also elsewhere. His photographs of marine life around Gibraltar were pioneering.

He was a great supporter of the Forum, having participated in many of its conferences, including the one hosted by GONHS in Gibraltar.

He was outspoken, fun-loving, serious yet jovial, and an accomplished guitarist. Above all, he was lover of Nature who will be greatly missed.



Common dolphins in the Strait of Gibraltar. Photo: Dr Eric Shaw

Documentary on Plymouth, Montserrat

Channel 5 television broadcast on 23 May 2023 a documentary *Ben Fogle and the Buried City* about Plymouth, the capital of Montserrat destroyed by a volcano in 1997. The film can be seen until 22 December 2027 at:

https://www.channel5.com/show/ben-fogle-and-the-buried-city/season-1/ben-fogle-and-the-buried-city?fbclid=IwAR3Gik4pxVbPyjtoG_m0Q9nfC5O_ePCrmvDsCqa8Ajp40MDYWiTn3tWmO34.



The films premiere in Montserrat



James 'Scriber' Daley and Ben Fogle in the ruins of Plymouth

Pitcairn wins Blue Park Award for Exceptional Marine Wildlife Conservation

The Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area (MPA) has just won the Platinum-level Blue Park Award for exceptional marine wildlife conservation. UKOTCF is pleased to be one of the bodies which supported the nomination.

The Blue Park Awards, which are supported by the Blue Endowment Fund, recognize outstanding efforts by governments, non-profit organizations, MPA managers, and local communities to protect effectively marine ecosystems. The award was announced at the 5th International Marine Protected Area Congress (IMPAC5) by the Blue Parks Science Council, an international council of marine conservation experts.

The Pitcairn Islands MPA is the first awarded Blue Park in a UK Overseas Territory.

It encompasses Pitcairn's entire Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and the territorial seas around the four islands, which cover nearly 850,000 square kilometres. Pitcairn and the two other Blue Parks to join the the Blue Parks Network in 2023, make up some of the world's most outstanding marine protected areas and ocean champions. To date, Blue Parks cover nearly 3 million square kilometres of ocean, spanning 22 countries.

Pitcairn's MPA is highly participatory and the community takes part in management activities, such as monitoring key habitats and species.

99.5% of this MPA is a no-take zone, with small zones around each island allowing for limited subsistence fishing by residents of Pitcairn Island. Furthermore, the blue waters of Pitcairn's MPA are supremely clear, which allows corals to grow at unusual depths in cooler waters, and protects some of the few remaining near-pristine coral reef atolls and coral reef ecosystems in the

world. Further offshore, the seafloor bathymetry is dominated by two seamount chains with a high density of over 90 volcanic seamounts rising from the sea-floor.

Pitcairn Islands MPA has become a leading model for innovative and pragmatic ocean conservation since its establishment in 2016, when Pitcairn banned all resource extraction in 99% of its waters to create the world's largest MPA.

This commitment to marine life conservation has now been recognized with the Platinum Blue Park Award, which is a testament to the protection and effective management of the vast ocean area surrounding the Pitcairn Islands. Since then Pitcairn's Marine Protected Area (MPA) has become a leading model for innovative and pragmatic ocean conservation. The marine protected area provides a safe haven for numerous species of marine life, and Pitcairn is committed to preserving this unique ecosystem and its important role in global marine conservation efforts.

From a tourism perspective, the Pitcairn community's efforts to protect and preserve their marine environment offer a unique and unparalleled opportunity for visitors to experience a thriving and diverse ocean ecosystem.

Over time, the award-winning MPA will increasingly offer visitors the chance to witness and explore an incredible array of marine life in an almost pristine environment. The recognition of Pitcairn's efforts by the Marine Conservation Institute will probably attract more visitors to these legendary and secluded islands, providing opportunities for Pitcairn's tiny community also to benefit economically from sharing their story and showcasing their commitment to marine conservation



Aerial view of part of Ducie Island. Photo: Christopher Pegman

UKOTCF publishes book on major conservation success.

In *Forum News* 57, we announced the forthcoming publication by UKOTCF of our Chairman's book on the project he set up earlier in his career in the 1980s to restore Red Kites across Britain, these previously common birds having been almost totally exterminated over a century earlier. With the UK Red Kite numbers now well over 10% of the world population, the book was published for World Wildlife Day, 3rd March 2023. Whilst the book does relate to some extent to Crown Dependencies, it does not cover UKOTs (except in terms of wider issues), but all proceeds from sales go to UKOTCF (but UKOTCF is not paying for production).

The book has been very well received, and we reproduce here extracts from some of the independent reviews.

Dr Mike Pienkowski is a former Chief Ornithologist and then Assistant Chief Scientist of the Nature Conservancy Council and subsequently the first Director of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee as well as a range of significant roles in nongovernmental organisations. He was the chair of the group who planned and executed the reintroduction of this remarkable bird into those parts of the UK from which it had been missing for at least a century and a half. He is thus well equipped to tell this story in some detail and with some authority. The author sets himself the task of writing an accurate and readable account of two decades of work and he succeeds. ... this is not a slightly hazy recollection of what happened but a detailed documented and well illustrated telling of the story. This is definitely a readable account with well-chosen graphs and tables, and a wealth of photographs of the birds, localities and people involved.

Unless you were there, back then, you might glance up at a Red Kite with pleasure and think that the process of bringing them back was easy and non-contentious. Not so! Not remotely so! There were those who prophesised that Red Kites would wipe out lots of important and endangered species (they haven't), eat loads of Pheasants (they eat a lot that have already been killed by motorists) and those who said that this expensive project would suck money away from better conservation causes. On the last point, the relatively small amount of money spent has provided a massive return on investment and secured a greater, but also more visible, conservation legacy than other alternative avenues of spend. Even some birders were against the project because the released Red Kites wouldn't be 'real'. Tell that to the generations of young people growing up with magnificent Red Kites as part of their wildlife normality today.

The author of this book was a leading figure in bird conservation and wildlife conservation back in those days, and is still making important contributions now. He was not universally loved, nor did everyone always agree with him, but this book reminded me of his enormous contribution (and not because he bigs himself up in the book, he doesn't). This book, long awaited, is an account of one area where he made a difference, and a very significant difference it has been. It also describes a time when statutory sector conservation staff were leaders – and that is rarely the case these days.

Mark Avery (<https://markavery.info/2023/02/19/sunday-book-review-when-the-kite-builds-by-mike-pienkowski/>)

By the last quarter of the 20th century, despite expense and energy, it was obvious that the Welsh population of the red kite would not, could not, expand into what historically



Hardback, 240 x 170mm, over 270 + xiii pages with colour throughout including over 290 photos and over 40 other illustrations. IBBN 978-1-911097-05-1

Available from www.ukotcf.org.uk/kite-book/ £29.95 + P&P (Total in UK & Crown Dependencies £35; Rest of Europe £42; Americas (except USA), Africa, Middle East, S & E Asia £51; Australasia, Pacific & Indian Ocean Islands £54; USA £57)

had been its range in this island. Today the UK is home to around 10 per cent of the world population of red kites and is now helping other countries by donating chicks.

The most extraordinary aspect of this project that shines through is the scale of its ambition. Previously avian re-introductions had been small, piecemeal and mixed; most failed. Rarely has conservation come out of the shadows and pushed through to such stunning results as *When the kite builds...* demonstrates. Partly, this came about by a change in culture. Ironically, that change was the result of some of the most upsetting, enraging, duplicity unconnected to the red kite story but laid out here with a refreshing directness (or as close to the whole truth that the skewed law of the land allows).

In fact, this book shows how much ground has been traversed since those days; the acknowledgements are packed with names across the entire spectrum of UK and Irish institutions, political and civic organisations, legal and military, commercial and individual supporters who willingly rallied to Mike Pienkowski's standard. This marks a sea change in our shared public life. The mobilisation of multiple constituencies it represents, handled well, is enormously significant for the future of nature conservation in these islands.



Young kite in basket in which it was lowered from a nest in Spain before transporting to UK. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

When the kite builds... can be truthfully described as 'lavishly illustrated' – and some! Many fine photographs and maps in colour, well presented and data easily referenced. Precise and authoritative, it is never unreadable even at its most technical, adeptly folding together several strands – complex negotiations and resource management – that gives the general reader a clear view.

This book will, I am sure, inspire a new generation. **Barry Larking** (*ECOS, the journal of the British Association of Nature Conservationists*: <https://www.ecos.org.uk/book-review-when-the-kite-builds/>)

If you are interested in conservation and reintroduction, this book provides a much wider knowledge base than just Red Kites, and is a great in-practice example of how these projects work, and the dedication required to pull them off. *When the Kite Builds* provides such a wide breadth of knowledge and history that I truly don't see how this book wouldn't be enjoyed by any reader. **Antonia Devereux** (*WILD Magazine - Students for sustainability*, <https://wildmag.co.uk/2023/02/27/when-the-kite-builds-book-review/>)

This wonderful book has been dedicated to the amazing team of people who have helped restore Red kites into the countryside of Britain. My heart is drawn to the care and attention this team took to rewild chicks into UK territory. (<http://blog.theeconews.co.uk/the-book-on-the-full-story-of-the-restoration-of-red-kites-across-britain-and-ireland/>)

When do you get the chance to give to charity by buying a book? This one covers the whole of the reintroduction of Red Kites ... (with birds now heading back to Spain, from where they were reintroduced). Mike Pienkowski, as the lead in this programme, has done a fantastic job not just for the birds, but also in his writing about one of the world's most successful reintroductions, which led to many more such schemes, elsewhere. There is so much detail and colour pictures throughout, many taken by Mike. This is a fascinating and informative read. **John Miles** (*Bird Watchng Magazine*, June 2023)

The reintroduction of the Red Kite to parts of the United Kingdom is arguably one of the greatest conservation success stories of recent times. It has been estimated there are now around 6,000 breeding pairs, which represents at least 15% of their European and world population... Mike Pienkowski is well placed to document how this ground-breaking conservation project emerged and developed. Lessons have been learned on how

various obstacles were overcome and best practice approaches that have proved useful for reintroductions or translocations of other raptors in the UK and abroad... Pienkowski's access to previously unpublished NCC records of the early deliberations concerning the programme make particularly interesting reading. I recommend this book for any with an interest both in raptor reintroductions in general and as an important historical reference point for Red Kite conservation in particular across the UK and Europe. **Duncan Orr-Ewing** (*Scottish Birds*, June 2023)

Mike Pienkowski was pivotal in setting up the Red Kite reintroduction programme in the late 1980s, and chaired the group overseeing the initial, experimental stage of the project. His book deals with all aspects of the work, from early discussions about whether it would succeed (many thought not) to the practicalities of establishing a team, choosing the first release sites and then collecting, rearing and releasing the birds. His photographs span several decades, showing the first nestlings to be imported, as well as free-flying individuals and birds at the nest in England... the work has helped a wide range of species. It has generated positive publicity and increased public interest in kites and in conservation more broadly. Lessons from the kite work have been applied to restoration projects involving a whole suite of animals, some of which are described. **Ian Carter** (*British Wildlife*, May 2023)

This is a comprehensive account of the science behind the reintroduction of the Red Kite to England and Scotland, but written with very gentle humour, and so easy to read. I learnt quite a few things, including that the change in public attitudes, especially gamekeepers, was important for the survival not only of the Kite, but also other species of raptor. It is also an engaging personal account from the man who co-ordinated the whole project. The book is full of photographs of Red Kites behaving in different ways, many of them taken by the author. Treat yourself or give it as a present, or both! **J. Middleton** (May 2023, Amazon)

When the Kite Builds is a truly inspirational account wonderfully illustrated, of how the Red Kite was saved from near extinction in the British Isles. It is a truly uplifting story and a must read for all concerned with our environment today. The book then goes on to discuss the hot topic of reintroducing wild boar, lynx and wolves to Britain. **Fiona Middleton** (April 2023, Amazon)

View a 35-minute video on a few aspects of the project from the early days and the current situation:
<https://youtu.be/JjAl3Y3fw5U>



Red Kite of the rapidly growing population now re-spread across Britain. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

New UKOTCF Council Member: Leigh Morris

Leigh Morris became CEO of [Manx Wildlife Trust](#) in the Crown Dependency of the Isle of Man in January 2020. He is a member of the UKOTCF European Territories Working Group and the [Inter Island Environment Meeting](#) (IIEM) partnership.

