

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Annual Report April 2022 - March 2023

Report of Council

Overview

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

Conservation bodies inevitably go through periods of time when grant funded projects change the balance of activities and they are slightly skewed in favour of the grant/contract requirements. UKOTCF has certainly been in this position this year, but continues to carry out its core aims in support of all its members, associate organisations and partners. Indeed, without grant income and lots of donated time, the core activities would not be possible. Some new faces joined our team and have been providing assistance to these tasks in a variety of ways.

During the year we organised a meeting for the Environment Ministers Council, a webinar on invasive species, and publication and launch of an important conservation book.

We received a second grant from the Garfield Weston Foundation this year as we continue to implement several other externally funded projects from the UK's Darwin Initiative and jointly from two UK Research Institutes Councils (Natural Environmental Research Council and the

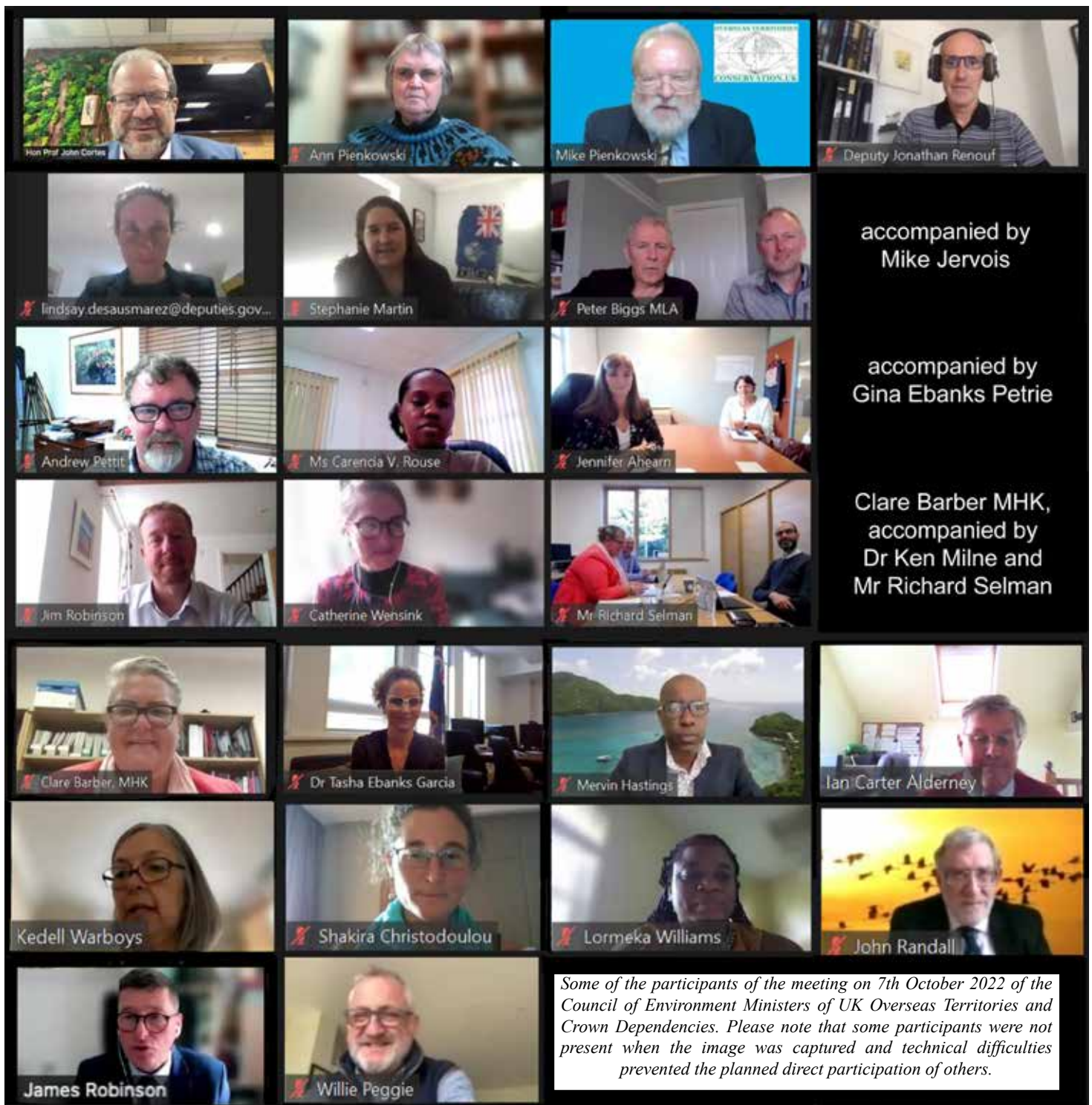
Arts and Humanities Research Council).

One of the aspects we undertook under this last and other projects was the consultation to develop a framework for best practice for bodies involved in funding and undertaking research and conservation in the UKOTs. This built on our being ever mindful that examples of best practice such as detailed work in Montserrat could be championed to help promote and secure greater support for, and recognition of, the role of UKOTs and CDs in meeting UK biodiversity commitments and targets.

This will continue to feature in our activities in 2023-24, as will the discussions that Council and others have had throughout the year on how we might reach out to an even wider public in the UKOTs, CDs and elsewhere. Among the other challenges and opportunities of this year are expected to be: organising another meeting of the Council of Environment Ministers of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies; undertaking much of the writing and editing our new book on the nature of the UKOTs and CDs; continuing the pioneering project Adopt a Home for Wildlife; and starting a new Darwin Plus supported project in Montserrat. This aims to (1) bring together voices that may not otherwise feed into public consultations; (2) create a biodiversity and human well-being toolkit for the community, physical planners and developers; (3) monitor and evaluate outcomes for biodiversity and human well-being; (4) share outcomes with other UKOTs via existing knowledge-sharing networks. We expect also to continue to seek ways to enhance communications with Parliament, UK Government and the public, as well as to continue to explore and press for more funding opportunities to support the important conservation work in UKOTs and CDs. We anticipate maintaining our wide range of publications and other types of outreach.



In December 2022, Ann and Mike Pienkowski joined the Montserrat parts of the Adopt a Home for Wildlife project team, in order to interview "Adopters" at their Wildlife Homes. Ann's edited videos can be seen as they are released over current months at <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/adoptahomeforwildlife/>; scan down to Project Updates. In the photos here at Wildlife Home 06 (Lookout Primary School), Mike interviews head teacher Ms Denelta Weekes, some of her pupils, and project officer Delmaude Ryan at Lookout School. The boundary of the site, beyond the playing field, is very exposed to high winds and salt spray. A first step in the management will be to establish a shelter-belt of endemic Montserrat pribby (as at the MNT Botanic Garden, shown) and sea-grape. This will allow other plants to establish, to benefit both biodiversity and the pupils. All photos: Ann Pienkowski



Project work

The Darwin Plus project (DPLUS155), which forms the present phase of our *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* and *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* programmes, continued on Montserrat throughout the year (it started in October 2021 and will finish in September 2024). The Project Officers, who form part of the overall team, lead on activities on Montserrat with UKOTCF supporting from the UK and during visits. The independent assessor's report arrived just before a scheduled trip from UKOTCF in July. As noted earlier, with delays in Darwin's decision-making, the project had started half way through the 2021/2 financial year. This meant that a full-year report, despite only half a year of activities, had to be submitted before the end of April 2022. The project had been fast moving during this time with a lot achieved, so the report was full of progress. Despite its reporting on only the first 17% of the project's duration, the assessor scored the project a '2' which means that it is [already] expected to meet its target at project end. Only a '1' is higher: that it is expected to exceed its target – which would be an impracticable assessment at such an early stage.

The team put together a packed itinerary for the visit of a team of highly

qualified scientists in July. Luckily, most had been completed before some re-arranged/postponed activities due to circumstances beyond anyone's control, as anti-Covid precautions due to an outbreak in the local population, rather than the visitors. Entomologist David Clements joined UKOTCF on the trip and certainly made an impression on the project team and the community (an account of his first trip to Montserrat was given in *Forum News* 57). Preliminary surveys of the plant and insects at the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* sites ("*Wildlife Homes*") have now been completed and management plans drafted.

Monty's Messengers, the kid's club re-invigorated by the Montserrat National Trust, with the help of the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project, has been meeting regularly throughout the year. The aim of this group is to provide primary children with a safe space to explore and be exposed to the natural environment as they learn important lessons on conservation, nutrition, living sustainability etc.

Questionnaires have been conducted to gain knowledge on community thoughts about biodiversity, ecosystem services and Natural Capital. The results have been analysed by the team and will be shared with the respondents.



One of the Adopt a Home for Wildlife volunteer visiting scientists, entomologist David Clements, identifies invertebrates with local project officers Ajhermae White and Antwone Sinclair. Photo: Catherine Wensink.

In December 2022, another visit to Montserrat was undertaken by UKOTCF to conduct some filming and interviewing “Adopters” on their Wildlife Homes – and subsequent editing to make these videos available continued to the end of the reported year and beyond, with 13 already published and many more planned. UKOTCF personnel met with colleagues at Montserrat National Trust about project work present and future, with the Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment. They participated in radio and streamed video shows, e.g. Montserrat National Trust’s *Heritage Show* and Rose Willock’s *Culture Show* on ZJB radio. They met 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 Dr Mike Pienkowski. They explored some possible new Wildlife Homes with potential Adopters.

Three issues of the project newsletter *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* were produced and published, in May, September and March.

Links with other groups and partners on Montserrat and elsewhere have been made as we began in January 2022 the project funded jointly by the UK Research Institute’s Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) under its call “*Hidden Histories*”. This project includes partners from Cayman, Montserrat, Belgium and the UK. There are several work packages as part of this project, with UKOTCF involved in all.