Leigh's career began in horticulture, gaining qualifications in commercial crop production and an MSc in International Horticulture. He managed plant nurseries, before becoming a lecturer and subsequently a Division Head at the Welsh College of Horticulture. He joined the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) in 2004, as Head of the School of Horticulture, becoming Associate Director of Horticulture. His role included international botanic garden development and capacity building in several countries including a prolonged period in Oman. He also completed a short-term placement for Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), delivering training to Ethiopian farmers. Leigh chaired the [Grow Careers initiative](#), and served as President of the [Chartered Institute of Horticulture](#), a period when they were awarded Royal Charter.

Inspired at RBGE, Leigh's career developed a wider conservation focus, becoming a Trustee of the UK Marine Conservation Society, and Director of Community Conservation at the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, and was the first CEO of the National Land Based College.

Leigh spent 2 years (2018-19) on the UKOT of St Helena for two years, delivering a [training needs analysis of the island's agriculture](#) for the St Helena Government and a subsequent up-skilling programme. Leigh helped guide the establishment of the Marine Team in the [St Helena National Trust](#), and joined their Council as Vice-President. Leigh additionally undertook consultancy on both St Helena and Ascension Islands, supporting the [waste management plan on Ascension](#), reviewing their [hydroponic farm](#), and developing proposals to enhance recycling on St Helena. A keen scuba diver in his spare time, Leigh volunteered as a diver for the SHG on their annual reef surveys and a [Darwin Project on lobsters](#).



Leigh Morris

See pages 1-5 for Leigh's summary account of his volunteering to help the UKOTCF/ Montserrat National Trust *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project on Montserrat in May.

UK Minister for the Overseas Territories resigns over the Prime Minister's lack of interest in the environment

On 30 June 2023, the Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park, FCDO Minister for Overseas Territories, Commonwealth, Energy, Climate and Environment, announced his resignation. Here is his resignation letter in full: See also pages 24, 25 & 27.

Dear prime minister,

I became involved in politics above all because of my love and concern for the natural environment. We depend on nature for everything, and we are degrading the natural world at an astonishing speed. Logically, there is nothing more important.

So when you asked me to stay on as minister for the international environment, I of course accepted. I did so with a view to guarding the progress we had seen in recent years on the international environment, and to building on a record of international leadership that has been so warmly welcomed around the world.

The past four years have been an exhilarating experience for me, and I will forever be grateful that I was put in a position where I could do more for the environment than I thought possible in a lifetime.

I'm proud that in recent years the UK has played a critical, indeed defining role – leading powerful coalitions of ambition and securing world-changing commitments over a very wide range of environmental issues.

And even if in the highly polarised political environment here in the UK there is an unwillingness to acknowledge it, that leadership has been recognised and appreciated by civil society and governments around the world.

As a direct consequence of our environmental leadership, we have seen countries previously ambivalent towards the UK stepping up to support us on numerous unrelated issues. We often find ourselves invited to regional environmental summits as the only “outsider” country present.

It is the UK that civil society routinely turns to for help advancing their cause.



In many respects, the UK has become the single most important voice for nature globally.

I believe we can be proud of our record. At Cop26 we secured unprecedented commitments from countries, philanthropists and businesses that – if delivered – will put the natural world on the road to recovery. At the time, WWF said “Nature truly arrived at Cop26”.

The Tropical Forest Alliance said “we’ll look back and realise that this was the day we finally turned the tide on deforestation”. Forbes called it a “Paris moment” for forests. In Glasgow, with strong support from the then prime minister, we were able to achieve far more than any of us ever thought possible.

Since then, the UK has been the driving force behind successful global efforts. We led calls to protect 30% of the world’s land and ocean by the end of this decade, a goal that was agreed at the Biodiversity Cop in Montreal last year where the UK did more than almost any other country to make it a historic success.

Separately we helped galvanise agreement for a new global treaty on plastic pollution. And it was our team of negotiators who – more than any other – secured an agreement for the creation of new laws to protect the high seas.

Our G7 negotiators meanwhile persuaded the main donor countries to align their aid spending not only with the Paris goals, but with nature too.

We have created world-class funding programmes like our new biodiverse landscapes fund, which is creating vast wildlife corridors between countries, providing safe passage for wildlife and jobs for people living in and around the corridors; and our new blue planet fund, which is supporting marine protection, coral and mangrove restoration, and efforts to stop plastic pollution and illegal fishing.

These and other funds are world-class and have leveraged a wave of financial support from other countries and philanthropists.

It has been my privilege to grow our wonderful Blue Belt programme so that today it fully protects an area of ocean significantly larger than India around our overseas territories.

The UK has been able to win arguments internationally in part because we were taking action at home. I won’t pretend we have gone nearly far or fast enough, but there is no doubt that since 2019 we have made meaningful progress.

We strengthened our environmental laws, provided more funding for nature, committed to more protected areas, more action on plastic pollution, and the UK is one of the only countries with legal targets to reverse biodiversity loss.

We have committed to restore our peatlands and plant trees on an unprecedented scale and we are transforming our land subsidy system to support the environment. We have also taken steps to address our international environmental footprint, including new laws stopping the import to the UK of agricultural commodities grown on illegally deforested land.

We also made progress on animal welfare. The government signed off an ambitious action plan for animal welfare, which would have represented the biggest shake up of animal welfare in living memory.

As minister responsible I was able to translate it, bit by bit, into law. We increased sentencing for cruelty from six months to five years, we recognised in law the sentience of animals, enacted and extended the ivory trade ban, introduced measures to break the pet smuggling trade and banned glue traps.

Before you took office, you assured party members, via me, that you would continue implementing the action plan, including the kept animals bill and measures like ending the live export of animals

for slaughter, banning keeping primates as pets, preventing the import of shark fins and hunting trophies from vulnerable species.

But I have been horrified as, bit by bit, we have abandoned these commitments – domestically and on the world stage. The kept animals bill has been ditched, despite your promises. Our efforts on a wide range of domestic environmental issues have simply ground to a standstill.

More worrying, the UK has visibly stepped off the world stage and withdrawn our leadership on climate and nature. Too often we are simply absent from key international fora. Only last week you seemingly chose to attend the party of a media baron rather than attend a critically important environment summit in Paris that ordinarily the UK would have co-led.

Worse still, we have effectively abandoned one of the most widely reported and solemn promises we have made on this issue: our pledge to spend £11.6bn of our aid on climate and environment.

Indeed the only reason the government has not had to come clean on the broken promise is because the final year of expenditure falls after the next general election and will therefore be the problem for the next government, not this one.

This is a promise, remember, that has been consistently repeated by prime ministers in the past four years, including by you, and for good reason.

It is the single most important signal of inten[t] for the dozens of small island and climate-vulnerable states on an issue that is existential for them. These states, remember, have equal sway in the UN where we routinely seek their support on other issues.

That same promise was also used successfully by the UK as leverage to persuade G7 countries to follow suit, and breaking it would not only infuriate them, along with those small island states in the Commonwealth and beyond – it would shred any reputation we have for being a reliable partner.

Prime minister, having been able to get so much done previously, I have struggled even to hold the line in recent months.

The problem is not that the government is hostile to the environment, it is that you, our prime minister, are simply uninterested. That signal, or lack of it, has trickled down through Whitehall and caused a kind of paralysis.

I will never understand how, with all the knowledge we now have about our fundamental reliance on the natural world and the speed with which we are destroying it, anyone can be uninterested.

But even if this existential challenge leaves you personally unmoved, there is a world of people who do care very much. And you will need their votes.

Every survey and poll – without exception – tells us that people care deeply about the natural world, about the welfare of other species, about handing this world in better shape to the next generation. And as these issues inevitably grow in importance, so too will the gap between the British people and a Conservative party that fails to respond appropriately.

It has been a privilege to be able to work with so many talented people in government, in particular my private office, and to have been able to make a difference to a cause I have been committed to for as long as I remember.

But this government’s apathy in the face of the greatest challenge we have faced makes continuing in my current role untenable.

With great reluctance I am therefore stepping down as a minister in order to focus my energy where it can be more useful.

Zac Goldsmith

Webinar organised to meet requests from UK Overseas Territories

At the 2021 UKOTCF-organised conference, participants asked UKOTCF to organise webinars on topics of interest in intervening years to keep the momentum going between its main conference for practitioners (see: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/our-conferences>). Suggestions from UKOTCF regional working groups highlighted invasive species as a topic of significant interest. Many of the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and Crown Dependencies (CDs) are islands – and so are particularly vulnerable to local extinctions, given the unique island setting in which the native and endemic species evolved. Invasive non-native species (INNS) are one of the five main drivers of global biodiversity loss. Across the UKOTs, there are teams of passionate, talented people working on reducing this threat, with their work being underpinned by research and innovation. This seminar brings together some of those inspiring people working in the UKOTs. Organised by UKOTCF and supported by the UKOTCF network, project partners and other technical specialists, the webinar fulfilled several functions: to outline issues, to demonstrate some of the excellent work being undertaken across the UKOTs on INNS, to share knowledge and best practice on INNS research and management, and to further expand networks of researchers and practitioners.

The webinar, titled *Terrestrial Restoration and Invasive Non-native Species in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies*, took place via Zoom on 6 & 7th March 2023. An additional half-day workshop was held on the 8th March focusing on cane toads.

It was supported by the Garfield Weston Foundation, Jersey International Centre for Advanced Studies and several members and associate organisations: Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society, Bermuda National Trust, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Species Recovery Trust and UK's Darwin Plus.

All presentations are available to view on UKOTCF's website: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/other-territory-support/seminars-training/webinar-invasive-species/>

Session: What are UKOTs prioritising?

Peter Carr from the **Chagos Conservation Trust** gave an account of the **Healthy Islands and Healthy Reef Programme**. Research has showed that the presence of seabirds on islands produces multiple benefits to the marine environment and ecosystem health. The Chagos Archipelago has approximately 55 islands and hundreds of thousands of seabirds. Studies found that every island that was farmed for coconuts had rats. A feasibility study, EIA and operational plan for eradicating rats and restoration of habitat have been produced for four northern atolls. The programme will require political good will and funding to be a success.



Julia Henney outlined the **Invasive Species Strategy for Guernsey**. The Asian Hornet was first reported on Guernsey in 2017. A strategy to deal with this was based around protecting health, controlling and reducing population, effective data

capture, analysis and methods of communication. An initial campaign controlled spring queens followed by treating sites that had been reported by the public. Staff were retained to work on an overall strategy for invasive species across the island. This strategy includes: Prevention, Early Detection & Rapid Response, Management of Invasive Non-Native Species.



Rhian Guillem presented an overview of the work **Surveying for native and invasive ants using Gibraltar as a case study**: which started in 2007. Invasive ants are a problem as they displace native ants, cause problems to wildlife, are aggressive, spread rapidly, are a pest of people, tend to be generalists and hard to eradicate. Ants can be found by manual searching, traps, sieving leaf-litter, winkler bags for leaf-litter and light-trapping. They can arrive in lots of different ways: food items, in plant material, in luggage and vehicles. It only takes a single queen ant to start a nest. Poison bait can reduce population but must be done consistently. Pheromone traps are being investigated. Management depends on costs and effects on native wildlife.



Catherine Wensink of UKOTCF presented the project **Adopt a Home for Wildlife Montserrat**, which is focused on 'People' in terms of managing wildlife in their local area. A network of community-managed sites have been created across most habitat types. Surveys of plants and invertebrates have been carried out



revealing some of the invasive species found. Working with the land-owners, these will be controlled by removal and replacement where possible with native plant species. Opportunities for young people are being developed, e.g. kid's club.

Farah Mukhida and **Louise Soanes** discussed Dog Island Restoration Project in their talk **Anguilla rats and Islands**. Dog Island is a scrubby, 205ha private island with many nesting seabirds. The project began by cutting of tracks across the island to allow the territory of rats to be accessed, placing baiting in a grid system, rat activity was monitored using lots of methods and perimeter baits stations established to stop re-invasion from rats off-island. After baiting, the rat population collapsed in 15 days; subsequently seabirds numbers recovered. So far, the habitat is improving and the island is now rat-free. Similar work on other islands around Anguilla; Prickly Pear islands and Sombrero Island was outlined.



Session: Legislating and Better Biosecurity - learning from each other

James Millett outlined the work of the **GB Non-Native Species Secretariat** and particularly its support in building biosecurity legislation in the UKOTs. The OTs Biosecurity Initiative aims to improve the biosecurity of all the UKOTs to reduce risks to biodiversity and human health and food security to threats from invasive non-native species. It can access UK government expertise and, through Public Administration International (PAI), legal work is undertaken. Model biosecurity legislation was shown with examples of clauses as well as best practice for drafting legislation. Ascension and Tristan da Cunha enacted legislation as part of the project and a number of territories have legal frameworks in progress.

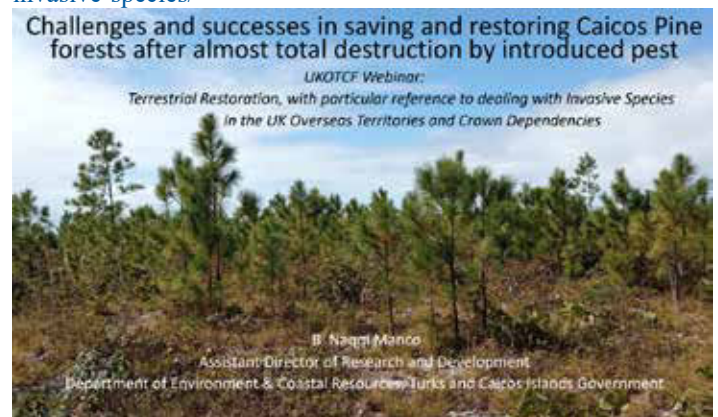


Alison Copeland, Durham University presented on **Who's in and who's out? Preparing invasive species schedules for Bermuda**. This outlined some of the work being undertaken to prepare schedules for Bermuda's Invasive Species Act (2021), which could potentially be of interest to those UKOTs formulating their own invasive species legislation. The talk focused on the list of species to which the do's and don't of the Act apply. A range of experts were gathered to produce the list of species. Many of the



invasive plant included in the list are found also in the same areas as endemic plants, yet are being sold in garden centres. Domestic animals are not included in the act as they are covered on various other pieces of legislation (e.g. Public Health Act, Agriculture Act). Schedules of the Act were outlined with some background information on the purpose of their inclusion. Once the Act went out for consultation, some species were removed, including those that were edible and those that were considered 'non-impactful'.

For the **2nd Sir Richard & Lady Dace Ground Lecture** given by **Bryan Naqqi Manco**, Department of Environment and Coastal Resources, Turks & Caicos Islands Government **Challenges and successes in restoring Caicos Pine forests after almost total destruction by introduced pest**, the recording is at: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/other-territory-support/seminars-training/webinar-invasive-species/>



Session: Control? Prioritising efforts?

Elizabeth (Biz) Bell, **Managing Director of Wildlife Management International Ltd** provided an **overview** of some previous experience from working across many of the UKOTs. Biz is a long-time collaborator with the UKOTs and has (so far) worked on six of them with Pitcairn being the first in the late 90s. Species control of black rats, brown rats and house mice using bait stations was outlined. The results of this work speak for themselves, particularly on Anguilla where much of their current work is focussed. An exclusion fence is being trialled at



the Fountain National Park to protect native species and could be a model for other UKOTs. Training in methods of control has been a core part of their work so that monitoring and interventions where necessary can be done in the long-term.

Prof Helen Roy spoke about **Documenting biological invasions on the UK Overseas Territories: informing prevention and management**. This summarised work being done on horizon scanning to predict what biological invasions are likely, could arrive or become established and what impact this might have on native wildlife and human health and local economies. Patterns or diversity of invasive species is similar across the UKOTs. A list of the most high-risk invasive non-native species has been produced with the Asian green mussel *Perna viridis* top of the list. Detail of work on St Helena and Tristan da Cunha was also given.



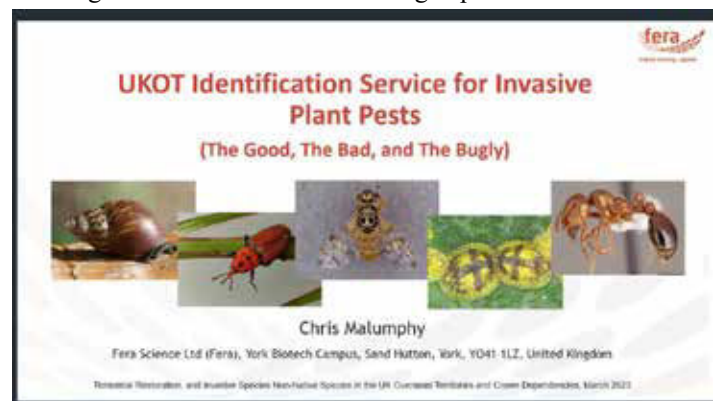
Natasha Stevens, St Helena National Trust provided an outline of the current work on invasive species. The talk focused on **Conserving St. Helena's endemic invertebrates through invasive invertebrate control**. Control of the common wasp *Vespula vulgaris* included a scoping phase to investigate their ecology in order to understand the best way to deploy poison bait. The control trials have shown promising results and the wasp has declined in the treated area in 2022. The control of the big headed ant *Pheidole megacephala* took a different approach. As they are so prolific across the island, the control is targeting sites of importance. The use of a biocontrol is being considered for the non-native springbok mantis *Miomantis caffra*. Work continues on implementing control methods and monitoring activities given the huge number of endemics invertebrate species found there.



Norbet Maczey, CABI Science provided an update on long-term work and recent activities on **Dealing with invasive species on the South Atlantic UKOTs using biological control**. Current work includes a project on Ascension Island which aims to control Mexican thorn. It impacts on infrastructure, impacts on nesting turtles, harbours other invasive species, e.g. rats. A control agent, a moth, will be released on Ascension later in the year. It has been extensively tested in Australia and found to be highly host

specific. Another project includes a control agent for the invasive soft brown scale insect on Tristan da Cunha. It infests native trees which are a food source for native birds. Work on St Helena (already mentioned) is on springbok mantis. As it would not be feasible to use bait or pesticides in sensitive habitats, they are looking at parasitoids that attach eggs or other life stages. Also on St Helena, a project is looking at die-back in endemic tree species.

Chris Malumphy outlined the work of the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA) **Pest ID Service**. Aptly named **the Good, the Bad and the Ugly**, it provided an introduction to the work of FERA which aims to “support and develop a sustainable food chain, a healthy natural environment, and protect the global community from biological and chemical risks”. It provides identifications and rapid advice when biosecurity threats are detected and basic training to build local capacity where resources permit. There has been high demand for the service. Since 2009, over 3,250 samples have been received with 250 new geographical records. Significant findings include croton scales and mealybugs which can have a devastating impact on native biodiversity. They have published many datasheets which are widely available. Funding is secured until 2025 enabling expansion of the service.



Jakovos Demetriou and Kelly Martinou provided an overview of much of the work being undertaken on **Invasive Alien Species at the Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus**. The Joint Services Health Unit deals with insects that have an impact on health such as sand flies and mosquitoes, but they also work on invasive species, one of the major pressures at the wetlands. Their work includes monitoring to help inform management decisions, public outreach and events. Experiments included the introduction of mosquito fish which predate on mosquitoes. Public involvement in recording and monitoring has been key, e.g. via bioblitz and use of apps; Mosquito Alert, which tracks three types of *Aedes* spp; FITCount app based on UKCEH's. Darwin Plus projects were outlined. The first identified and prioritised species not present, but may arrive; surveillance of modelling species distributions and some capacity building. The second developed: an online recording and database, hydrological and vegetation sampling, remote sensing and capacity building and engagement of public.



Session: Data gaps and citizen science and tools for conservation

AJ McClean, Blue Iguana Conservation spoke of **Trouble in Paradise**, given that the Grand Cayman blue iguana *Cyclura lewisi*, although brought back from the edge of extinction, still faces many threats from feral cats, dogs, fire ants, poultry and diseases. The creation of the blue iguana guardians' programme has seen over 100 guardians trained already. They provide vital support, emergency assistance such as for disease outbreaks or on island issues, networking, new creative ideas, local capacity building, fundraising, data collection and trained volunteers. E-guana, a citizen science mobile app, has been designed to collect, inspire and engage people with data collection, challenges and threats. It is a platform to submit sightings of any species of iguana on the island. Once submitted, it alerts the system and sends an email to say thank you to the individual and data comes straight through to the dashboard to be exported, recorded and used for future planning.



Wayne Dawson from the University of Durham spoke about **Horizon Scanning by Starlight: Invasion Science Needs More Data**. It outlined the importance of data as the evidence base that informs decision-making and management. An invasion curve shows the stages of invasive species management from pre-arrival (prevention) to long-term control. It is important to find where a species sits on this curve to inform management. It can also be useful for working out impacts of the species on native biodiversity. Horizon-scanning/ risk-assessment can help decide whether biosecurity is necessary. For example, it helps to ask what is the risk of arrival and establishment? What kind of data should we collect? Where are the knowledge gaps that hinder decision-making/action? Is detail sufficient to inform management decisions and monitor the effects. If invasion stage is at pre-border, data are needed on transport volumes. If invasion stage is at a border, data-needs include interceptions, quantifying pathways. If invasion stage is at early establishment, data-needs are population locations and sizes, population reproductive status. If invasion stage is at invasion, one must measure impacts beyond the territory.