WP1: Knowledge of the human-environment interplay on the UKOTs (Case Study 1: Medicinal plants and biodiversity of Montserrat; & Case Study 2: Invasive species of the Cayman Islands);

WP2: Develop best practice template for equitable biodiversity, ecological and biological research collaboration and data sharing between the UKOTs and UK – Developing a “Framework of best practice for environmental research and conservation for the UKOTs”

WP3: Mapping the representation of UKOTs data and materials in overseas collections. Methods to share data equitably to inform research and nature conservation

Under WP 1, Case study 1, the following was achieved between April 2022 and the project’s end in March 2023:

1. Completion of colouring and activity guides, available online and as printed materials, for children on medicinal plants
2. Completion of booklet, available online and as printed materials, for adults on medicinal plants
3. Monty’s Messengers session on natural history collections and invertebrate sampling attended by 23 children (aged 4-14)
4. Launch of medicinal plants booklets at Montserrat Museum (attended by >30 people including Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment and Minister of Communications).
5. Six radio interviews to promote project.
6. Three meetings during visit regarding developing the Montserrat

Museum

7. Training sessions led by Leeds Museum and Galleries on online training resources and using Google Arts & Culture (attended by 8 persons)
8. Oral Histories training to at least 10 persons on Montserrat, with a follow-up advanced training on Oral History collecting (attended by 5 persons)
9. UK team lead Monty’s Messengers wildlife session at Nantes River.
10. Pilot Bioblitz event at Montserrat Botanic Garden with over 20+ participants.
11. More records added to iNaturalist page – there are now over 2,500 records of 866 species, generated for Montserrat – this platform is being used to help document and learn about the biodiversity of Montserrat. The project team are the top 5 recorders.
12. Successful funding application to the IPT Biodiversity Challenge Fund from Montserrat National Trust, with support from Meise Botanic Garden and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew for setting up a herbarium collection in Montserrat. (Total grant amount secured \$10k).
13. Successful funding application to Defra Darwin Plus (DPLUS192) from Montserrat National Trust, UKOTCF, Leeds Museums and Galleries and UKCEH for project: Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat’s sustainable development. (Total grant amount secured £485,986).

Under WP 1, Case study 2, the following was achieved from April-March:

1. Training in Oral Histories equipment was undertaken by the Leeds Museum and Galleries team, particularly on the impact of the green iguanas on local ecology.
2. A bioblitz event held at the MNT Botanic Garden with partners and representatives from the Meise Botanic Garden.
3. A workshop on perception of invasive and endemic iguana species on the Cayman Islands was held on 6th December 2022. The workshop led key informants through a series of discussion questions around their views and perceptions of endemic blue and invasive green iguanas.
4. Workshop report was published.
5. Completion of colouring guides for Cayman Islands available online and as printed materials.
6. Additional biological records made for the Cayman Islands via iNaturalist.
7. Training arranged for Luke Harding at Iguana Conservation conference in Gephy held in January 2023. This programme helps users to generate interaction maps.



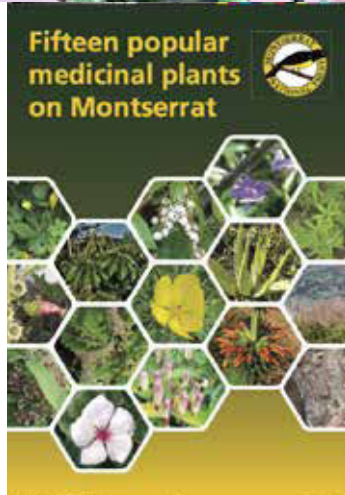
Other WP1 Outputs included:

1. Draft of “The environmental consequences of colonialism, case studies from islands and the UK Overseas Territories” was shared with co-authors in January 2023.
2. Draft of a data paper on iguana interactions.
3. Draft of a paper that characterises collections and collectors of the island’s biodiversity.

Under WP2: UKOTCF led the development of a best practice template



Hon. Crenston Buffonge, Montserrat Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing & Environment (right) and Mrs Sarita Francis, Executive Director of Montserrat National Trust (and UKOTCF Council Member), launch the books on medicinal plants of Montserrat, as part of the Hidden Histories project. Photo: Montserrat National Trust



for equitable biodiversity, ecological and biological research and conservation collaboration and data-sharing between the UKOTs and UK, developing a “Framework of best practice for environmental research and conservation for the UKOTs”

1. Following several wide rounds of consultations (involving all inhabited UKOTs) on drafts, the Framework was endorsed at a practitioner workshop in July (with 9 UKOTs represented – well over half those not administered by UK Government appointees).
2. The UKOT/CD Environment Ministers’ Council meeting in October formally encouraged all others to adopt the Framework.
3. Article was published in December in ECOS: <https://www.ecos.org.uk/ecos-43-3-2-1-the-uk-overseas-territories-moving-away-from-colonialism-in-the-environment/> looking at the relationship between the UK and UKOTs with respect to conservation.
4. Paper drafted on methods and background to drafting framework of best practice.

Under WP3: Mapping the representation of UKOT data and materials in overseas collections. Methods to share data equitably to informing research and nature conservation, the following were achieved:

1. Poster created representing articles held for the Cayman Islands and Montserrat.
2. Google Arts & Culture page created for the Cayman Islands.
3. Catalogue of collections from the UKOTs that are held around the world, uploaded to UKOTCF website see: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/blue-iguanas-to-blue-vervain/>

The project has certainly strengthened many relationships and is leading to a lot of follow-up work. A final project meeting took place at the end of March via Zoom and was attended by >25 persons.

There have been some opportunities for *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* to complement the work under the *Blue Vervain to Blue Iguana* project (started in January 2022 and ending in March 2023). This makes good use of resources such as the new kid’s club (Monty’s Messengers – see above). Both the pilot bioblitz event (an event that focuses on finding and identifying as many species as possible in a specific area over a short period of time) and use of the application iNaturalist have been introduced on island to address some data-gaps and provide opportunities for the community to get involved in data-collection.

The Higher Education Evening postponed from July took place in August.

This pilot event included members of the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* team and *Blue Vervain to Blue Iguana* team as well as representatives from Antigua and Cayman.

A proposal in partnership with the Montserrat National Trust and the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology was developed throughout the year. The project DPLUS192, titled “*Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat’s sustainable development*” builds on ideas generated with the team on Montserrat and other newer partners, e.g. UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Leeds Museum and Galleries and Meise Botanic Gardens. The project will commence in April 2023 and will finish in March 2026. It aims to (1) bring together voices that may not otherwise feed into public consultations; (2) create a biodiversity and human well-being toolkit for the community, physical planners and developers; (3) monitor and evaluate outcomes for biodiversity and human well-being; (4) share outcomes with other UKOTs via existing knowledge-sharing networks.

Organisational development

A second grant was awarded to UKOTCF by the Garfield Weston Foundation this year. This has supported most of our ongoing work including: the organisation of the remote meeting of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers in October; UKOTCF’s seminars for conservation practitioners, the theme for 2022-23 being invasive species; support capacity in the UKOTs, including support for NGOs, and young people (e.g. through higher education as mentioned with new work with the Jersey International Centre for Advanced Studies (JICAS), we aim to facilitate MSc students and PhD students) throughout the year; respond (and encourage those in UKOTs to respond) to UK Parliamentary Inquiries, take part in All Party Parliamentary Group meetings, and work with the UK Parliament’s Environmental Audit Committee, especially in the run up to UNFCCC COP16 throughout the year; expanding on work of the DPLUS155 project; expanding work of UKCEH and developers’ guidelines. Expansion of the programme; helping to fundraise and support the ground-breaking *EcoPlay* project on Montserrat; expanding *Blue Iguana to Blue Vervain* project and continuing work to facilitate more equitable research in the UKOTs.

We welcomed Jack Hayes to the team. Jack is working part-time for UKOTCF – in the role of Secretary of the Southern Oceans Working Group and a range of other tasks including helping with the invasive species webinar. Jack holds a BSc in Marine Biology from Swansea University and an MSc in Island Biodiversity and Conservation from the University of Exeter. His MSc, completed in summer 2022, focused on densities of the invasive lionfish at shallow-water habitat sites in the North Sound in the Cayman Islands and whether artificial habitats could be used to measure low densities. Jack has worked alongside the Cayman Islands Department of Environment and has particular interests in most things marine, particularly ichthyology, tropical marine ecology, climate change, sustainability and blue carbon. Jack spent most of his MSc studies on the Crown Dependency of Jersey, in the Channel Islands, as his post-graduate course on Island Biodiversity and Conservation was run by Exeter/JICAS. When studying islands and the particular conservation issues they face, he developed an interest in conservation management plans, invasive species and the UKOTs. As a passionate conservationist, Jack is never too far from the sea as he is also a keen surfer.

Keith Bensusan joined our Council. Keith is General Secretary of the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) and Director of the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens, as well as an environmental consultant through Wildlife (Gibraltar) Ltd. He is also a Research Fellow at the University of Gibraltar and a member of a number of statutory bodies in Gibraltar including the



Gibraltar saxifrage *Saxifrage globulifera* subsp. *gibraltaria*. Photo: GONHS

Nature Conservancy Council and CITES Scientific Authority.

Keith has had a lifelong interest in birds. He began birding at a very early age and his interests eventually diversified to other aspects of natural history. This led him to read Zoology, take an MSc in Biodiversity and Conservation, and finally a PhD on the ecology of migrant and resident birds around the Strait of Gibraltar. Apart from bird migration and ecology, Keith also has an interest in plants and is a keen entomologist, having worked on a range of groups. He has published on all of these subjects.