Jodey Peyton presented on **Building knowledge on invasive non-native species on Diego Garcia**. By understanding species found in British Indian Ocean Territory, large populations of nesting seabirds and coconut crabs can be protected. For example, ant farm for honeydew and large infestations can impact shrubs and plants. Seabirds nest in many of these plants; so it is very important to know what is there. Current work builds on previous records of plants and animals on Diego Garcia. Updated species lists using a variety of methods are being produced including on new species and their locations. Recording in the field uses iNaturalist as a free open access tool. Biosecurity is an important aspect of the project, looking out for invasive non-native (INNS) species and informing protocols for their management. Outputs include training for key stakeholders, outreach materials, training plans, videos on ant ID, and Facebook page on ants of the UKOTs.



Samantha Slisarenko from the University of Gibraltar provided the last presentation, but set the scene for the future in terms of innovative tools. Sam's presentation focussed on **Benefits of eDNA**. eDNA can be used to detect the presence of invasive species in their early stages and monitor presence in area over time or confirm if they have been successfully eradicated. eDNA refers to genetic material that organisms leave behind in the environment. It can be used to detect presence without directly observing them. Surveys can be targeted where a specific species is isolated from a sample, where an entire host of organisms is identified in a sample. eDNA detection was found to be over two times higher than visual surveys. Sam's research will look at eDNA as a tool for determining absence/presence data for elusive and difficult-to-capture species in the marine environment.



UKOTCF thanks all the presenters, facilitators and participants for making the webinar a success. There were over 100 registered participants. Further information on the webinar is available at: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/other-territory-support/seminars-training/webinar-invasive-species/>

The Status of the UK's Overseas Territories in the 21st Century: a UK Parliamentary inquiry

Over decades, the UK Parliament has shown an interest in the UK Overseas Territories, particularly with the encouragement of UKOTCF and others, the Environmental Audit Committee and the Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Committee.

In April 2023, the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee (PACAC) launched an inquiry into the status of the UKOTs in the 21st Century.

William Wragg MP, the Chair of PACAC, said: *"The UK Overseas Territories are an important part of the UK family. With ten territories permanently inhabited by British nationals and all fourteen represented at the international level by the UK, we cannot deny their unique constitutional position."*

"Each territory has its own legislative processes and bespoke relationship with the UK, but with no official representation in UK Parliament, these constitutional arrangements are often

misunderstood or overlooked.

"We recognise that there is no 'one size fits all' framework for relations between the UK and the Overseas Territories, but by better understanding how existing arrangements operate in practice, we can better assess whether they are satisfactory and appropriate in the 21st century."

The Committee is welcoming written submissions by 5pm on Monday 4 September 2023. For more information see here: <https://committees.parliament.uk/call-for-evidence/3109>

There are clearly implications for the natural environment in such an inquiry given that many of the UKOTs economies are based on sustaining and protecting their natural assets. UKOTCF will make a submission, and we are grateful to new volunteer Ben Parker for a good deal of preparatory work on this.

House of Commons Environmental Audit Select Committee at 25

We congratulate the UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee on its 25 years of work, which it celebrated this year. UKOTCF Council member and former EAC Chair Joan Walley attended an event to mark this milestone.

The EAC strives for a world where humans co-exist and thrive with the natural world. This is, of course, in common with other bodies, including the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF, www.ukotcf.org.uk). With support from nature conservation bodies across the UKOTs, and the UK, there have been successes in encouraging UK Government to take seriously its responsibility towards the UKOTs. They contain over 90% of the global biodiversity found within the UK and the UKOTs combined, and for which UK has international responsibility. Here we outline five areas EAC can influence in the next 25 years.

1. UK Government financial support for environmental work in the UKOTs

The increased funding for UKOT biodiversity conservation as of 2023 (via Biodiversity Challenge Funds: Darwin Plus Local, Darwin Plus Main, and the Darwin Strategic being launched), as already recommended by several Select Committees of the House of Commons, must not be vulnerable to any future UK Government cuts. It will contribute significantly stability and long-term planning of conservation programmes and activities which are crucial to the survival of many of the UKOTs' endemic plants and animals. EAC can advocate for these funds and ask questions about additional and complementary resources (e.g. UK Research Institute, National Lottery, the private sector).

2. International Environmental Agreements and Environment Charters

In 2023, when the Global Biodiversity Framework comes into the international domain, EAC can support the re-affirmation of the UK Government's commitment to the Environment Charters which form the basis of UK's and UKOTs fulfilling their international conservation obligations – for both the inhabited and uninhabited UK Overseas Territories. This is important because, while some UKOTs do not currently have the capacity to seek to have international agreements ratified by the UK Government, they have a basis for which to act.

3. The role of Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs)

EAC can encourage UK Government Ministers to instruct their officials and agencies to respond positively to invitations from NGOs to collaborative working. NGOs are crucial to represent voices of local communities and utilize resources rapidly, and are able to work rapidly in times of crisis (e.g. novel diseases, rescues, pollution events). NGOs should be pro-active and ensure they are included in consultations and initiatives to ensure that all voices are respected and acknowledged. They often know exactly what is happening 'on-the-ground' and can provide insight not available elsewhere. They can also deploy resources in ways which represent good value for money.

4. Addressing equitable research to underpin conservation efforts

EAC can encourage the UK Government to support further interventions by the UK Research Institutes to welcome UKOT researchers as equal partners in innovative research projects and provide financial resources to undertake research which underpins conservation efforts. In 2023 and beyond, there is an opportunity to re-address some of the inequalities in research with UKOTs researchers becoming fully resourced and recognised for their contribution to the global understanding of effective conservation of the natural world.

5. Strengthening the critical mass of conservation practitioners by bringing them together,

EAC can encourage UK Government to support NGO proven initiatives (e.g. conferences, webinars, workshops) that bring together voices across multi-disciplines in support of challenges faced by the UKOT community (e.g. invasive species, unsustainable development, climate change) so that they can make best use of their resources and have access to expertise and alternative views where they seek them.

Joint Ministerial Council

The Joint Ministerial Council held in May its meeting postponed in November. JMC plans to meet again in November 2023.

Extracts from the Statement from the Joint Ministerial Council (full version available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/2023-uk-and-overseas-territories-joint-ministerial-council-communique/2023-uk-and-overseas-territories-joint-ministerial-council-communique>):

We, the Ministers for the Overseas Territories and elected leaders and representatives of the Overseas Territories, met as the Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) on 11 to 12 May 2023. Ministers and representatives from across the UK government, including the Home Office, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, Department of Transport, HM Treasury, Department of Health and Social Care, and the Department for Energy Security and Net Zero joined.

1. The Foreign Secretary reaffirmed that the Overseas Territories are an integral part of the undivided realm. The longstanding and deep partnerships give us strength in this rapidly changing world. We are family, under one realm. United by shared values and pushing in the same direction to overcome shared challenges.

2. In keeping with the founding intentions of the JMC, as the highest forum for political dialogue and consultation between the UK and the Overseas Territories, we approached these discussions with the purpose of promoting cooperation in areas of mutual interest. We discussed key priorities with an aim to: promote the security and good governance of the Territories; their sustainable development, economic and social progress; and to agree priorities, develop plans and review implementation.

3. We welcomed the Foreign Secretary's announcement of a new UK government strategy on the Overseas Territories. We look forward to collaborating in its development, setting the direction for a relationship firmly based on the principles of collaboration and mutual interest. The Overseas Territories further welcome that each government department will have an assigned minister responsible for their department's relationship with the Territories. These ministers will meet as a group chaired by the Minister for the Overseas Territories.

13. We condemn the ongoing illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine and note this has created new challenges for the Overseas Territories. The UK government welcomes the Overseas Territories' continued strong commitment and actions in implementing and enforcing sanctions against Russia.

Environment and climate change

14. The Overseas Territories are spread across all 7 major oceans and seas, and support the Earth's major ecosystem types, from polar tundra to mangrove forests. The Overseas Territories are leading on policies to protect unique environments and to address climate change including energy transition. The UK government recognises that the Territories are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and we are working

with Territory Governments to prioritise climate change actions in UK funding.

15. We remain committed to keeping a limit of 1.5C temperature rise within reach and to implementing and building on the Glasgow Climate Pact. We welcomed the extension of the UK's ratification of the Paris Agreement to Gibraltar in 2022 – bringing them into scope of the UK's Nationally Determined Contribution to reduce all greenhouse emissions by at least 68% of 1990 levels by 2030. While recognising the efforts of all Overseas Territories in reducing emissions, the UK government will continue to support Overseas Territories with appropriate technical support.

16. The UK government is supporting biodiversity and conservation projects in the Overseas Territories. For each year until 2025, the UK government will continue to make available £10 million for applicants to Darwin Plus. This year, Darwin Plus has been expanded to include a new local scheme aimed at building capacity and growing local economies; and a new strategic scheme for fostering greater innovation and collaboration between Territories. With improvements to the Darwin Plus Fellowships scheme also underway, UK government is pleased to be enhancing the full Darwin Plus offer and will keep the structure of the programme under review, with a focus on suitability and practical conservation. The UK government will explore ways that funding for the Overseas Territories is not cut short as a result of loss of access to EU environment funding.

17. The UK government and Overseas Territories are developing a new joint UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy, expected to be published in 2024. Building on the success of the Darwin Plus and Blue Belt Programmes, the Strategy will set out the priorities of individual Territories, our ambition to protect and restore biodiversity, and the approach to long-term investment for sustaining the Territories' biodiversity.

18. The UK government reiterates its commitment to the longevity of the established Blue Belt Programme, whilst continuing to welcome new Territories to the programme where they are committing to enhancing the protection and sustainable management of their marine environments. We welcome the Turks and Caicos Islands and Anguilla as the newest members of the Blue Belt family, and we welcome Bermuda's participation in the Blue Belt Ocean Shield initiative.

19. We welcomed the active participation of the Overseas Territories in international fora including the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP27) and the fifteenth meeting of the Convention on Biological Diversity. The UK government and the Overseas Territories will work in partnership at upcoming climate change and biodiversity summits, including COP28 in the United Arab Emirates and at the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2024.



The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park, FCDO Minister for Overseas Territories, Commonwealth, Energy, Climate and Environment, addresses the JMC Reception, attended by UKOTCF. Lord Goldsmith was pleased to note that he is the first UK minister with "Overseas Territories" in his title.

Photo: Dr Gemma Harper, JNCC CEO

The Falkland Islands take over Presidency of the UK Overseas Territories Association

On 8 February, at the AGM of UK Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA), the Falkland Islands were elected to the Presidency of UKOTA, replacing the Turks and Caicos Islands who had held the Presidency for the last year.

For 2023 the UKOTA will be chaired by the Falkland Islands Government Representative to the UK and Europe, Richard Hyslop. In accordance with the Association's constitution an elected member of the Falkland Islands Legislative Assembly assumes the Presidency of the Political Council of UKOTA, and The Honourable MLA Teslyn Barkman will fulfil this role. As Chair of UKOTA, Mr Hyslop will lead the work of the Association, advancing and defending the collective interests of the Overseas Territories in the UK over the forthcoming year. For the Falklands specifically, this also builds upon the busy and successful Falklands 40th anniversary year in 2022, and the 10-year anniversary in 2023 of a decisive referendum to remain a proud member of the UK Overseas Territory family.

Commenting on the Chairmanship Mr Hyslop said, 'It is an honour to be elected as Chair of UKOTA and I am grateful for the confidence of the other Overseas Territory Representatives and support of the Falkland Islands Government. I look forward to working with my colleagues to further promote the relationship between the Overseas Territories and the UK and to engaging with all stakeholders to advance the work of the Association. I would like to put on record my thanks to Tracy Knight, the UK Representative from the Turks and Caicos Islands who chaired UKOTA brilliantly over the last year.'

As President of the Political Council, MLA Teslyn Barkman will have responsibility for chairing the council's annual meeting of



Hon. Teslyn Barkman MLA speaks on behalf of the UK Overseas Territories at the Joint Ministerial Council reception. Richard Hyslop, Falkland Islands Government Representative to the UK and Europe, looks on from the left. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF

political leaders in London later this year ahead of the annual Joint Ministerial Council between the Overseas Territories and the UK Government. MLA Barkman said; 'Throughout my political career I've been fortunate to learn more about my fellow UK Overseas Territories and to champion my home and the wider UK Overseas Territory family at Joint Ministerial Councils. As President I look forward to continuing to work with UK Overseas Territories politicians and representatives and to raise the profile of the UK OT family as a spokesperson for our collective voice.'

Other posts elected at the AGM include Mrs Janice Panton MBE, UK Representative for Montserrat, as Honorary Secretary and Chris Carnegy, UK Representative for the Government of Tristan da Cunha, as Hon. Treasurer.

Reception held at the Speaker's House in the Palace of Westminster to celebrate St Helena's Blue and Green Agendas

On Wednesday 17 May 2023, Chief Minister Julie Thomas hosted a reception at the Palace of Westminster in London to celebrate St Helena's Green and Blue Agenda and the ongoing Cloud Forest Project. Speaker of the UK House of Commons, Sir Lindsay Hoyle, kindly allowed the reception to take place in the State Rooms of the Speaker's House.

Over 120 guests attended. This included UK Parliamentarians, St Helena Cloud Forest Project partners, people connected with St Helena through charities and other groups, officials from UK Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), the UK Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and St Helenian students currently studying in the UK, as well as UKOTCF.

During the event speeches were made by the Speaker of the House of Commons Sir Lindsay Hoyle, the Overseas Territories Minister for the UK Government Lord Goldsmith, Beccy Speight the CEO and Shayla Ellick of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and the Chair of the St Helena All Party Parliamentary Group Amanda Milling MP.

These focused on celebrating the wide variety of work underway in St Helena related to the Island's environmental management and stewardship. This included St Helena's Blue Agenda and the Island's MPA and internationally recognised sustainable fishery, as well as their Green Agenda and ongoing cloud forest restoration project.

The voices of some of the cloud forest workforce were brought to the reception through a short video. A longer video showcasing some of St Helena's Blue and Green initiatives was also shown during the reception.

On the event, Chief Minister Julie Thomas said: "I was humbled to see so many people attend tonight and show such interest in what we have achieved and what we are aspiring to deliver in St Helena. It is a testament to the amazing work underway across our terrestrial and marine environments that such an array of guests wanted to be here, whether to celebrate or learn more. Our Green and Blue Agenda can only be

achieved by working together as a community with our international partners. When we bring our local knowledge and expertise together with that of larger organisations and funders, we've shown that we can deliver internationally recognised results."



Photo composite: St Helena Government

JNCC launch new strategy to 2030

UK Government's statutory agency, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) launched its new strategy on 22 May 2023, the UN International Day of Biological Diversity. *Together for Nature – our Strategy to 2030* outlines the areas of work that JNCC will undertake, focusing on its role in terrestrial and marine nature conservation and recovery, at the UK level, working with the UK Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies, and inputting evidence and advice to global nature issues.

The strategy includes the development of new partnerships and the strengthening of JNCC's facilitation and convening role to help ensure that its work is based on the best available science and has greater impact and profile in the years ahead.

UKOTCF's Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski, was invited to the launch, both in that capacity and because he was the "Implementation Officer" charged with setting up JNCC some 30 years ago and served as its first Director. In view of this, JNCC's Chairman, Professor Colin Galbraith (who was on Mike's staff at the time) invited Mike to reflect on JNCC's further development. Mike made three points:

Recalling that NGOs had been JNCC's best friends in politically troubled time of JNCC's creation, but that links had weakened somewhat since, he welcomed JNCC's wish to restore strong relations with domestic NGOs evident in the present event and looked forward to this being extended to UKOT & CD NGOs and their umbrella body in the future.

He welcomed strongly the comment from JNCC's CEO, Dr Gemma Harper, that JNCC would restore its ability to advocate - and congratulated JNCC and its sponsor ministry Defra, on restoring this ability.

He underlined the importance to world biodiversity of UKOTs, and the continued under-resourcing of their conservation, encouraging more support via NGOs as well as official routes.

All three points were strongly supported by other speakers. On behalf of the other UKOT UK representatives and UKOTA members present, Kedell Warboys (St Helena UK Representative), backed up the third point and stressed the need for UK's developing biodiversity strategy be the product of territories, not a UK-written product.

You can download *Together for Nature* from <https://data.jncc.gov.uk/data/ccb9f624-7121-4c32-acfa-e0579d7eaa1/together-for-nature.pdf>.



Above: Professor Colin Galbraith, JNCC's Chairman, addresses the meeting.

Below: At JMC (p. 24), JNCC CEO, Dr Gemma Harper, re-meets the Chairman of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers' Council, Minister John Cortés, and UKOTCF Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski (behind camera), having previously met both at the 2018 Environment Ministers' Council meeting in the Isle of Man, when she was working for Defra. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski



Below: Dr Mike Pienkowski, and Tracy Knight, Janice Panton & Kedell Warboys (UK representatives respectively for Turks & Caicos Islands, Montserrat and St Helena) in informal talks at the launch.



Above: Dr Mike Pienkowski reflects on the origins and future potential of JNCC and its prospective partners. Photos: JNCC, except as indicated.



Left (from left): NGO panellists: Craig Bennett (CEO, The Wildlife Trusts); Prof. Juliet Vickery (CEO, British Trust for Ornithology), Ian Dunn (CEO, Plantlife), and Beccy Speight (CEO, RSPB), and Dr Gemma Harper with one of the session chairs, Leah Gowing & Olivia Agbe



Reception in Parliament to celebrate marine conservation in the UKOTs

The Great Blue Ocean Coalition held a reception in Terrace Dining Room A of the House of Commons on 12 June 2023. This was hosted by Hilary Benn MP and Sally-Ann Hart MP to celebrate marine conservation efforts in the UK Overseas Territories.

In his speech, Lord Goldsmith, Minister of State for Overseas Territories at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office recalled the work 10 years ago by NGOs, Hilary Benn MP, Tim (now Lord) Benyon (also present), Lord Randall, himself and others to get this initiative started. He and Hilary Benn stressed the cross-party nature of the success, and expected all parties to include a commitment to build on it in their manifestos for the forthcoming general election.

Hilary Benn underlined the huge contribution of the UKOT populations to world conservation, especially when viewed in terms of areas conserved per capita, adding to Lord Goldsmith's noting of the exceptional value for money of the UKOTs' contribution. Sally-Ann Hart paid tribute to these and the NGOs' invaluable contributions, as did the other speakers.



Above: Host Hilary Benn MP addresses the meeting. Photo: Richard Hyslop, Falkland Islands UK Representative

Below (from left): Lord Goldsmith, host Sally-Ann Hart MP, and Tracy Knight, Turks & Caicos Islands UK Representative, speak.

Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF



Main Store at Grytviken, South Georgia, open to visitors

The Main Store at Grytviken is now open to visitors following five years of sympathetic restoration and curation by the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) and South Georgia Heritage Trust. The huge two-storey building retains an authentic feel and is packed with original whalers' stores, allowing visitors to get a feel for working life at a South Georgia whaling station.

GSGSSI and SGHT are working to ensure that South Georgia's human story is told. The restoration of this important historic building now adds another layer to the rich cultural heritage that is being preserved on the island.

<https://sgmuseum.gs/news/february-2023/> invites you to have a look inside and see what is on the shelves.

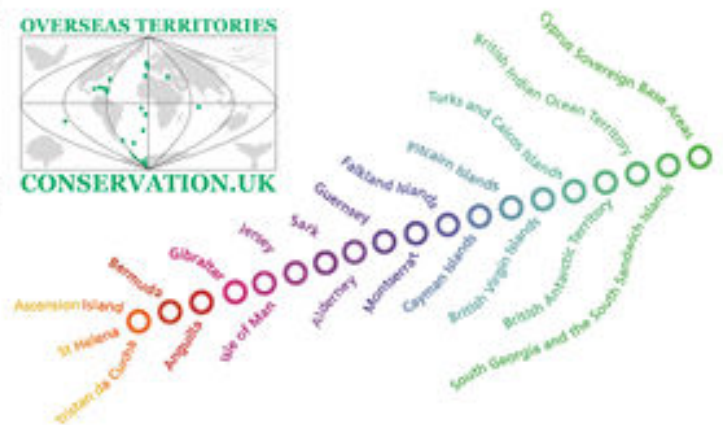
Grytviken Whaling Station was established in 1904 by Norwegian whaler and polar explorer Carl Anton Larsen, and ceased operations in the 1960s. Due to the remote location, the whaling station had to be self-sufficient. Everything from coal, to food and raw materials had to be brought in. The organisation of stores and supplies for the whaling station was critical. Supplies had to be ordered and delivered in time for the summer season of whale catching (October to March) and the winter season of repair and maintenance.



From left: The Main Store at Grytviken whaling station, 2022; close-up of a shelf showing the rivet size in the black stencilled label – and more shelves of rivets; The Main Store from the side with the whale-catcher Petrel moored alongside the repair jetty, 2022. Photos: SGHT

**Council of Environmental Ministers
(or equivalents) of
UK Overseas Territories
and Crown Dependencies:
6th meeting, Thursday 18th May 2023**

**Zoom hosting by:
UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum
(UKOTCF)**



Sixth UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council Meeting, 18th May 2023

UKOTCF was pleased to be asked again by the Council of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers (and their equivalents in non-ministerial systems) to provide the secretariat for their meeting and again to host it on UKOTCF's Zoom platform.

On the next page is the image of those participants present when the "group photo" was assembled, with their names below on this page.

In the main part of this article, we are pleased to reproduce the Council's Statement issued after the meeting (available also [here](#)).