Keith has a keen interest in the wildlife of the UK Overseas Territories and its conservation. He finds the parallels and differences between the territories fascinating and believes that interchange of views, ideas and experiences via the Forum is an ideal way of tackling conservation problems effectively. He has been Chair of the UKOTCF's Europe Territories Working Group (ETWG) since 2014.

We welcomed also Leigh Morris as a Council member. Leigh 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 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.



Seagrass meadow at Fort Island, Isle of Man. Photo: Tony Glen, Manx Wildlife Trust



Awareness raising and information management

Forum News 56 was published and circulated in July and Forum News 57 was published in November.

Edition 12 of *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* was published online and circulated in May 2022, and edition 13 in September, using material from a trip to Montserrat in July. Edition 14 was produced in March 2023. Currently it is circulated to around 200 people in Montserrat and beyond, but some of these circulate further.



An annual Christmas card was sent out to UKOTCF's circulation list in December with a review of the year and looking ahead to 2023.

A series of videos on *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* sites ("Wildlife Homes") and the "Adopters" have been produced by Honorary Environmental Education Officer; these were filmed in the December visit. These are published on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/@ukotcf4676/videos>) and website (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/>)



A still from one of Ann's Adopt a Home for Wildlife videos: Project Officer Elvis Gerald, with gardener Ishmael Farrell, at Carol Osborne's Wildlife Home 12 (Cassava Ghaut), explains the problem of invasive non-native vine, golden pothos. Image: Ann Pienkowski

[adoptahomeforwildlife](#)) with links from UKOTCF's website. The Communications Officer in Montserrat for the project (and for Montserrat National Trust) is linking to the video on social media. Several other videos on Wildlife Homes will be ready and released as soon as the Adopters for that site have had chance to check them. Others on other Wildlife Homes will follow over coming months.

As part of the project mentioned above, UKOTCF has developed a framework for research to support conservation efforts in UKOTs. It is hoped that this can be used to build a case for greater support for them as funded researchers in their own right. *ECOS* has recently published a paper by several in the team, coordinated by Mike Pienkowski, on part of this: <https://www.ecos.org.uk/ecos-43-3-2-1-the-uk-overseas-territories-moving-away-from-colonialism-in-the-environment/>

The NatureBureau, a long-established environmental consultancy, with book publishing arm, Pisces Publications, together with Sara Oldfield, the author of *Fragments of Paradise* (in many ways, UKOTCF's establishing document) and UKOTCF's (as called then) first Coordinator and later Chair, made contact with UKOTCF and asked if they would be interested in working with them on a new publication – a sort of re-visiting of that book but in a style combining coffee-table photographs with referenced scientific content. UKOTCF, working with Sara, is making a start on this.

In addition and marking World Wildlife Day in March 2023, UKOTCF Chairman, Mike Pienkowski launched his book *"When the Kite builds... WHY and HOW we restored Red Kites across Britain"*, which has a Foreword by UKOTCF Council member Lord (John) Randall. UKOTCF has published the book and, in turn, will benefit from the proceeds of the book and so has been assisting with promoting and selling it on the UKOTCF's website see: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/kite-book/>, where also a 35-minute video on aspects of the project can be viewed. This was prepared for the launch of the book in March at Wormsley in the Chilterns, one of the homes of the Getty family. The late Mr John-Paul Getty Jr (later Sir Paul) had allowed the use of his estate for the rearing and release of the first kites in England for over 100 years. At the launch, Mike presented a copy of the book to Sir Paul's grandson, Mr Alexander Getty. UKOTCF Council member Mrs Joan Walley drew attention to how the book, together with the video, provides an opportunity to promote further UKOTs' work across the UK as an example of citizen-science best practice.



Mr Alexander Getty (right) receives a copy of *"When the Kite builds... WHY and HOW we restored Red Kites across Britain"* from Dr Mike Pienkowski. Photo: Alan Roe.

Influencing policy

The UK Government's Biodiversity Challenge Funds have now been divided into several strands of funding. These follow, in part, some of the recommendations made by the UKOTCF, and others in the Call for Evidence (2017). Darwin Plus Local is a new scheme within the existing UK government's Darwin Plus fund, which will fund "projects to protect the unique biodiversity and improve resilience to climate change within the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs)". It will "support small scale environmental projects in the UKOTs, with the aim of building capacity in-territory and contributing to local economies". For the first round which closed in February, Darwin Plus Local will provide grants of up

to £50,000 for organisations, and £20,000 for individuals. Applications can be made only by bodies in the UKOTs. The medium funding level grants continue under the Darwin Plus scheme. Whereas, the Darwin Plus Strategic fund (yet to be launched) will provide larger transformative environmental projects between £1m and £3m, aiming to encourage "greater ambition and collaboration across the OTs".

The meeting of the Environment Ministers' Council of the UKOTs and CDs took place in October 2022. Representatives from most UKOTs and CDs had expected to attend (except Pitcairn and Ascension). However, a few had some technical difficulties (some resolved by the team, but others could not join); the problems seemed to be due to clashes between the security systems of some participants' offices and the Zoom system. It is intended to resolve this in future by a slight lowering in security levels). Around 20 people took part. It was chaired by Gibraltar Environment Minister Prof John Cortés. The meeting covered items such as: the Framework for best practice in research in the UKOTs (as part of UKOTCF's work to influence UK Research Institutes to provide more support for the UKOTs); the work being done by the Protected Areas Working Group of the IUCN-UK Committee; the new All Party Parliamentary Group for Biodiversity in the UKOTs; plans for COP15 in Egypt and COP27 in Montreal. A statement had been drafted in advance, was modified by agreement and published online.

UKOTCF has maintained contact with the House of Commons Environmental Audit Select Committee to advocate the importance of including UKOTs in audits and policies relating to biodiversity. UKOTCF continues to brief parliamentarians in both houses of the UK Parliament, and it is helpful that some of our concerns have been reflected in parliamentary questions to the government so that information relating to UKOTs has become publicly available and can be referenced.

Relations with UK Government and Government Agencies

Briefings for new Governors of the UKOTs continued throughout the year. These provide information on the importance of biodiversity and UK's international responsibility towards them, background on the Environment Charters and active conservation bodies. In February a meeting was arranged with the new Governor of Cayman Islands. There are several forthcoming appointments and we hope to meet the appointees which will hopefully enhance relations between Governors' offices in the UKOTs and UKOTCF. UKOTCF personnel met with Adam Pile, Head of Caribbean and Southern Oceans Department of FCDO's Overseas Territories Directorate, while on Montserrat – which we hope will foster greater collaboration between FCDO and UKOTCF.

Defra launched a consultation in late 2022 on its OT Biodiversity Strategy. UKOTCF attended a workshop held in London in March and will submit a response to the public consultation, encouraging members and associates to do so also.

Working for partners and responding to requests

Meetings of Wider Caribbean Working Group were held in June and October 2022 and February 2023; Europe Territories Working Group in July, November and March; and Southern Ocean Working Group met in October and March 2023. The Chairman and Executive Director participated remotely in the Inter-Island Environment Meeting, in Alderney on 13 & 14 October. This normally annual event is organised in the Channel Islands, but involves also participants from the Isle of Man, UK, France and UKOTs. This meeting included sessions on corporate



His Excellency Lieutenant-General Richard Cripwell, Lieutenant-Governor of the Bailiwick of Guernsey, opens IIEM 2022. Photo: Emily Wordley

funding, coordinated by Leigh Morris, Director of Manx Wildlife Trust (and since joined UKOTCF Council).

UKOTCF responded to a request to nominate Pitcairn Marine Protected Area as a Blue Parks Nomination. This involved reviewing their application and filling in a form. In February 2023 it was announced that they had received a Platinum award. It is understood that a small grant would be received for this.

In 2022, UKOTCF circulated information to partners on an international assessment of the barriers influencing the effectiveness of island ecosystem management by an Oxford University researcher. This has now been published. It is a synthesis of the views of 360 conservation practitioners working on island conservation in 77 jurisdictions. It notes “*Big egos, lack of staff training and policy enforcement*” as the major barriers to island conservation. See: <https://besjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/pan3.10417>

Support was provided to several partners as they made submissions to the John Ellerman Foundation’s call for proposals. Several projects have been successful and the impact of this fund for the UKOTs is starting to be visible across the UKOTs.

An online webinar was held on the challenge facing conservationists across the globe: invasive species in terrestrial situations. This was held on 6th & 7th March, 2023 via Zoom, with a special workshop on 8th March focusing on cane toad management. A recording of the webinar has been circulated to registered participants and those attending, of which there were over 100 from many of the UKOTs, CDs, UK and internationally; it is available also to others (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/other-territory-support/seminars-training/webinar-invasive-species/>)

Following a request from Bermuda National Trust to find a key speaker for a forthcoming international event on ecosystem restoration and sustainability, personnel contacted several possible speakers, and successfully connected BNT with Bryan Naqqi Manco of TCI Department of Environment and Coastal Resources who visited Bermuda for the first time.

The UK’s Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) contacted UKOTCF personnel for advice during the 10-year review of UK’s Tentative List to the World Heritage Convention.

A meeting was held in November with Simon Young as new mayor of Pitcairn as of January 2023 to explore ways in which support could be provided to the island.

During the visit to Montserrat in July, UKOTCF presented a cheque to the President of the EcoPlay Committee, Carol Osborne, for EC\$6000 (about £1800) collected for the project via UKOTCF’s PayPal account – to facilitate contributions from outside Montserrat. EcoPlay is formally a joint MNT/UKOTCF project. Through its Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) account it can facilitate US donations via CAF America also.

Our networks

The Inter-Island Environment Meeting, a collective of conservation bodies in the Channel Islands, but involving also the Isle of Man, UK and other partners, took place over two days in October 2022, hosted by the Alderney Wildlife Trust.