On the next page, some of the participants; From left to right, by rows from the top:

Hon. Prof. John Cortés, Minister for Education & Culture, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change, Heritage and Public Health, Gibraltar

The Rt Hon. Lord Benyon, UK DEFRA Minister of State (Minister for Biosecurity, Marine and Rural Affairs)

The Hon. Walter H Roban, JP, MP, Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs, Bermuda

Hon. Pete Biggs MLA, the portfolio holder for Environment and Public Infrastructure, Falkland Islands

Deputy Lindsay De Sausmarez, President of the Committee for the Environment & Infrastructure, Guernsey

Hon. Clare Barber MHK, Minister for the Department of Environment Food & Agriculture, Isle of Man

Hon. Quincia M. Gumbs-Marie, Minister of Sustainability, Innovation and the Environment, Anguilla

Hon. Josephine Connolly, Minister of Tourism, Environment, Maritime, Heritage & Gaming, Turks and Caicos Islands

Hon. Christine Scipio, Minister of Environment, Natural Resources and Planning, St Helena

States Member Lin Maurice, Chair of the General Services Committee, States of Alderney

Dr Mike Pienkowski, Chairman, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (Secretariat)

Ms Channele Petty Barrett, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Sustainability, Innovation and the Environment, Anguilla

Ms Melissa Meade, Chief Natural Resources Officer, Department of Natural Resources, Anguilla

Ms Funmi Okorro, Anguilla UK Office

Ms Dorothea Hodge, Anguilla UK Representative

Mr Lee Lyons, UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Mrs Catherine Wensink, Executive Director, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (Secretariat and Presenter)

Ms M. Rozy Azhar, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Bermuda

Mr Troy Jacob (representing Hon Wayne Panton, Premier and Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency, and Ms Jennifer Ahearn, Permanent Secretary), Cayman Islands

Mrs Ann Pienkowski, Environmental Education Coordinator, and Secretary of the Wider Caribbean Working Group, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (Secretariat)

Ms Julia Henney, Senior Natural Environment Officer, States of Guernsey (and Presenter)

Mr Willie Peggie, Group Director - Natural Environment (representing Deputy Jonathan Renouf, Minister for the Environment)

Mr Darren Duncan, Portfolio Director, Environment, Natural Resources and Planning, St Helena

Mrs Kedell Worboys, St Helena UK Representative, and UKOTA

Ms Shakira Christodoulou, Conservation Leader for La Société Sercquaise (representing Conseiller Helen Plummer, Chairman of Agriculture, Environment and Sea Fisheries Committee of the Chief Pleas of Sark)

Mr Chris Carnegie, Tristan da Cunha UK Representative (representing Chief Islander Mr James Glass)

Ms Lormeka M. Williams, Director of Environment & Coastal Resources, Turks and Caicos Islands

Mr Richard Selman, Head of Ecosystems, Isle of Man

Prof. Helen Roy, UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (Presenter)

Ms Natasha Stevens, St Helena National Trust (Presenter)

Dr Rhian Guillem, Gibraltar Botanic Gardens (Presenter)

Apologies for absence

Dr the Honourable Natalio D. Wheatley, Premier and Minister responsible for Natural Resources, (British) Virgin Islands

Hon. Crenston C. Buffonge, Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment, Montserrat

Mr Simon Young, Mayor of Pitcairn

Council of Environmental Ministers (or equivalents) of
UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies:
6th meeting, Thursday 18th May 2023

Zoom hosted by:
UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum
(UKOTCF)



Participants



John Cortes



Lord Benyon



Minister Walter Roban



MLA Pete Biggs



Deputy Lindsay de Saussure



Clare Barber



Hon. Gumbs-Marie



Hon. Josephine Connolly



Minister Christine Scipio

Chair of the General
Services Committee
States of
Alderney

Lin Maurice



Mike Pienkowski



Channele Petty Barrett



Anguilla - Melissa Meade



Funmi Okorou



D.A. Hodge



Lee Lyons



Catherine Wensink



Rozv Azhar



Troy Jacob, MSCR



Ann Pienkowski



Julia Henney



Willie Peggie



Darren Duncan ENRP



Kedell Worboys



Shakira



Chris Carnegie



Lormeka Williams-TCI



Richard Selman...

Richard Selman (IoM DEFA)



Helen Roy - UKCEH



Natasha Stevens



Rhian Guillem

Sixth UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council Meeting, 18 May 2023 (by Zoom) – Statement

Summary

In this Statement, the Council recognises the context of its meeting, stressing the value of, and responsibilities to, the natural environment.

It welcomes the participation in part of the meeting by UK Environment Minister Lord Benyon.

It expresses appreciation of the work of the UK Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA) and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF).

We look forward to a restoration of representatives of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies to full membership of the core team of UK delegation as in earlier Conferences of the Parties to environmental conventions, given the enormous contribution we can make to international discussions on matters related to biodiversity. Our differences are what makes us special; our commonalities are what bring us together to share knowledge and experiences. We tried to show UK Government that many seats at the table and many voices should not to be seen as a challenge, but a way to foster partnerships and collaboration, which can be a cost-effective way to do better for biodiversity and the planet.

We recognise the changes HMG has made to its Biodiversity Challenge Funds which will see the levels of funding available, via Darwin Plus, at several levels from small projects to larger strategic projects. We welcome also the undertaking of HMG to consult widely on the drafting of a UK Government Biodiversity Strategy in support of the UK Overseas Territories. We appreciated the assurances from Lord Benyon that UK ministers recognise, in view of the huge proportion of the global biodiversity for which UK is responsible internationally that depends on the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, and that their waters provide the great proportion of UK's protected marine zones, UK Government is committed to appropriate inclusion of territory representatives in UK delegations to COPs. We appreciated his willingness and that of colleagues to explore wider funding opportunities including replacement for the EU funding potential lost with Brexit, and the inclusion of UK Overseas Territories representatives in any review of funding and its structures. We welcomed also the commitment of Lord Goldsmith at the Joint Ministerial Council to pursue the availability to territories of National Lottery funding, and to encourage Darwin Plus to resource more practical conservation, rather than research.

We welcomed the recent 3-day technical webinar of UKOTCF which picked up our concerns expressed last year about the environmental, social and economic damage caused by invasive species, and valued the chance to discuss some presentations from that. Adequately resourced long-term programmes are needed, especially in complex ecosystems; local communities are key to action needed to prevent introductions, and to control invasive species once they are established; UKOT- and CD-based researchers are leading the way in terms of our understanding of invasive non-native species and UK research institutes could benefit massively from partnerships with them; innovation can help us prepare for and monitor invasive species in efficient ways so that we can protect our native species.

We continue our recognition of the importance of NGO bodies experienced in project design and operation, and which can draw on a wide range of expertise. We urge the UK Government to consider supporting such bodies so that they can deploy their skilled volunteer and paid personnel in helping the territories and raising and empowering local capacity, as well as supporting the infrastructure facilitating this such as conferences, workshops and

reviews by experienced NGO bodies. Noting the benefits of Blue Belt and Blue Shield on marine conservation, we reiterated also the need for increased UK funding for terrestrial conservation – on which most species unique to UK territory depend. We noted also other funding aspects.

Main Text

1. We, the portfolio holders for the environment in our respective territories or dependencies, held our sixth Environment Ministers' Council meeting by Zoom on Thursday 18th May 2023. We continue to fulfil the role recognised by the November 2017 Joint Ministerial Council, which emphasised the importance of meetings of environment ministers in work on environmental management and climate change issues. Since our first meeting, in Gibraltar in 2015, we have faced major challenges. COVID-19 has had a global impact, but has had a particular impact on those economies, including many represented here, with a high dependence on tourism. The United Kingdom's withdrawal from the EU has led to a reappraisal of future funding arrangements for environmental work. Since then, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is generating major challenges to economies, energy and food supplies. We welcomed the opportunity afforded by this Council to address our challenges through joint and collaborative working, and to develop common priorities and approaches.

2. We welcomed greatly the participation in part of the meeting of The Rt Hon Lord Benyon, UK DEFRA Minister of State (Minister for Biosecurity, Marine and Rural Affairs).

3. We value the support of our UK Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA) in addressing many of our links with UK Government, including supporting environmental initiatives.

4. We appreciate also the work of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) and its associated organisations in pursuing and facilitating many environmental aspects important to our territories and their natural and human welfare, as well as the work of other supporting bodies, within our jurisdictions, the UK and beyond, with whom the UKOTs & CDs work.

5. The biodiversity of the territories and dependencies we represent is considerable. We have 3,300 endemic species, compared with around 90 in the UK. About 75% of these are globally threatened. Our ecosystems contain some of the rarest, and most threatened habitat types: we have, for example, nearly 5000 km² of coral reefs, which makes the UK the twelfth largest reef nation in the world. Our environmental capital has underpinned sustainable livelihoods in our populations for many generations, and can help continued growth in our economies and our living standards, as well as public health. But it is increasingly under threat, and needs both safeguarding and management. We recognise the hard spending choices facing UK and Territory politicians post-pandemic and during the current economic challenges, but note the increasing public awareness of the reality of the immediate major threats to human life and well-being caused by biodiversity loss and climate change.

6. We confirm our commitment to conserve our environmental capital, and, recognising its global importance, some territories have chosen to be included in UK's ratification of international environmental agreements. We share with the UK a partnership approach to integrating environmental considerations in government decision-making, marked in the case of most Overseas Territories by individual Environment Charters as envisaged in the 1999 White Paper *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity*, on which the 2012 White Paper *The Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability* is explicitly built. The approach

is shared by other territories and dependencies through their commitment to the international agreements in which they are included. The Territories are important to the delivery of UK's global environmental promises, for example in protecting the over 90% of species found only on UK sovereign territory and by the declaration of by far the largest area of UK protected ocean. The Territories are a positive asset to be celebrated and invested in.

7. We recognise that Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies have materially different relationships with the UK and we further recognise that there are differences between Overseas Territories. These differences are particularly reflected in approaches to funding, which we recognised in our consideration of future aspirations, expectations and obligations. But for all of us, particularly in the light of the major challenges noted above, funding remains the key issue. External funding for initiatives to tackle the priorities we identified in previous meetings, such as unsustainable development, invasive species and the impacts of climate change, remains a challenge. For some of us the EU was a source of considerable funds for project work, technical advice and infrastructure development. We are pleased to see changes and resourcing so far through the Darwin Plus programme to start to address this, but note that some key aspects, particularly terrestrial conservation, still lag behind in funding.

8. We showed our appreciation to the UK Government for HMG for eventually affording more places than ever to the Overseas Territories at the 15th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity in Montreal in November 2022, as well as places at the 27th Climate Convention Conference of the Parties in Sharm El-Sheikh in December 2022. The work of UKOTA in negotiating the additional places for OTs as part of the UK overflow delegation is acknowledged and appreciated. This gave the opportunity to highlight how precious and vulnerable our natural environments in the Overseas Territories are, and to generate high level engagement on environmental protection. Our differences are what makes us special; our commonalities are what bring us together to share knowledge and experiences. We tried to show UK Government that many seats at the table and many voices should not to be seen as a challenge, but a way to foster partnerships and collaboration, which can be a cost-effective way to do better for biodiversity and the planet. We welcomed this greater level of engagement and look forward to a further move to restore representatives of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies to full membership of the core team of UK delegation as in earlier Conferences of the Parties to environmental conventions. All UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies who wish to attend COPs should be able to do so. If only a few Ministers are able to attend there should be a clear process for getting the key points from the other territories and for providing feedback to all territories.

9. We appreciated the assurances from Lord Benyon that he and his fellow ministers recognise the huge proportion of the global biodiversity for which UK is responsible internationally that depends on the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, and that their waters provide the great proportion of UK's protected marine zones - and that consequently UK Government is committed to appropriate inclusion of territory representatives in UK delegations to COPs. We appreciated too his commitment to explore with colleagues and officials efficient use of marine resources in relation to Tristan da Cunha, including assistance for locally-controlled shipping capacity that would support IUU policing and ocean science. We appreciated his willingness and that of colleagues to explore wider funding opportunities including replacement for the EU funding potential lost with Brexit, and the inclusion of UK Overseas Territories representatives in any review of funding and its structures. We welcomed also the commitment

of Lord Goldsmith at the Joint Ministerial Council to encourage Darwin Plus to resource more practical conservation, rather than research.

10. We confirmed our welcome of the work of the project partners (UKOTCF and UKCEH) and the funding bodies (AHRC & NERC) for arranging for bodies in our territories to be funded from UK research funds and looked forward to this precedent to be expanded greatly in the future to an increasingly equitable situation. We welcomed also the commitment of various UK bodies who are supporting the UKOTs, including the John Ellerman Foundation (JEF), the Garfield Weston Foundation, the People's Postcode Lottery and the People's Trust for Endangered Animals, to fund environmental conservation in our territories. We encourage other foundations to join them in helping to conserve the unique and globally important part of the natural heritage for which the UK family is responsible. For over 10 years JEF has been supporting work in UKOTs. Since our last meeting, a dedicated fund has been established which is very welcome and should be supported. This resulted from efforts of the Environmental Funders Network, supported by a secondment from RSPB, and with input from several others.

11. We noted in our fifth meeting our concern about the environmental, social and economic damage caused by invasive species. We noted that the costs of their removal greatly exceed the costs of prevention. Effective action requires wide consultation, stakeholder engagement, especially of active conservation NGOs, and public awareness campaigns. We recognised that long-term biosecurity, together with the development of early warning and rapidly adaptive response systems, needs to be resourced at the local and regional levels to prevent introduction and spread as new threats emerge. In this context, we greatly welcomed the organisation by UKOTCF in March 2023 of a 3-day technical conference on this topic, bringing together experience across our territories and others with relevant experience. This featured also the second Sir Richard and Lady Dace Ground Lecture, on Challenges and successes in restoring Caicos Pine forests after almost total destruction by introduced pest, by Bryan Naqqi Manco, Assistant Director responsible for Research & Development, Department of Environment and Coastal Resources, Turks & Caicos Islands Government. This was widely acclaimed and may be viewed on <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/other-territory-support/seminars-training/webinar-invasive-species/>.

12. We were able to view in our meeting a few of the shorter presentations from that conference, and discuss with the presenters. Reinforced by these we note that:

Technicians highlighted that long-term programmes are fundamental to dealing with the threats (e.g. displacement, introduction of disease) posed by invasive non-native invasive species (INNS). Some ecosystems in the UKOTs, e.g. Turks and Caicos Pine Yards, are extremely complex and require management, resources and time to recover. We saw the green shoots of recovery only possible through decades of dedication from many collaborators.

Discoveries by UKOT home-grown researchers, for example on St Helena, provide the UK and the world with knowledge and understanding of unique and complex ecosystems. We recognize and applaud these achievements.

UKOTs and CDs (e.g. Gibraltar and Guernsey) can be centres of excellence. Their data collections and knowledge provide an understanding of movement of species, including invertebrates such as non-native ants, wasps and hornets and their interaction with native invertebrates. Collaboration between them in order to share knowledge is a way to address global issues starting at smaller scales.

Communities are fundamental to action needed to deal with INNS once they become established. They drive the action in collaboration with bodies (such as environment departments and NGOs) responsible for protecting fragile and rare habitats.

New innovation in the form of techniques such as horizon-scanning, monitoring tools such as those which allow us to analyse environmental DNA (eDNA) can be used in a variety of ways. By refining these techniques, we can work more smartly and quickly to monitor changes in composition of species and take action to protect our native wildlife where appropriate.

13. We continue to recognise, as we have done at previous meetings, that conservation workers in our territories benefit from cooperation with NGO bodies experienced in project design and operation, and which can draw on a wide range of expertise. We urge the UK Government to consider supporting such bodies so that they can deploy their skilled volunteer and paid personnel in helping the territories and raising and empowering local capacity. We note that the UK Government has supported working conferences for conservation practitioners, organised by UKOTCF, as an opportunity to share experience and skills; this has led to maximising cost-effectiveness of project funds. We value these working conferences highly, and encourage the UK Government to contribute substantially to such future physical or online conferences for practical territory conservationists, in accordance with its commitment to ‘promote better cooperation and the sharing of experience between and among the Overseas Territories and with other states and communities which face similar environmental problems.’

14. At our 2018 meeting in the Isle of Man, we welcomed Blue Belt funding for extensive marine protection around oceanic territories, and recognised also the success of co-operative fishery management alongside marine protected areas. At our 2022 meeting, we welcomed UK Government, in response to calls from ourselves and UKOTCF’s 2021 technical conference, to continue and expand the Blue Belt programme in order to (a) provide the necessary financial and technical support to bring about effective and locally-led protection and sustainable management of their large-scale MPAs; and (b) expand the Blue Belt Programme and assistance for UKOTs developing other types of protected areas to other territories, including those not in mid-ocean, complementary “Blue Shield” initiative. Safeguarding vital marine biodiversity and enabling ecosystem recovery will sustain the blue economies of tourism and fishing, enable sequestration of ‘blue carbon’, and improve territories’ climate resilience against increasingly frequent and stronger extreme weather events. We continue to call for a comparable scheme for terrestrial conservation, on which most of the species found only in our territories depend. Some of our senior officers have expressed concern at the discomfort between their terrestrial and marine staff that this discrepancy in UK support has generated, and called for a “green dot” initiative.

15. We again recall our governments’ commitments to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development by choosing to be included in various international environmental agreements. We note that, in 2021, the UK Government and UKOTs reached 20 years of the existence of the Environment Charters and their commitments, not created under the Charters but brought together from under other international measures. We again note the invaluable role played by the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum’s (UKOTCF’s) “Review of performance by 2016 of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies in implementing the 2001 Environment Charters or their equivalents and moving towards the Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Targets” (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/env-charter/progress/>) which we endorsed at our 2017 meeting. We regret

that the UK Government has not provided the modest financial support we sought to enable the updating of this. We are grateful that the UKOTCF is nevertheless trying to undertake an update using unpaid skilled volunteers, and call on all to assist with this.

16. We welcome the undertaking of HMG to consult widely on the drafting of a UK Government Biodiversity Strategy in support of the UK Overseas Territories, and note that, in the context of devolved environmental powers, the Strategy must embody the will of the Territories themselves.

17. We underlined our welcome, expressed in our previous statements, of the constructive approach by the technical conference organised by UK Overseas Conservation Forum in March 2021 to identify solutions to other aspects of the situation and highlight their following recommendations:

- support should be given to long-term projects involving knowledge transfer to local NGOs through cooperation with the wider scientific and environmental community. The UK Government and other potential funders should focus resources on provision by experienced NGOs and others of the technical guidance and project officers needed to capitalise on the considerable local enthusiasm for conservation and environmental initiatives. We welcome progress made in the recruitment and deployment of citizen-scientists and citizen-conservationists, organised largely by NGOs, to further public ownership of these initiatives while recognising that costs need to be invested to release this major workforce;
- long-term funding is needed also for projects, such as those involving environmental recovery, that cannot be completed within the usual short time-frame. Sustainability cannot be built in a three-year cycle for habitats that take 30 years or more to come to fruition;
- local knowledge is essential in project-development and grant decisions. UK Government agencies were not funded by earlier UK Government grant funds for Overseas Territory conservation, but they are now. The UK Government needs to reverse its recent tendency to divert the use of traditional sources of grant-funding from cost-effective and experienced local and supporting UK NGO bodies to support instead UK government agencies and institutions, some of which are not experienced with some territory situations, however experienced they may be generally, and pay more regard to experience and proven success in the Overseas Territories, especially NGOs. The UK Government should revert to the more cost-effective approach of concentrating grant-funding on conservation bodies in the Overseas Territories and their joint body, rather than on consultancies;
- UK government agencies working in the Overseas Territories should be more open to speaking with other stakeholders, especially NGOs, to avoid duplication of effort. They should recognise the capacity constraints on local NGOs, which in most cases depend on voluntary work, and ensure funding to enable their contributions are built into project budgets;
- UK Government funding applications need to be less bureaucratic and repetitive, and consideration of projects should not take many months more than the time for application preparation. The assessments should be by those with Overseas Territories project-running experience and not based on box-checking scores;
- linking organisations help our territories make the best use of science and other information for decision-making, where local government or NGO staff may lack the relevant technical expertise. Whilst the UK government has international responsibility for environmental issues in the

Overseas Territories (House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee 2013), in practice that responsibility is devolved to the territories themselves. There is, therefore, little or no overall coordination, or mechanism for sharing expertise, which can lead to waste of resources in addressing problems to which solutions have been found elsewhere, and can fail to identify issues which others have seen as priorities. The further development of a loose, consultative structure of mutually reinforcing institutions, along the lines of the UKOTCF with its regional working groups, is a priority, which would be helped by support and recognition by UK government, as well as territory governments.

18. We agree to consult further after the meeting on our representation and presence at CoPs (including UNFCCC CoP28 from 30 November to 12 December 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates; and CBD CoP16 in Turkey in 2024), noting the importance of inclusion of our representative in the UK delegation, and noting that 94% of the globally important biodiversity for which UK is responsible depends on the Territories, as well as the considerable in-territory knowledge and expertise which will add value to the UK delegation.

19. We recognise with thanks the key role that local conservation leaders play in maintaining community motivation throughout the planning and implementation of long-term conservation projects. Their importance cannot be overstated if we are to ensure that community support for conservation projects does not fade over generations, and that future conservation projects will be embraced as readily as those currently being undertaken.

20. We continue to regret that, whilst there is no legal impediment to funding from the UK National Lottery being used in support of the environment in the territories, the policies and procedures of the Lottery funding bodies effectively prevent this. We ask, as we have done in previous meetings, the UK Government to undertake urgently a review of this situation, which would open up new horizons for cooperation. We welcomed the commitment of Lord Goldsmith at the Joint Ministerial Council to pursue the availability to territories of National Lottery funding.

21. We agree to meet again, possibly in late 2023 and in 2024 by remote communications, and ask UKOTCF to continue in the role of Secretariat.

Appendix: List of Ministers and other lead representatives participating

Alderney: Lin Maurice, Chair of the General Services Committee, States of, States of Alderney.