UKOTCF continues to play its part in the IUCN-UK National Committee ExCo; a great way to maintain knowledge and contacts with the UK conservation community. Personnel are working with the IUCN-NCUK’s Protected Areas Working Group to investigate opportunities for UKOTs & CDs to participate.

Co-ordinating with Others

Connections with Jersey International Centre of Advanced Studies (JICAS) and other research institutes based in the UKOTs continue to



Some of the participants in the UKOTCF online workshop on invasive species, March 2023.
Image: Ann Pienkowski

be made.

The Turks and Caicos Islands Climate Change summit took place in April. Personnel had viewed this remotely. It can still be viewed on YouTube here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qer7FiJAqU0>.

Acknowledgements

UKOTCF Council would like to thank the individuals and representatives of member and associate organisations who have given numerous hours of voluntary time to the Forum, both in the UK and the Territories. These included: Dr Jamie Males, Paul Cawsey, Maddie Heap and Jack Hayes. Although all Council members donate time to UKOTCF, Council would like to acknowledge the very large quantities donated by Mike and Ann Pienkowski, on which UKOTCF depends. The Forum would also like to thank its member organisations and individual supporters who support us via our *Friends of the UK Overseas Territories* membership (not to be confused with the unrelated body Friends of the British Overseas Territories created more recently). Those who have an interest in the UKOTs/CDs are encouraged to join us. We thank also those who have donated via Gift Aid or Easy Fundraising. The Forum is very grateful for financial assistance from the UK Government’s Darwin Initiative, United Kingdom Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC), the Garfield Weston Foundation and anonymous donors.

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum: Summary Statement of Financial Activities (including Income and Expenditure Account) for the year ended 31 March 2023

	2023 Unrestricted Funds	2023 Restricted Funds	2023 Total Funds	2022 Total Funds
Incoming Resources				
Voluntary Income	202,893	64,854	267,747	214,863
Investment Income	508	-	508	7
Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities				
Project Income	3,555	90,568	94,123	50,740
Total Incoming Resources	206,956	155,422	362,378	265,610
Resources Expended				
Charitable Activities	158,844	171,244	330,088	255,544
Governance Costs and Other Resources Expended	8026	376	8,402	6,540
Total Resources Expended	166,870	171,620	338,490	262,084
Net incoming/outgoing resources	40,086	(16,198)	23,888	3,526
Balance brought forward at 1st April 2022	72,405	17,124	89,529	86,003
Balance carried forward at 31st March 2023	112,491	926	113,417	89,529

Note: Incoming and outgoing resources include donated time and expenses of £201,086 (2022: £207,628).

Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

WCWG met 3 times via Zoom in the financial year 2022-2023; June and October 2022 and February 2023.

As Covid restrictions eased, programmes which had been postponed or delayed were able to resume, so this has been a very busy and productive year for colleagues in the wider Caribbean. Cross territory work which WCWG engaged with included:

- Facilitation of cross-territory co-operation on habitat restoration and management of alien invasive terrestrial species, including exchange visits and online webinar held in March 2023
- Support and advice to WCWG UKOT bodies regarding writing and submission of applications for funding
- The *Hidden Histories* project involving Cayman and Montserrat, and partners from UK and Belgium
- The Climate Change Summit held in the Turks and Caicos Islands in April 2022 (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qer7FiJAqU0>)
- Information exchange with Coral Conservation OTs (CCOT) about Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease
- UKOTCF Council members providing briefing leading to Parliamentary Questions to UK Government on issues raised by WCWG members

Funding possibilities were revealed in Parliamentary Questions and Debate, e.g. “£5 million for British Overseas Territories, which are important in terms of biodiversity.” (Ref. to this debate at <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2023-01-12/debates/18A9AB35-A3A8-479B-B314-4053998F9A80/UNBiodiversityConferenceCOP15>)

WCWG facilitated a visit to Bermuda in November 2022 by Bryan Naqqi Manco, (Assistant Director responsible for Research and Development, Department of Environment and Coastal Resources [DECR], Turks and Caicos Islands), to give a presentation on habitat restoration and species recovery of the endemic Caicos Pine. This is very relevant to the habitat and species recovery programme for the Bermuda Cedar.

UKOTCF hosted a webinar workshop in March 2023, on Terrestrial Restoration and Invasive Non-Native Species in UKOT & CDs. Presentations from the Wider Caribbean were given by colleagues in Anguilla, Bermuda, Cayman, Montserrat, and the Turks and Caicos Islands. Many of the other presentations were relevant to issues of invasive non-native species and habitat restoration in the Caribbean, including a special workshop on cane toads. The group photo and recordings of the sessions are available at: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/other-territory-support/seminars-training/webinar-invasive-species/>

Inappropriate built development proposals and concerns about lack

of effective Environmental Impact Assessment procedures have been highlighted by at least 3 WCWG member territories. These have been noted in the minutes of WCWG meetings.

A selection of topics relevant to specific WCWG UKOTs is given below. Much more information about the work of WCWG is available in the *eNewsletters* and *eBulletins*, available online at www.ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/.

Anguilla

A collaboration between many organisations in Anguilla, including the Anguilla National Trust, has had much success with invasive rat and mouse eradication, and subsequent increase in breeding birds and reptiles, and habitat restoration. This work started in 2011 on Dog Island, continued in 2016 on the Prickly Pear Cays, and in 2018 on Sombrero. The most recent ambitious project, starting in summer 2022, is to eradicate invasive mammals and restore habitat in the Fountain National Park, on the mainland. This ambitious plan involves erecting a storm- and rodent-proof fenced enclosure, eradicating invasive mammals and removing invasive plants within the enclosure. The need for constant monitoring of those sites cleared of invasives, through good biosecurity, has been recognised in their ongoing work programmes. This successful and important work was presented at the UKOTCF Webinar on Terrestrial Restoration and Invasive Non-Native Species in UKOT & CDs, and can be viewed at the link near the bottom of the previous column (Session 2-2,



Part of the storm- and rodent-proof fence at Fountain National Park, Anguilla. Photo from Anguilla Rats and Islands by Farah Mukhida and Louise Soanes at UKOTCF's webinar on Invasives

starting at 42:30 minutes from start of that recording).

Bermuda

Bermuda has an excellent record in habitat restoration and dealing with alien invasive species, with the Bermuda National Trust working well with government and other stakeholders. However, alien invasive species continue to be a considerable problem in Bermuda. The public consultation for the Invasive Species Act had revealed a lack of public understanding, and unfortunate compromises had had to be made. At present, a quadrat survey would show 99% of the plants to be invasive. Work was ongoing to address this.

The Bermuda Cahow Species Recovery Programme continues to deliver increasing breeding success. In 2022 there were record numbers of 156 breeding pairs and 77 successfully fledged chicks, up from 143 pairs producing 71 chicks in 2021, and significantly up from the 18 pairs that produced 7 to 8 chicks annually back in the early 1960s.

Chester Zoo has been raising endemic Bermuda skinks *ex situ* since 2010. In July and August 2022, 12 were released on Trunk Islands as part of a restoration project. The re-introduction of the *ex situ* bred endemic land snails has been very successful. Another shipment of 20-30,000 has been released. *Ex situ* breeding may no longer be necessary, but the situation will continue to be monitored.



Bermuda Skink *Plestiodon longirostris*. Photo: Bermuda Government Department of Environment and Natural Resources, from their species recovery plan of 2010

(British) Virgin Islands

National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands' (NPTVI) continued many interesting projects in 2022-23.

NPTVI has a long and very successful partnership with RGB Kew. Marcella Corcoran from RGB Kew visited in May-June to conduct staff training for the Botanic Garden nursery. All staff were trained, important for a small team in order to cover staff absences.

NPTVI is working with its partner, Environment Systems Ltd, to use satellite imagery to indicate coastal changes, and for climate change predictions. The project will develop a web-based, publicly available dashboard.

The Anegada Iguana Recovery Program focuses on finding nests and relocating hatchlings to the head-start facility. The recovered iguanas grow at the facility until they are large enough for feral cats not to be a threat anymore – about three years. This year, the iguana work benefitted from a visit by Kelly Bradley, a scientist and long-term partner from Fort Worth Zoo, who brought a trained sniffer dog to detect iguana nests. This method of locating nests shows great promise.

The Marine Conservation Society has been working with many partners and stakeholders to inform the Sea Turtle Recovery Plan and required legislation to make the turtle fishery more sustainable and promote turtle conservation. Part of this was community engagement, producing a video, screened in BVI in February – March 2023, and made publically available afterwards.



Image: Marine Conservation Society, from their video: <https://www.mcsuk.org/ocean-emergency/marine-protected-areas/recovery-projects/projects-in-uk-overseas-territories/british-virgin-islands/bvi-balancing-conservation-and-culture/>

Cayman Islands

The implementation of legislation and regulations for the National Conservation Law have had impressive results. The passing of the regulations for the Act for invasive and feral species control has enabled the Department of the Environment to proceed with feral cat culling on Little Cayman to protect the native rock iguana, and limited culling on Cayman Brac around the Brown Booby nesting colony. The National Conservation Council (NCC) continued the development of species conservation plans, such as the Seabird Plan. Information on this and other conservation matters is available on the NCC website (<https://conservation.ky/>)

The NCC has also been successful in challenging some development proposals. NCC took the Central Planning Authority (CPA) to judicial review as the CPA were refusing to take instruction from NCC to refuse building permission for rebuilding on 7 Mile Beach of a cabana which was falling into the sea. NCC were successful (see <https://conservation.ky/2022/08/23/grand-court-rules-in-favour-of-national-conservation-council-in-judicial-review/>).

However, the proposed East-West arterial road extension project is causing considerable concern, as the planned route would go straight through the Central Mangrove Wetland. It would affect the Mastic Reserve and the Salina Reserve blue iguana release site.

Montserrat

UKOTCF, with the Montserrat National Trust, Montserrat Government and international partners have been involved in 3 projects in Montserrat.



Two well-grown chicks and one adult brown boobies on adjacent nests on Cayman Brac. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

The Hidden Histories (*Hidden Histories of Environmental Science: Acknowledging legacies of race, social injustice and exclusion to inform the future*) project, From *Blue Iguanas to Blue Vervain: sharing the colonial histories from the UK Overseas Territories*, (for more information see <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/blue-iguanas-to-blue-vervain/>). The Hidden Histories project funding, which ran from January 2022 to March 2023, involved also the National Trust for the Cayman Islands. The *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/adoptahomeforwildlife/>) is funded partly by DEFRA as DPLUS155 (*Securing Montserrat's threatened endemic species and natural capital through community-action*). *EcoPlay* (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/eco-play-montserrat/>) is the project to provide a base for the Montserrat National Trust's programmes for young persons, including the primary-school age *Monty's Messengers*. Information about these projects is available on the ukotcf website, including videos (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/adoptahomeforwildlife/>) and newsletters (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/project-newsletter-1/>).

A 3-year project to develop a marine turtle action plan ended in March 2023. A comprehensive plan proposed updated legislation and provision of protection for turtle beaches. The collaboration for this project, between the Government of Montserrat and Exeter University, arose from contacts and discussions made during the UKOTCF/Montserrat National Trust/ Montserrat Government project DPLUS049 (*Maximising long-term survival prospects of Montserrat's endemic species and ecosystem-services*).

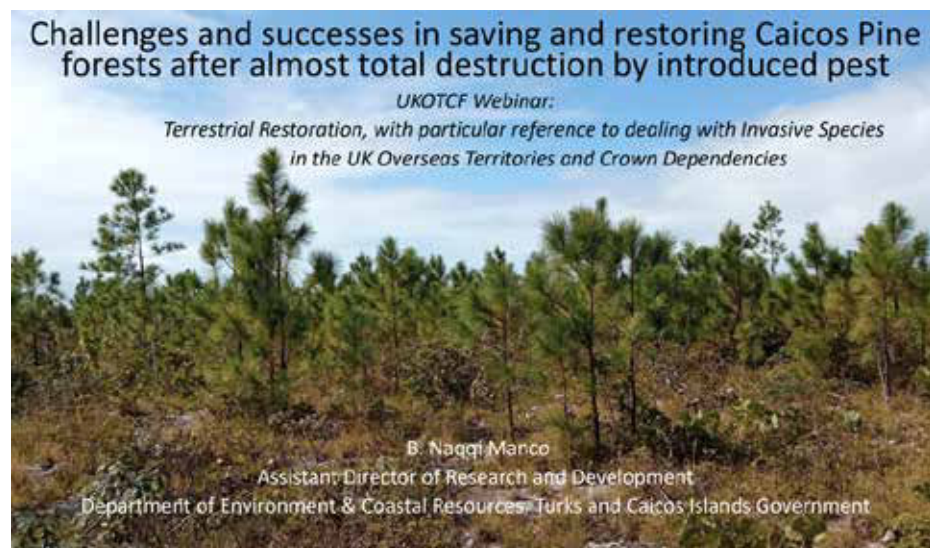
Turks and Caicos Islands

In the late 1990s early 2000s, with funding from the Darwin Initiative and elsewhere, UKOTCF and local and international partners developed and started implementing a management plan for the North, Middle and East Caicos Ramsar Site (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/TCIRamsarSiteManPlan.pdf>)

It is more than timely that Environment Systems have received funding (DPLUS129) for a project titled "*Understanding Ramsar wetland dynamics for marine conservation and environmental resilience*". A workshop was held in November 2022 in TCI, followed by a week of fieldwork. One objective of the project is to provide evidence to extend the boundaries of the Ramsar Site.

Bryan Naqqi Manco, Assistant Director responsible for Research & Development, Department of Environment and Coastal Resources Islands, gave the second Sir Richard and Lady Dace Ground Lecture in March at the UKOTCF-organised webinar workshop *Terrestrial Restoration and Invasive Non-Native Species in UKOT & CDs*. The title was *Challenges and successes in restoring Caicos Pine forests after almost total destruction by introduced pest*. The recording is available on the UKOTCF site: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/iq7u9ssa7yclqhq/AAAtKz9QjAlSsIBSeOR9X4gYa?dl=0> and select: UKOTCFInvasivesWebinar2023-Session4.mp4

The Turks and Caicos Reef Fund (an NGO) has continued its impressive marine and coral conservation efforts. A grant from the John Ellerman Foundation has enabled TCRF to establish a land-based coral nursery in an effort to create a species survival program for stony corals that have been severely affected by Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD). There were some water-quality problems after Hurricane Fiona, possibly due to new water treatment measures, which temporarily closed the land-based facility. A switch to "Instant Ocean" enabled the corals to be returned. Alizee Zimmerman, Executive Director of TCRF, attended the MPA Connect Reef Futures Symposium in Key Largo (*Planning for Coral Rescue as a Response to Stony Coral Tissue Loss in the Caribbean*) in October 2022. Her presentation,



Part of the Adopt a Home for Wildlife project is to support Montserrat National Trust's restoration of their group for primary-school-age children, Monty's Messengers, which had to be suspended at the time of the volcano emergency in 1997. ("Monty" is the nickname for the endemic national bird, the Montserrat oriole.) Above: notice of an event. Below: Down by the river: The Montys explore freshwater invertebrates.

Photo Jodey Peyton



which summarises much of the work and effort of TCRF, can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwayGyB0M5k>

There are some concerns about proposed development activities. One is the possible biosecurity and invasive species risks regarding the importation of scorpions, and cockroaches to feed them, for a beauty treatment. Another is a proposed hotel development at Wheeland Ponds on Providenciales, which could affect wetland habitat including seagrass meadows.

During UKOTCF's webinar on dealing with invasive species, Bryan Naqqi Manco, Assistant Director for Research and Development, at TCI's Department of Environment & Coastal Resources, gave the 2nd Sir Richard and Lady Dace Ground Lecture, to much acclaim by the participants. A recording of the webinar, including the Lecture is available (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/other-territory-support/seminars-training/webinar-invasive-species/>).

Report of the UKOTCF Southern Oceans Working Group

The Southern Oceans Working Group (SOWG) held three online meetings via Zoom, in July and October 2022, and March 2023. The meetings were organised with email updates and accompanied by circulation of the meetings' minutes. A special thanks goes to those who participated in the meetings or who provided reports and updates if were unable to attend. The meetings allowed for discussion of cross-territory themes and issues. There was good participation in the group; online meetings generally had a good level of attendance with representatives joining from several NGOs, such as: St Helena National Trust (SHNT), Great British Oceans (GBO), Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) and South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI). Local government departments had also been routinely involved in SOWG meetings, including: the Falkland Islands Government (FIG), Tristan da Cunha Government and the St Helena Government. We have welcomed contributions from researchers and others working in the field when these have been available. SOWG has continued to provide links between UKOT personnel and others, when requested, and facilitated the exchange of information and reports between group members on topics discussed in the meetings.

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

Cross-Territory Projects

During 2022, the Blue Belt Programme assisted development and publication of management plans and provided scientific and technical advice for Tristan da Cunha's MPZ, Ascension Island Government's MPA and the Pitcairn Island's MPA, as well as updating St Helena Government's Marine Management Plan, providing a comprehensive overview of management of these marine environments while leading a global example of best practice for governing marine areas. The Blue Belt Programme had also funded the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) to develop a tool to assess MPA conditions in the UKOTs. This is in line with the UK's 25 Year Environment Plan. This will allow UKOTs to assess conditions of their MPAs and adjust management and protection measures where required. During this time, the Blue Belt Programme launched 2 sub-programmes which support its objectives and also extend support to other UKOTs:

-The Blue Shield;

-The Global Ocean Wildlife Analysis Network; (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1081068/Blue_Belt_Programme_AR_06.06.22.pdf).

Cross-UKOT work under an EU BEST programme, centred on the Inaccessible Island (Tristan da Cunha) flax-removal. There were linkages with Dr Rebecca Cairns-Wicks who has been developing an invasive species project more focused on database management on St Helena. The leader of the field team on Inaccessible Island visited St Helena, and discussed the use of flax in rope-making, and the possibility of taking some of that heritage from St Helena to Tristan. This would also inform the educational aspects of the EU BEST project, particularly the discussion of invasive species with school children (<https://www.tristandc.com/news-2022-04-12-flaxprojecttristan.php>: Tristan da Cunha Wildlife and Conservation News: Tristan training after flax removal project).

As the threat of avian influenza has been looming in the South Atlantic,



Stephanie Martin presents on behalf of the UKOTs at the meeting on the Blue Belt programme in June 2022. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands and the Falklands had been in close liaison to coordinate a response to this threat, particularly given the strong tourism links between both territories.

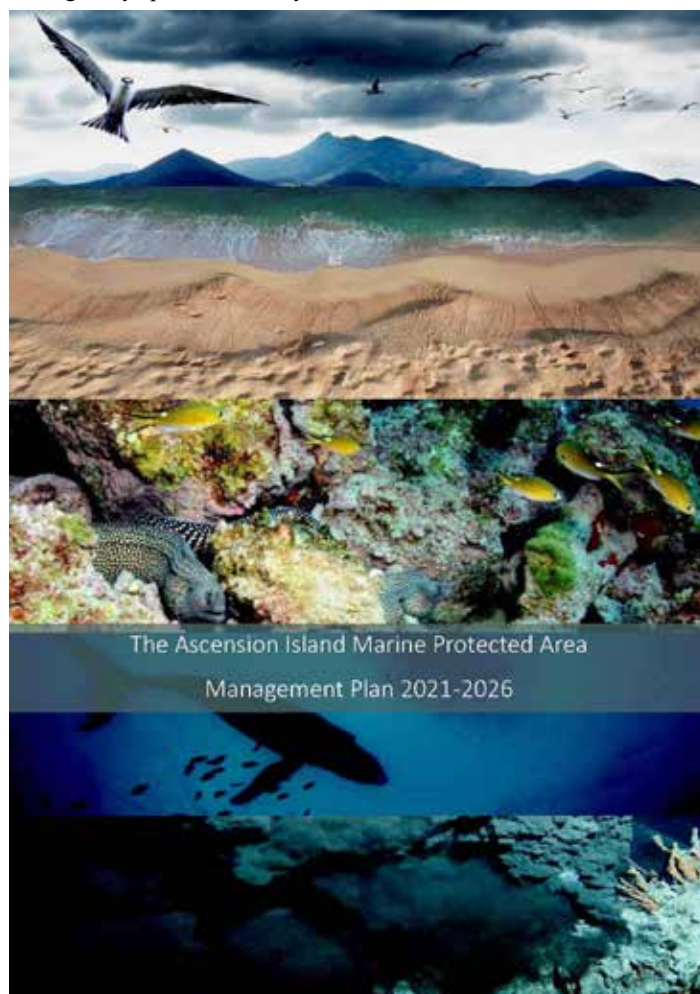
SOWG proposed an online Seminar on Terrestrial Ecological Restoration, with particular reference to dealing with Invasive Species in the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies to compare experiences across UKOTs. This received lots of interest from territories in other working groups as this topic is frequently discussed also in the Wider Caribbean and Europe Territories working groups. Normally the UKOTCF would charge for a meeting of this scale but, due to grant support, there was no charge on this occasion.

Ascension

The runway rebuilding is scheduled to be ready in 2023. In 2022 Ascension Island Auxiliary Airfield resumed full flight operations with opening of the newly paved eastern portion of the runway. This is a critical air transport hub for passengers and cargo and the airbridge to the Falkland Islands for Britain's Royal Air Force missions.

Progress has been made with the Ascension Island Marine Protected Area Management Plan which sets out how the area will be managed over 5 years between 2021 and 2026. In one year 45% of the action targets have been achieved and significant progress made against a further 41%.

A visiting researcher, Dr Danielle Orrell from the Hussey Lab at the University of Windsor, collected the first record of a fish parasite *Alebian carchariae* in Ascension's waters. With collaboration with Alaska Fairbanks University, samples provided the first DNA barcode of this species and the first record of its attachment to Galapagos sharks. To date, this *A. carchariae* has been recorded on 15 shark species and one other fish species. Its life cycle and reproduction are relatively unknown, although its distant parasite relative, the sea louse, has been relatively well studied owing to its impact on aquaculture. It is unknown how this species reached Ascension. Its long lifespan may allow it to hitchhike on migratory species or it may arrive via ocean currents. Further studies



Front cover of the Ascension Island MPA Management Plan (<https://www.ascensionmpa.ac/resources/MPA-Management-Plan-2021-26-Final-compressed.pdf>)

and tagging work may offer insights into the ecology and life cycle of this species as well as unravel potential ambiguities around identifying susceptible hosts, its widespread distribution and depth tolerance. Further research on this can provide a greater understanding of Ascension's Galapagos sharks and microscopic communities (<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-the-marine-biological-association-of-the-uk/article/alebion-carchariae-copepod-caligidae-host-plasticity-and-distribution-a-new-host-and-locality-record-from-ascension-island/366B789826CF220CA23E36566E908845>).

Ascension Island was also represented at the International Marine Protected Areas Congress (IMPAC 5) in Vancouver, Canada in February 2023, joining other members of the Blue Belt team including representatives from St Helena and the UK. This participation helped to affirm how Ascension Island is connected to a worldwide network of similar minded communities who value importance of the ocean and work to protect it (<https://www.ascension.gov.ac/project/marine-protected-area-2021-2022-annual-review/>).

British Antarctic Territory

No specific points were raised during this reporting. It is worth noting their field season has begun with over 500 people working on BAS research stations, on *RRS Sir David Attenborough* and in the field with other Antarctic operators. A range of projects are taking place this season which will provide data to produce more robust predictions around the future of The International Thwaites Glacier and its potential to contribute several centimetres to sea level rise by the end of the century (<https://www.bas.ac.uk/media-post/2022-2023-field-season-begins/>).

British Indian Ocean Territory

Sarah Puntan-Galea became the new Director of the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) in May 2022. A focus was on an expedition to the Chagos Islands, to undertake final research needed for Programme Manager, Dr Pete Carr, to finish the *Chagos Archipelago Rat Eradication Operational Plan* known as REOP. This is part of the *Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs* project and wider rewilding plan. Expedition crew included rodent expert Dr Grant Harper and forestry expert Darryl Birch. This was a success in completing the final piece of research required for REOP. The trip was funded by DarwinPlus as well as the Trust. Once REOP was finished, it was submitted to the British Indian Ocean Territory Administration, part of the UK Government's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, for approval at the end of 2022.

The next part of the project involves the CCT leading on the authorship of the *Chagos Archipelago Vegetation Management Plan* (VMP). Funding for this is sought through a Bertorelli Programme of Marine Science bid. If unsuccessful, CCT will lead on securing the required funding to complete the VMP. Both REOP and VMP will be combined to produce the *Chagos Archipelago Rewilding Plan* (CARP). A CCT-led project involves multiple stakeholders including ZSL (the Zoological Society of London), the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, a private forestry contractor, rodent eradication specialists, drone specialists and several academic



Image from Dr Peter Carr's presentation on Chagos Conservation Trust's Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs programme which is restoring the natural communities on the islets, thereby also restoring the marine environment.

institutions.

In January, partners Rhode Island University Marine Archaeological Expedition to BIOT collected rat DNA from all the northern atolls. These data are being made available to contribute to the rewilding plan.

Two precursor scientific papers are being co-ordinated by CCT in preparation for CARP, one on marine ecosystems and one on lessons learnt from 30 years of restoration projects in the tropical Indian Ocean.

CCT will launch a 5-year strategy in 2023, which is the 30th Anniversary of CCT, to update and revitalise CCT. Working with the Chagossian Community, Chagossian Voices, ZSL will be recruiting a wildlife officer from the region, for 3 years. The post will involve alternating 2 months at sea and 2 months on land (<https://chagos-trust.org/news>).

Falkland Islands

Consultation reports on Marine Managed Areas were produced by the Falkland Island Government based on public surveys done earlier in the last year. This provides insight on people in the Falklands being supportive of those marine managed areas as they were presented. The next step is the detailed policy work to develop options for elected members on how they can go forward on this. This is still happening.

Executive Council gave approval to create a national park in the Hill Cove mountains in West Falkland. The idea has been there for over 20 years until now when the current Assembly has picked it up. What this means is that approximately 12,000 hectares of land in the Hill Cove mountains, where 1/3 of native plant species found in the Falklands exist, will be protected.

The Environment Department is growing and a recent arrival is helping lead the government's work on pollution policies. Also, now with a bigger department, the team-members are able to branch out from environmental policy work and, in winter 2023, are starting a tussock-planting project around Cape Pembroke and one of the offshore island nature reserves using a course that Falklands Conservation developed.



Tussacs newly planted by volunteers as part of the restoration programme for this plant important as habitat for birds, mammals and invertebrates.

Photo: Falklands Conservation

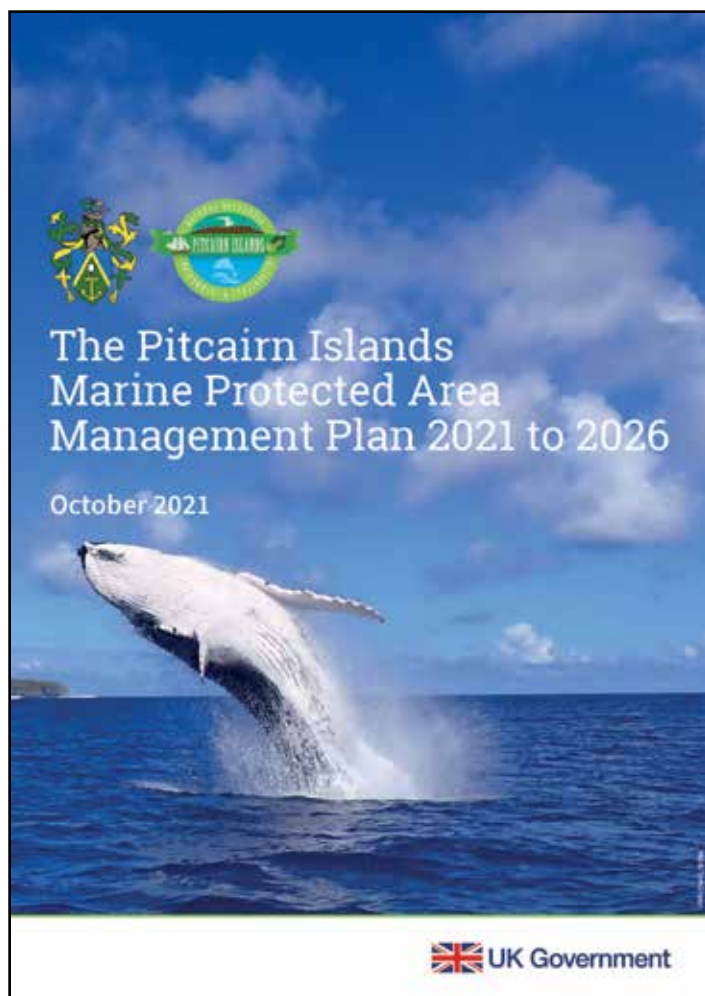
Bird flu remains a risk, so protocols are in place with public information with particular concern after the bird migration season has begun.

Falkland Islands Trust had funded SAERI to look at carbon neutrality in fishing.

SAERI also completed wetlands projects establishing long-term monitoring for freshwater ponds, lakes and rivers due to the increasing concern of water security given the recent dry periods. SAERI has two other projects in marine managed areas and data gathering. One focused on blue carbon around Burdwood Bank. The other tracking seabirds and seals, to see how they interact with the environment and humans.

Pitcairn

Simon Young, who took the advantage of a visit to UK late in 2022 to meet UKOTCF officers, had just been elected Mayor. The Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area Management Plan 2021 to 2026 continues with efforts formulating research and monitoring plans. The Pitcairn community has drafted and applied sustainable coastal fisheries



regulations. In February 2023, The Pitcairn Islands Marine Protected Area (MPA) won the Platinum-level Blue Park Award for exceptional marine wildlife conservation. This is a testament to the commitment in preserving its unique ocean ecosystem (<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2023/02/06/pitcairn-islands-marine-reserve-receives-prestigious-marine-conservation-institute-award>).

St Helena

Under *Conserving St Helena's endemic invertebrates through invasive invertebrate control* (DPLUS 104), trials to control the invasive wasp *Vespula vulgaris* and key invasive ant species *Pheidole meacephala* using poison were successful. One of the team attended the Royal Entomological Society conference (Ento22) in September to discuss this.

In the final year of the project *Community Supported Multispecies control of Invasive Vertebrates on St Helena* (DPLUS107), the focus was on involving the community in building traps as well as trapping target invasive species, like rabbits and myna birds. This project will end in May 2023. The team has already exceeded the reduction of myna bird target (target 3,000, actual 3,076). Myna bird culling needs to be continuous to make a difference and resources are necessary to make this activity



Image from presentation on *Conserving St Helena's endemic invertebrates through invasive invertebrate control* by Natasha Stevens, St Helena National Trust, at UKOTCF's webinar on Invasives, March 2023

sustainable. Feral cat reduction had also been successful and the target should be met by the end of the project. However, feral cats are being observed in seabird colonies again, so that monitoring must be continuous, and action taken if needed.

The annual cloud forest survey is being carried out, and species that were recently found in one area of the Peaks have been found in a different site. Historic features within the Peaks National Park will be added to the Historic Environment Register and the Cloud Forest Education Resource Packs are almost complete.

The whale shark monitoring project is being carried out. They are low in numbers compared to previous years. ZSL worked with the *Marine Plastics* team on land. They have been collecting data to create baselines for the success of the project, as well as stakeholder engagement.

SAERI engaged in GIS-related work across territories involving work with projects in St Helena. This involves sharing of expertise to deliver training, events and support for two projects in which SAERI is a partner, the MOVE-ON project and the Darwin Plus (154) project entitled '*Sustainable Management Planning for St Helena's National Conservation Areas (NCAs)*'. The MOVE-ON South Atlantic Anchor project investigates bridging the gap between evidence and decision making by making Mapping and Assessment of Ecosystem services (MAES) outputs available to policy and decision makers on St Helena.

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

In 2022 the Government had the entire landmass designated as a protected area which fulfils the recommendation the UKOTCF had made in 2005. The new terrestrial protected area covers 3,800 square kilometres complementing the marine protected area of 1.24 million square kilometres which had been in place since 2012.

South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands toothfish fishery went ahead. It is not clear on the implication on getting MPAs designated through the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic and Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), but Great British Oceans, and partners Pew and Greenpeace, were monitoring the situation. This meant the UK would put itself outside CCAMLR. It remains unclear how the UK would navigate this or what it would mean for previous discussions about expanding the MPA. GBO would like the MPA to cover the entirety of SSI's waters. Given dysfunctionality in some previous CCAMLR meetings, there is uncertainty about how fisheries management and MPA regulations will fit together.

SAERI had supported a terrestrial invertebrate project in South Georgia which was in the second field season in October.

Tristan da Cunha

The Speaker of the House of Commons hosted a celebration of the Marine Protected Area in May 2022 (and UKOTCF Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski, attended). Work by the Tristan community, the RSPB and others had helped declare 687,247 square kilometres of Tristan Waters to be designated as a Marine Protection Zone and the largest no-take zone in the Atlantic as well as fourth largest on the planet.

Other research projects planned included flax removal on Inaccessible Island, BRUV (baited remote underwater video) work within the Blue Belt Programme, and shark-tagging with both the Blue Belt Programme and RSPB.



The Speaker (left) and James Glass hold Tristan da Cunha's flag at the event. Photo: www.tristandc.com

Report of UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group

Many of the member of the group provided presentations at the invasive species webinar held on 6, 7 and 8th March 2023 organised by UKOTCF. See: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/other-territory-support/seminars-training/webinar-invasive-species/> including the Joint Service Health Unit (JSU), Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas; States of Guernsey, Gibraltar Botanic Gardens, University of Gibraltar.

Members of the group often connect outside of meetings including on issues such as invasive species, agri-environment schemes, volunteers etc. Below we provide an overview of the year in each of the Europe Territories.

Alderney



Alderney Bailiwick Bat Survey (BBS), a pan-island citizen science project where the public put out detectors in their selected plots; and Alderney Brown Long-Eared Bat. Photos: (above) Alderney Wildlife Trust staff; (right) Tom Marshall



The Alderney Wildlife Trust celebrated its 20th anniversary this year. A blog of their achievements was published on their website. AWT worked with the States of Alderney to provide each resident with a free tree as part of the Jubilee celebrations during this special year.

Sadly, Avian Influenza (HPAI), reached the Channel Islands in July. In less than three weeks at least 10% of the gannet colonies' chicks were lost alongside a number of adult birds. AWT staff worked with the States of Alderney and Animal Welfare to respond to reports of sick or dead birds as well as those found at sea.

Much of AWT work is made possible through its partnerships with volunteers. They have made a number of projects possible including surveys (e.g. 72 different moth species recorded in moth traps), restoration of native trees and filling data gaps. For example, the Bailiwick Eelgrass Exploration Project and the Bailiwick Bat Survey (BBS) Project. Last year, records confirmed the presence of the common noctule and soprano pipistrelle, which were added to the bat list for the island. This citizen-science project involves volunteers reserving a square (which can cover their garden or adjacent land) and then putting up a detector for four nights between April and mid-July, and then again before the survey ends in October. During this period, sensors in the detectors pick up sounds created by bats and then the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) Acoustic Pipeline technology identifies the species.

In November, sixteen volunteers from Guernsey Conservation Volunteers (GCV) joined AWT and Alderney's own volunteers, to carry out some removal of the invasive plant, the sour fig at Saye Beach. In total, there were 33 volunteers and they filled the equivalent of two tips with sour fig. Wildflower beds have been created across the island to provide pollinator-friendly habitat as part of the Pollinator Project. It relies on members of public expanding the available areas by planting on their land. A seed

mix has been developed containing twenty species of native wildflowers, including cornflower, wild marjoram and field forget-me-nots.

The annual Big Channel Islands Beach Clean took place in February, in addition to other beach cleans throughout the year. They collected 33.2kg of litter with the help of a total of 46 volunteers over two days. In part related to this, an Island Management Waste Survey has been launched in partnership with the States of Alderney and Chamber of Commerce. The results will help provide the evidence required to look into more efficient and sustainable methods of waste management in Alderney.

Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs)

Through a Sustainability Working Group set up by the Commander of British Forces Cyprus (CBF), a project was funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to undertake ecosystem services and natural capital assessments within the SBAs. It aimed to fill the evidence gap needed to meet the 2050 net-zero target. It focussed on understanding carbon budgets and opportunities of land-cover and land-use across the SBAs with regard to expected impacts from climate change. Terrestrial and wise use of wetlands, salt-lakes and grazing marshes – which are very rare in Cyprus – are crucially important as well as *Posidonia* seagrass beds in the marine environment.

In the meantime, a Darwin Plus Project (DPLUS141: *Habitat Restoration & Wise Use for Akrotiri & Cape Pyla*) aims to “restore important wildlife habitats within the Cyprus SBAs, focusing on Akrotiri wetlands and native scrub on Cape Pyla, promote wise use of the area and at the same time develop eco-tourism opportunities to support local economy.” The project is being undertaken by BirdLife Cyprus (the project lead), Terra Cypria, the SBAs Administration Environment Department and the RSPB.

In autumn 2022, BirdLife Cyprus reported that bird trapping levels with nets almost halved (49%) compared to autumn 2021 (and have decreased by 91% since 2002) within the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas in Dhekelia and in the Republic. However, it also reported that in certain areas of the Republic, trapping continues. They believe this is largely due to the Cyprus Police Anti-Poaching Unit being disbanded and a relaxation in fines for the killing of birds using lime-sticks.



Thomas Hadjikyriakou's photo confirms a new species occurring in Akrotiri (the Western SBA): African Desert Warbler.

Gibraltar

In August, a bulk carrier was involved in a collision with another vessel south of Europa Point. It was carrying 215 tonnes of heavy fuel oil, 250 tonnes of diesel fuel and 27 tonnes of lube oil. Initially the spill had been contained, but after a few days, the hull broke and diesel fuel was released into the sea. Local teams were deployed to handle the spill, including setting up a seabird rehabilitation centre at the Environmental Protection and Research Unit, to limit the impact on Gibraltar's wildlife. The impact of the spill is ongoing with beach clean-ups still underway. The vessel was still 700m from the shoreline at Catalan Bay, although the Port Authority removed the oil it could from it.

The Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS) celebrated the 22nd edition of the BirdLife EuroBirdwatch in October as the now-annual initiative celebrated its 30th anniversary. The annual event aims to celebrate the spectacular migration of birds across Europe. Activities included: bird-ringing, raptor displays, bird-migration observations. GONHS was now fully committed to all outings, after Covid; this had been welcomed by their members.

Honorary Life Patron of GONHS, Field Marshal Sir John Chapple and Governor of Gibraltar 1993-1995 sadly passed away just before the start



*Botanical outing to the Upper Rock Nature Reserve, March 2023.
Photo: GONHS*

of the reported year. UKOTCF attended the memorial of Sir John in March after this had been postponed due to the passing of Her Majesty in September. <https://www.gonhs.org/news/209-field-marshal-sir-john-chapple-1931-2022>. UKOTCF's tribute: https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Forum56_July2022j.pdf

Dr Eric Shaw, an environmentalist known for his work both with marine life and the macaques, also passed away in March 2023. The Helping Hand Trust, which he founded, paid tribute here: https://www.gbc.gi/uploads/hvYoJ_Eric_Shaw_-_press_release_12_03_2023.pdf.

Guernsey

The States of Guernsey is focusing on two streams of work to deliver its Strategy for Nature: the Blue Marine Economy Supporting Plan and the Green Economy Supporting Plan.

Work has begun on a Natural Capital Atlas. An important part of that is data capture to provide an evidence base for the marine and terrestrial environment. They have teamed up with Jersey and partners in the UK to have Fish Intel installed (see Sark). An eelgrass bed mapping project is progressing and providing important data on eelgrass around Guernsey.

Under the Blue Marine Economy Supporting Plan, a Marine Biosecurity Plan is being developed. It has involved gathering data and evidence including a pathway analysis for non-native species and pathogens and horizon scanning. It will also involve a public Call for Evidence and would be followed by a final consultation phase.

The Green Economy Supporting Plan will look at the information needed to inform the Island Development plan, e.g., landscape connectivity and a review of agriculture.

An Invasive Species Action Plan has been drafted. It includes three phases: biosecurity, surveillance & rapid response, and priority management of those species already established. The island has had huge success in the control of the invasive Asian hornet and wants to build on this work.

A habitat and species monitoring programme for the island is under development, which includes some citizen-science initiatives. The aim is to gain an understanding of how the environment is fairing so that, where necessary, action plans can be prioritised.

To support plant conservation, a native plant seed mix was being developed with support from the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) to sell to the public and recommend as part of planning applications.



*Wildflower meadow at Les Cotils, Guernsey.
Photo: Plant Heritage Guernsey*

In order to support all of the work, the Nature Commission; a new independent charity has been established. It will work across the public, private and third sector [confusing jargon for NGOs] to enhance the natural environment and deliver parts of the strategy.

Isle of Man

In December, Daphne Caine MHK tabled a motion in Tynwald (Isle of Man's Parliament) to acknowledge the global biodiversity and ecological crisis. This will highlight the importance of delivery of the island's biodiversity strategy and activities relating to it.

The Isle of Man Government's Department for the Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA) and the Manx Wildlife Trust (MWT) are working collaboratively on a number of projects including a Nature Recovery Network on the island. A base-layer map (<https://manngis.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapAndAppGallery/index.html?appid=95a32dd31a7848e9943efc0a9977839d>) for the Isle of Man has been created which shows wildlife sites including agricultural land. As MWT is the delivery partner for the agri-environment scheme, it is forming strong relationships with the farming community. The initiative rewards farmers for working land in sustainable ways for nature. An example is chough and grazing – farmers now get paid for ensuring land is managed for choughs. In addition to this, MWT is looking at what people can do in their own areas to do better for nature. This work is supported by the MWT's new Community Ranger, funded by Lloyds Bank International.

The Manx Blue Carbon initiative project run by DEFA, funded by the Climate Change Transformation Fund is underway. It aims to understand "where blue carbon is in the Isle of Man's coastal areas and territorial seas; how much carbon is stored, how quickly it is being locked away, and where it is coming from; and what we can do to protect existing blue carbon stores and improve carbon storage." The project links nicely to MWT's work also including the Manx Eelgrass Project. It is currently looking at the abundance and distribution of seagrass around the Isle of Man funded by KPMG. Activities have also included the creation of a test-bed which will be monitored to see if the longer-term blue-carbon plan works and the first seagrass translocation.



An eelgrass sprig about to be planted in Port Erin Bay. Photo: Richard Cowin, Manx Wildlife Trust

In the year, the Isle of Man has joined as part of the Temperate Rainforest Network through the Wildlife Trust movement. This globally rare habitat has mostly been damaged or destroyed by development and agriculture over the last few centuries. The plan is for the site at Creg y Cowin to be planted with native tree species with some regenerating naturally.

Together with the Isle of Man Government, MWT has had a leading role in regional cooperation as a member of the Irish Sea Maritime Forum. One of main roles is to look at marine spatial planning in and around the Irish Sea.

Jersey

The States Assembly approved plans to protect trees under Jersey's Planning and Building Law. The Tree Strategy, a framework for the future protection and management of trees on Jersey, was launched in May. In March 2023, a consultation was launched which sought views on the proposed exceptions to the new legislation which would be introduced shortly.

The National Trust for Jersey (NTJ) Council agreed a plan for St Ouen's Bay. It will bring together cultural heritage, archaeology, interpretation, sustainability and conservation at the site. The NTJ is investigating mammal-exclusion fencing where puffins nest. There were currently 4 pairs with pufflings having recently been seen. Consultants from New



*Bottlenosed
dolphin
in Jersey
Waters.
Photo:
Government
of Jersey*

Zealand (the international experts) are advising on this.

Collaboration across the Channel Islands is mounting. For example, the Channel Islands Bat Forum held its first meeting on Jersey in March 2023. This was a first step towards establishing a Channel-Islands-wide group (with support from the Bat Conservation Trust and French partners) to share ideas and expertise. In addition, States of Jersey are working with Alderney WT and other groups to establish a response mechanism for bird flu. This involves pan-islands pooling of efforts, in terms of reporting information etc, so that the outbreak can be managed.

The Constable of St John Parish has spearheaded a Parish Climate Group including all 12 parishes. Quarterly meetings will take place to try and implement cross-parish measures on climate-change but also try to improve access of cycling and walking routes.

With the States of Jersey the Marine Spatial Planning team is leading on the development of a Marine Spatial Plan (MSP); which was agreed as part of the Bridging Island Plan in 2022. The MSP will look at how the marine environment can be used sustainably and protected. Public workshops are taking place to inform the Plan.

The Biodiversity Team has been developing an Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) framework including risk assessments and horizon scanning. It has been well supported by external stakeholders and collaborators across the world.

Government and local NGOs are working closely with Jersey International

Centre for Advances Studies in order to support their MSc programme. There are mutual benefits for students and collaborators as high-quality research projects inform and underpin management and decision-making.

Sark

The small team on island has many activities to cover and welcomes the help of volunteers to carry out many of its urgent activities, e.g. invasive species gorse removal, but also with its data capture. In recent years, bird, bat and moth recording has taken place with support of other Channel Islands.

As with several of the other Channel Islands, Sark has been a partner in the Fish Intel. This is an EU-funded project led by Plymouth University. It uses innovative underwater acoustic tracking technology to identify the environmental conditions a range of important marine species need in order to thrive.

Volunteers continue to record biological information, including bat counts, moss and pollination surveys, and are also doing work with the school and Sark Watch. There has been lots of engagement there, including beach cleaning activities etc. This work can be a bit frustrating as a week after the beach was cleared there was a container spill. With mainly private householders posting things they found on the beach it keeps focus in people's minds to be out there collecting. However, there then is a challenge of what to do with the waste.

Another project includes the rat feasibility study. This is finding nesting activity is restricted to off-shore islets and these are quite densely occupied. Birds seems to have fledged before bird flu got there.

Summer was an excellent butterfly year on Sark despite the drought, with gatekeepers, fritillaries, painted ladies and more. Hopefully, more people are leaving nettles, which are beneficial to them, in place. There seems to be a receptiveness to change, for example a wish to keep wildlife flowers in the verge etc, which will be explored. Sark is a partner in the Channel Islands Pollinator Project and welcomes visits from the team to explore further ways in which Sark can protect its pollinators.

Officers and Contact Points

First contact on any issue should normally be:

Executive Director: Catherine Wensink, Nottingham, UK.
email: cwensink@ukotcf.org

COUNCIL

Chairman: Dr Mike Pienkowski, Peterborough, UK.
email: m@pienkowski.org

Other Council Members: Peter Beckingham; Dr Keith Bensusan; Sarita Francis; Lady (Dace McCoy) Ground; Dr Nigel Haywood; Leigh Morris; Andy Pearce; Lord (John) Randall; Joan Walley; Kathleen McNary Wood

WIDER CARIBBEAN WORKING GROUP

Chairman: Dace Ground: *email:* dacemccoyground@gmail.com
Secretary: Ann Pienkowski, Peterborough, UK. *email:* apienkowski@ukotcf.org

SOUTHERN OCEANS WORKING GROUP

Chairman: Dr Nigel Haywood CVO, Corfe Castle, UK
email: nigelhaywood@mac.com
Secretary: vacant

EUROPE TERRITORIES WORKING GROUP

Chairman: Dr Keith Bensusan, Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society, Gibraltar. *email:* kbensusan@gonhs.org
Acting Secretary: Catherine Wensink, Nottingham, UK.
email: cwensink@ukotcf.org

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

Voluntary Co-ordinator: Ann Pienkowski, Peterborough, UK.
email: apienkowski@ukotcf.org

Membership

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

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