Anguilla: Hon. Quincia M. Gumbs-Marie, Minister of Sustainability, Innovation and the Environment

Bermuda: The Hon. Walter H Roban, JP, MP, Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs

Cayman Islands: Troy Jacob (representing Hon Wayne Panton, Premier and Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency, and Ms Jennifer Ahearn, Permanent Secretary)

Falkland Islands: Hon. Pete Biggs MLA, the portfolio holder for Environment and Public Infrastructure

Gibraltar: Hon. Prof. John Cortés, Minister for Education & Culture, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change, Heritage and Public Health

Guernsey: Deputy Lindsay De Sausmarez, President of the Committee for the Environment & Infrastructure

Isle of Man: Hon. Clare Barber MHK, Minister for the Department of Environment Food & Agriculture

Jersey: Mr Willie Peggie, Group Director - Natural Environment

(representing Deputy Jonathan Renouf, Minister for the Environment)

St Helena: Hon. Christine Scipio, Minister of Environment, Natural Resources and Planning

Sark: Ms Shakira Christodoulou, Conservation Leader for La Société Sercquaise (representing Conseiller Helen Plummer, Chairman of Agriculture, Environment and Sea Fisheries Committee of the Chief Pleas of Sark)

Tristan da Cunha: Mr Chris Carnegie, UK Representative (representing Chief Islander Mr James Glass)

Turks & Caicos Islands: Hon. Josephine Connolly, Minister of Tourism, Environment, Maritime, Heritage & Gaming

Apologies for absence

Montserrat: Hon Crenston C. Buffonge, Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment

Pitcairn: Simon Young, Mayor of Pitcairn

A UKOT site in UK's new Tentative List for World Heritage Site status

Every decade, nations are expected to revise their Tentative Lists of sites which they may put forward for World Heritage Site status in the following period. There were two such UKOT sites in the list of a decade ago, but these did not progress, probably partly due to a marked lack of interest (to put it mildly) on the part of UK Government to encourage and support.

UK Government's new list (which is about half the size of the one a decade earlier), overseen by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, includes one UKOT site, not one of those previously listed. It is the *Little Cayman Marine Parks and Protected Areas*, situated in the UK Overseas Territory of the Cayman Islands, put forward for their exceptional importance to marine biodiversity and their incredible natural beauty.

The other sites, all in UK itself, are:

The East Atlantic Flyway, part of a migratory bird route in Eastern England which is vitally important for bird populations and wildlife.

Birkenhead Park, which opened in 1847, was a pioneering project to bring greenery to urban environments and provided a blueprint for municipal planning that has influenced town and city parks across the world

The City of York has fantastic civic and religious buildings, including its Minster, and a rich history left behind by its Anglo-Saxon, Viking, and Norman inhabitants.

The Zenith of Iron Age Shetland combines three ancient sites in Shetland. Each site displays a different and distinctive facet of Iron Age architecture. Together they comprise a tribute to the capacity of humans to adapt to and live in a harsh, windswept environment.

They join two further UK sites which have already submitted their full nominations to UNESCO. One is the *Flow Country*, a large peatland area in the North of Scotland (see the kite book [pages 15-16] for something on their saving from threats), and *The Gracehill Moravian Settlement*, a religious site in Northern Ireland which is a joint bid alongside Denmark, Germany and the United States.

Darwin Plus Local Projects 2023

The first round of Darwin Plus Local projects grants (part of the UK Government's Biodiversity Challenge Funds) have now been announced.

Project	Title	Amount	Lead; partners	Territory
DPL00001	A wild welcome to Ascension	£8,990.00	Ascension Island Government; Royal Air Force	Ascension Island
DPL00002	Restoring native tussac grassland habitat	£21,000.00	Falkland Islands Government	Falkland Islands
DPL00003	Greening Our Schools – Let's think green!	£16,500.00	Department of Environment and Coastal Resources	Turks and Caicos Islands
DPL00004	Building Capacity for Coral Restoration: Contributing to Bermuda's Blue Infrastructure	£49,977.00	Living Reefs Foundation: Tritonia Scientific Ltd	Bermuda
DPL00005	Expanding the ex-situ propagation project for Cayman's Dendrophylax Ghost Orchid	£15,756.00	Christine Rose-Smyth; National Trust for the Cayman Islands, Cayman Islands Department of Environment, The Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park (QEII BP)	Cayman Islands
DPL00006	Restoring peat soils and tussac grass habitat in the Falklands	£11,398.00	Falkland Islands	Falkland Islands
DPL00007	Bermuda Zoological Society's Micro Forest Project	£50,000.00	Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo	Bermuda
DPL00008	Biodiversity Survey and Environmental Management Plan in Antarctica	£32,800.00	UK Antarctic Heritage Trust	British Antarctic Territory
DPL00009	Head in the Clouds: Extending Ascension's cloud forest	£8,000.00	Ascension Island Government	Ascension Island
DPL00010	Tackling plastic pollution on Ascension Island	£4,830.00	Ascension Island Government	Ascension Island
DPL00011	Achieving long-term recreational fisheries sustainability through community-led data collection	£49,844.00	ZSL - Zoological Society of London	British Indian Ocean Territory
DPL00012	Claw and Order, making Ascension Island safe for Land Crabs	£15,246.00	Ascension Island Government	Ascension Island
DPL00013	Conserving five Ascension-endemic crustaceans in a tiny biodiversity hotspot	£12,100.00	Ascension Island Government	Ascension Island
DPL00014	Raising awareness about the importance of arthropods.	£49,909.00	Enalia Physis	Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia (on Cyprus)
DPL00015	South Caicos Reef Restoration Vessel	£50,000.00	The School for Field Studies, Centre for Marine Resource Studies, South Caicos	Turks and Caicos Islands
DPL00016	Conservation Fieldwork Mobility Support for North and Middle Caicos	£48,300.00	Department of Environment and Coastal Resources	Turks and Caicos Islands
DPL00017	Pollution and invasive species management, Spittal Pond Nature Reserve	£49,995.00	Bermuda National Trust	Bermuda
DPL00018	Development of a National Trust for the Cayman Islands App	£26,060.00	National Trust for the Cayman Islands	Cayman Islands
DPL00019	Mapping South Georgia's Plant Biodiversity	£24,100.00	Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands	South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands
DPL00020	Data driven solutions to land management and climate change adaptation	£31,324.00	South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute; Falkland Islands Government (FIG), Department of Agriculture (DoA)	Falkland Islands

Project	Title	Amount	Lead; partners	Territory
DPL00021	Establishing digital data tools for enhanced conservation management and policy making	£49,768.00	ANT - Anguilla National Trust	Anguilla
DPL00022	Safeguarding Seedbanks: Securing the future of Ascension spurge	£10,000.00	Ascension Island Government	Ascension Island
DPL00023	Preventing Common Myna invasion in Akrotiri SBA and Cyprus	£31,663.00	Birdlife - Cyprus	Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia (on Cyprus)
DPL00024	Dealing with plastic waste on Diego Garcia's turtle nesting beaches	£49,980.00	ZSL - Zoological Society of London	British Indian Ocean Territory
DPL00025	Building farm biodiversity planning and monitoring capacity for sustainable management	£23,729.00	Falklands Conservation, Falkland Islands Government (FIG), Department of Agriculture (DoA)	Falkland Islands
DPL00026	Remote monitoring of Sister Islands Rock Iguanas on Cayman Brac	£33,627.00	Cayman Islands Department of Environment; SDZWA - San Diego Zoo Wildlife Alliance, North Carolina State University (NCSU), University of Rome Tor Vergata (UTV)	Cayman Islands
DPL00027	iRecord St Helena: wildlife recording for research, education and decision-making	£36,355.00	Saint Helena Research Institute	St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha
DPL00028	Nature-based solutions to treat SCTL D - Montserrat - Pilot Program	£39,127.00	Island Solutions Incorporated	Montserrat
DPL00029	Developing conservation practitioners to enable mountain chicken restoration in Montserrat	£49,998.00	Montserrat National Trust	Montserrat
DPL00030	Establishing a Video Survey Library Program for Montserrat's Coral Reefs	£38,741.00	Island Solutions Incorporated; Gov of Montserrat - Agriculture and Environment, University of North Carolina, Smithsonian Marine Station	Montserrat
DPL00031	MNT- Pipers Lot Outdoor Educational Facility & Nature Trail	£49,896.00	Montserrat National Trust; Montserrat - Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and Environment	Montserrat
DPL00032	Strengthening Montserrat's Marine Ecosystem through Coral Restoration Implementation and Training	£48,024.00	Island Solutions Incorporated; Gov of Montserrat - Agriculture and Environment	Montserrat
DPL00033	Building on island capacity for long-term seabird monitoring	£25,709.00	SHNT - St Helena National Trust; RSPB, ENRP - Environment, Natural Resources and Planning Directorate	St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha
DPL00034	Green Space Creation on Montserrat	£18,500.00	Department of Environment; Montserrat - Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and Environment, Montserrat National Trust	Montserrat
DPL00035	Restoration of grassland at Tristan da Cunha	£49,918.00	Gov of Tristan da Cunha	St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha
DPL00036	Island wide predator control to prevent loss of bird biodiversity	£39,302.00	SHNT - St Helena National Trust; ENRP - Environment, Natural Resources and Planning Directorate	St Helena, Ascension and Tristan da Cunha
DPL00037	Can Ascension be predator free?	£30,720.00	Ascension Island Government	Ascension Island
DPL00038	Can biocontrol halt the tsunami of non-native species on Ascension?	£19,964.00	Ascension Island Government; Centre for Agriculture and Biosciences International (CABI)	Ascension Island
DPL00039	Assessing Terrestrial Climate Change Impacts on a sub-Antarctic Archipelago	£39,229.00	Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands; SAERI - South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute, BAS - British Antarctic Survey	South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands

Project	Title	Amount	Lead; partners	Territory
DPL00040	Ascension Scaly Crickets: Urgent Conservation of a Unique Endemic Genus	£5,300.00	Ascension Island Government; Species Recovery Trust	Ascension Island
DPL00041	Assessing and protecting marine biodiversity (Jubilee Shoals, SBAA Akrotiri, Cyprus)	£49,248.00	Enalia Physis	Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia (on Cyprus)
DPL00042	Uncovering the genetic diversity of Caribbean coral rubble beds	£46,558.00	Turks and Caicos Reef Fund; University of Aberdeen - ACES	Turks and Caicos Islands
DPL00043	Caribbean flamingos as a flagship species for wetlands conservation	£25,574.00	National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands; Fort Worth Zoo (FWZ), H. Lavity Stoutt Community College	British Virgin Islands
DPL00044	Evaluating an important biodiversity area in Gibraltar: Windmill Hill Flats	£41,480.00	University of Gibraltar; Gibraltar Botanic Gardens, Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society, University of Auckland	Gibraltar
DPL00045	Developing biodiversity stewardship among TCI fishers through outreach and education	£51,480.00	FisherFolkFirst; Turks and Caicos Government Department of Environment and Coastal Resources, Turks and Caicos Islands, Department of Fisheries and Marine Resources Management, Dalhousie University - Integrated Marine Biosphere Research Project (IMBeR)	Turks and Caicos Islands

UKOTCF needs your help

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

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

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

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

Attenborough.

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

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

However, at the time of the financial crisis, in 2009, UK Government's average annual funding support for UKOT conservation paid via UKOTCF fell by 76%, and never recovered. Although it is said that that financial crisis ended (well before the next started), this funding was not restored – and, in fact fell further, so that the decline in UK Government support via UKOTCF for UKOT conservation declined for several years by 100%. We appreciate some project grants awarded in the last few years which restore part of this.

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

How you can help

Clearly, if you have links with funding institutions, an introduction would be welcome! Please contact Catherine Wensink (cwensink@ukotcf.org). However, even if you do not, there are several ways in which you could help: see <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/donate/>: