Overseas Territories Conservation UK, UKOTCF, and The Forum are operating names of UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (Registered Charity 1058483 and Company 3216892).

Last few days of seasonal discount on UKOTCF-published book on the restoration of Red Kites ("biggest species success story in UK conservation history"- see pages 16-17 and www.ukotcf.org.uk/kite-book/

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Community begins to shape the development of a biodiversity and well-being toolkit on Montserrat

The project *Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development* began in April funded by the Biodiversity Challenge Funds (DPLUS192). Its aims are:

1) to develop and publish a framework toolkit which enables biodiversity and well-being to be integrated into physical development. It will include: extensive consultations, and trialling the toolkit to measure benefits;

2) to develop a Youth & Education Programme by support to a primary group and creation of a youth group;

3) establishment of biological collections on island including herbarium development, data systems and management, citizen science opportunities, natural history collections development, publications and interpretation development on biodiversity and well-being;

4) expansion of Montserrat National Trust's botanic garden to facilitate uptake of the toolkit and provide sources of information, demonstrations and provision of native plants;

5) communicating and reaching out to the community.

As with most projects, the work began with a review of the work programme and putting in place all necessary financial mechanisms, and completing all the preparatory administration.

The Leaf of Life Kalanchoe pinnata *was one of the 15 medicinal plants published in* Fifteen popular medicinal plants on Montserrat. *Sometimes the leaves are warmed, smeared with white vaseline and placed on cuts and bruises to reduce infection and inflammation. A further 15 plants will be added to version 2, which is expected to be published in early 2024. The illustrations were commissioned under the the UKRI grant AH/W008998/1 within the programme of the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) and Natural Environment Research Council (NERC). The booklets themselves were designed by the Field Studies Council. © Lizzie Harper 2022*

The project launch took place at the Montserrat National Trust on 21st June 2023 (as reported in *Forum News* 58, page 11: *Biodiversity and Well-being Toolkit: Sustainable Development addressed as part of new project on Montserrat*). It was attended by about 30 people including a group of Montserrat Community College students, the Chief Physical Planner, Governor and Deputy Premier/Minister of Communications. It was recorded and streamed live on MNT's Facebook page and a permanent post was made on MNT's Facebook social media platform.

The marshalls for Biosplash 2023; part of the series of annual 'bioblitz' events the Trust will lead. Left to right: Ajhermae White, Kadine Cabey, Jo-Diaz Tye, J'Shwaun Fenton, Delamude Ryan and Virgine Chris Sealys. This was at Old Road Bay (also Wildlife Home 02 in the Adopt a Home for Wildlife *project).*

Several additional MNT staff have been recruited. Virgine Chris Sealys joined the Montserrat National Trust this year supported by an externally secured grant from the John Ellerman Foundation. Kadine Cabey, an MSc ethnobiologist graduate with an interest in the traditional knowledge of medicinal plants, Sam Paul and J'Shwaun Fenton working on plant propagation and general supporting duties also joined.

Community consultations took place in November with meetings including: a general information session (with general questionnaire) at the Trust offices and one at the Community Centre at Davy Hill; a meeting with the Youth Leadership Group at the Montserrat Secondary School; and a meeting with the Farmers Association. Further consultations are taking place this month with the Youth Parliament. The *Montserrat Heritage Radio Show* continues most Tuesdays and was used to reach out to landscapers and developers to get in touch with the Trust so they could explore how best to consult with them.

In order to build on the success of the *Blue Iguana to Blue Vervain* project, the project will publish a second version of the traditional use of medicinal plants booklet. A Medicinal Bush Plants Committee within the Trust is developing a short list of traditional medicinal plants to include 30 species. A radio show held in August facilitated the involvement of the community in this exercise. The plant list will be used for a publication to be launched in 2024.

The project is exploring the Young United Nations Global Alliance (YUNGA) initiative to celebrate and highlight the achievements of young persons in actions they take towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A series of Challenge Badges linked to each SDG provide a way to recognise efforts. The project will explore the development of the Biodiversity Badge.

Over the summer, in collaboration with the Montserrat Children's Society, a second bioblitz event took place by the coast. At the event called 'Biosplash' 89 species were recorded at Old Road Bay. Some back-packs donated by Lefrik (a 1% for the Planet company) made from recycled materials were awarded to the winners.

Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat issue 15 was circulated to around 200 persons on island and more online.

Ascension spider gets a name as 10 years of efforts to protect invertebrates are recognised

Expert arachnid taxonomist, Danniella Sherwood, has for several years been supporting the ongoing research on Ascension Island as part of the Darwin Plus project (DPLUS135) *From pseudoscorpions to crickets: securing Ascensions Island's unique invertebrates*, led by the Ascension Island Government and supported by the Species Recovery Trust.

In the latest published paper on Ascension's spiders a new species of the ground spider family has been described belonging to the genus *Australoechemus*, previously thought to be endemic to the Cape Verde Islands.

The original specimens for the spider were found by Eric Duffey on Boatswain Bird Islands, and Adam Sharpe collected specimens from the mainland.

The spider, *Australoechemus vickyae*, has been named in honour of Vicky Wilkins, of the Species Recovery Trust to acknowledge many years of work supporting invertebrate conservation in the UKOTs and beyond.

The published paper is available in full online: https://africaninvertebrates.pensoft.net/article/113946/

Readers of our *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* will know of some of the work Vicky has been doing on Montserrat in support of DPLUS155.

Recently described species of ground spider Australoechemus vickyae. *The lead author, Danielle Sherwood, has published many papers on UKOTs via open access journals so that they can be shared widely with all stakeholders and the general public. Photo: Danni Sherwood.*

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 (Ventana, Garibald 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 *Forum News* 58, we outlined some of the *Wildlife Homes* and *Adopters* for which videos had by then been published. In this issue, we continue this series for more of the *Wildlife Homes*. Much fuller versions of these can be read in our newsletter *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* 15, pages 2-14 (https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/SOSnatureNewsletter15a.pdf)

Wildlife Home 07: Lawyers Mountain (Cherise Aymer)

The site, approximately 840m^2, is about 80m from the Centre Hills Protected Area boundary. Short grass is found around the edge of the property with some fruit and ornamental trees at the back of the house. Beyond this, there is a layer of forest/shrub habitat. It is gently sloping, followed by a steep slope at the back of the plot. The site is in the lower montane rain forest (Moist forest). This forest ecosystem coincides with the island's water catchment areas. The area is full of fruit and forest trees, ornamental plants, shrubs and lawn grasses. The soil type is clay with plenty of stones. The site is a habitat for wildlife too, including various insects, iguana, agouti and the endemic Montserrat oriole *Icterus oberi*, which is often seen here.

Cherise is interested in her fruit garden to provide food for her and in increasing the number of healthy fruits trees (*e.g.* mango, banana, five finger, plumrose, citrus, passion fruit, guava and sugar apple). She is seeking help in grafting of her citrus and mango

WH07 from beside house, yard area and edge of slope, with view beyond.

Project Officer Elvis Gerald points out the importance of daily inspection for pests under the leaves of fruit trees. Adopters are encouraged to use organic products, such as Neem oil, for pest control.
Photo & those on next page: Ann Pienkowski

trees. She also wants help to identify and preserve any native and endemic plants on her plot.

At this particular site, invasive species within the forest will be targeted for removal and native replacements recommended. Native and endemic species will be encouraged to attract wildlife to her garden.

The site surveys showed 87 plant species here, with a mix of native, introduced and invasive species.

The presence of fruit trees on the site as part of the species composition is noteworthy as some like mango *Mangifera indica* are considered to be invasive (and could be a problem for native invertebrate biodiversity locally). This vegetation at this site has the potential to be used as a demonstration or model of how to use – but control – important food crop species which are also potentially invasive.

The invertebrate fauna at this site is dominated by scale insects, followed by butterflies and bees and then ants.

The scale insects were recorded on the various fruit trees on the site and feeding on plant sap and secreting honey-dew for ants and sooty mould fungus. Scale insects are plant-feeding bugs that can feed on a range of different plants; most are considered pest species and can spread plant diseases, although some will be native and even endemic (more research is needed on these). This group is thriving on the vegetation on this site.

Butterflies and bees were recorded on fruit trees and flowering plants. Maintaining the varied range of flowering native trees and shrubs will support butterflies, bees and pollinating flies.

Other invertebrate fauna groups were low, and some groups likely in rain forest, such as snails and slugs, were not found. Surprisingly there were few spiders, grasshoppers and beetles. The site was well kept, with a well-maintained open lawn. This tidying may be limiting other groups.

This site is obviously heavily dominated by fruit trees and other trees useful to people, and these are the main plants that are supporting these insects. There are a lot of grasses and low growing herbaceous plants plus a few shrubs, many of which are introduced species. There are some microhabitats missing at the site, including leaf-litter, which may limit some insect groups.

There is an opportunity to control some of the introduced species on the site. For example, there is some dominance by ironweed, *Cyanthilium cinereum*; this is an invasive and is wind-pollinated and may be having some, but probably limited, benefit to the insects. It is advisable to prevent the spread of the seeds of *Cyanthilium cinereum*. This more or less perennial species can be controlled locally, and seed-spreading reduced, by uprooting of the isolated individuals; persistent stands can be slashed with rotary cutters, and possibly targeted spray herbicide treatment could be considered on isolated spots.

There is an opportunity on this site to decrease selectively some of the grasses and introduced herbaceous species, and instead increase the number of native trees and shrubs in key areas - to reflect the adjacent forest. This will provide a buffer zone and better transitional areas to the Centre Hills habitat. This will see the variety of insect groups increase, allowing species from the forest to colonise and increase species diversity amongst many invertebrate groups but also pollinators such as butterflies and bees.

The site-owner, Cherise, is most interested in her fruit-tree garden and wants her mango and citrus trees grafted. She also wants to plant native and endemic trees on her plot and remove any invasive plant species which affect the integrity of her plot. She is most interested in encouraging animal wildlife to her site, by planting vegetation that would attract them. Native plants found on her site are found in low numbers and could be encouraged.

So, the means to this objective are to assist the land owner/ manager:

1. Identify and remove invasive, non-native species in the tropical rain forest and replace with native species that thrive in the conditions, by planting saplings from the MNT nursery. Native species appropriate for planting at this site include:

- lignum vitae *Gaiacum officinale*
- Montserrat pribby *Rondeletia baxifolia*
- pepper cinnamon *Canella winterana*
- trumpet bush *Tecoma stans*
- Barbados cherry *Malpighia emarginata*
- sea grape *Coccoloba uvifera.*

2. Provision of technical knowledge on agriculture and food production.

3. Assistance with grafting to control pests, *e.g.* scale insects

4. Provision of advice to encourage more invertebrate fauna on the site.

5. Provision of native plant species to encourage more invertebrates to the area.

Above: Project Officer Elvis Gerald points out to Cherise the pribby growing wild on the road bank opposite her house. Cuttings from this can be used to create the hedge which Cherise wants between her house and the road. Below: the steep road passes Cherise's House up to Veta's.

6. Advice on other aspects of managing the land including, for example, creation of leaf-litter piles in the garden area as one important microhabitat for invertebrate groups.

Tropical rain forest consists of fast-growing species (adapted to high rainfall). The challenges here are the small land area, with a steep slope at the back of the house. Finding adequate land space to plant other trees species will be a challenge, as the area is overcrowded with fruit trees. It is desirable to plant a few native trees to encourage wildlife where possible and remove any invasive species. The rich clay soil will be good for saplings to establish without any major issues.

One recommendation is pruning of fruit-trees and planting native and endemic species at the border of the plot, using fertilizers or compost to feed the young plants, with regular watering during the dry season.

Regular field visits will be made to the plot to make sure young native or endemic saplings are growing properly.

Wildlife Home 10: Lawyers Mountain (Veta Nicholas)

Just a few minutes' walk from WH07, to the top of the steep road at the edge of the forest reserve, takes us to WH10, immediately outside the boundary of the Centre Hills Protected Area. The forest is the largest remaining forest area on Montserrat, forming a single, almost continuous block of hill forest in the centre of the island. Several properties border the forest. This site is located near the start of the Oriole Walkway, a popular walking trail. The sloping area is a house spot of 5000 sq ft (about 460m^2). The area is full of vegetable plants, fruit and forest trees, ornamental plants, shrubs and grasses. The soil type is clay with plenty of stones. The site is a habitat for wildlife too, including insects, iguana, agouti, and Montserrat's national bird, the oriole.

Veta is interested in her vegetables, fruit and her moon garden. She would like to plant fruit-trees, including mango, banana, pineapple, citrus, guava and soursop, and would like help in grafting of her citrus and mango trees. She also wants to preserve any native and endemic plants on her plot. Veta is very interested in planting native and endemic plant species to attract wildlife to her garden. The project officers will help her to decide the best plants to grow in her area.

At this particular site, native and endemic species will be encouraged to attract wildlife to her garden. The area below the house has some hedge bushes that attract a wide range of butterfly and moth species. This area should be preserved for these.

Overall, 128 plant species were found on this site, with a mix of native, introduced and invasive species.

Native plant species found in WH10 survey:

Bidens pilosa	Spanish Needle
Byrsonima spicata	Shoemaker Bark
Cecropia peltata	Trumpeter
Cenchrus echinatus	Buzz Grass
Citharexylum fruicosum	Yellow Fiddle Wood
Citharexylum spinosum	White Fiddle Wood

Above: the magnificent view, to the sea, from WH10. Pollinators using the natural vegetation at the site boundary benefit Veta's garden.
Below left: the steep slope of the yard on which the house is built. Below right: the artificial cliff cut at the Protected Area boundary immediately behind the house. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Commelina elegans	French Weed
Cordia alliodora	Black Manjack
Crotalaria retusa	Shak Shak
Desmodium incanum	Alphabet Plant
Erigron canadensis	Horse Weed
Euphorbia hirta	Asthma Plant
Margaritaria nobilis	Bastard Hogberry
Melicoccus bijugatus	Guinep
Moconia crenato	Tanzy
Mycra splens	White Birch
Myrcianthes fragrans	Black Birch
Pilea microphylla	Artillery Plant
Pimenta racemosa	Bay Leaf
Pityrogramma calomelanos	Silver Fern
Pluchea carolinensis	Cattle Tongue /Congo Tobacco
Rondeletia buxifolia	Pribby
Ruellia tuberosa	Minnie Root
Scleria secans	Razor Grass
Solanum americanum	Guma (Black Night Shade/ Bitter Guama)
Solanum torvum	Turkey Berry
Spigelia anthelmia	Pink Weed
Swietenia mahogoni	West Indian Mahogany
Synedrella nodiflora	Syndrella
Tabebuia pallida	White Cedar
Trema micrantha	Ashwood (Nettle Tree)
Unknown	Siam
Wedelia calycina	Sage
Zanthoxylum monophyllum	Yellow Prickle

Invasive plant species found in WH10 survey:

Carica papaya	Papaya/ Paw Paw
Cyanthillium cinereum	Little Iron Weed
Cymbopogon citratus	Fever Grass
Cyperus rotundus	Nut Grass
Digitaria bicornis	Sprung Grass
Emilia praetermissa	Thistle
Hibiscus tiliaceus	Maho
Megathyrus maximus	Guinea Grass
Psidium guajava	Spice Guava
Tamarindus indica	Tamarind
Tradescantia spathcea	Moses in a Boat

Overall, there are very high levels of ants on the site and, together with the invasion of thistle *Emilia praetermissa,* these suggest a disturbed area. A number of pollinators were recorded, including: butterflies, moths and bees, as well as pollinating flies. The presence of termites was recorded during the survey.

Restoration of Dry/Mesic Forest habitat and improved levels of native species, such as *Begonia obliqua*, Araceae, Lauraceae, *Inga laurina*, *Eugenia* spp. and *Piper* spp., in disturbed areas, will help reduce ant numbers and so improve numbers for other invertebrate groups (as they are predators). As there are good numbers of pollinators on site, endemic/native plants should be encouraged that provide pollen and nectar sources for these species.

Above: Veta uses raised beds to grow herbs and vegetables, such as basil and egg-plant: one way she overcomes the challenges of a steep site.

Veta Nicholas, with Mike Pienkowski and project officers Elvis Gerald and Antwone Sinclair, explains how her passion for fruit trees fits in with increasing the nature value of her very steep garden. She valued the advice of Elvis Gerald, especially with regard to her favourite lime trees, which had previously not been doing too well.
Photos this page: Ann Pienkowski

The owner is interested in removing invasive and non-native species from her plot. Some invasive species found at the site produce food. Veta will manage them by pruning and removing unwanted suckers. She is very excited to create a moon garden (a garden enjoyed in the evenings) and having native plants that attract wildlife to her garden. This type of garden is designed to include "white or lightly coloured blooms that open at night, plants that release sweet fragrances at night, and/or plant foliage that adds a unique texture, colour, or shape at night."

Some native species appropriate for planting at this site, where space is available include the same list as for WH07.

The presence of fire-ants and termites on the site is noteworthy. There are 15 species recorded from Montserrat and these are highly destructive species that can be difficult to control. UK agency FERA provides identification and advice. Project Officers will seek advice through these channels.

The main challenge faced on this site is the topography of the land; the area has slight slopes to steep slopes. The soil in the area is mostly of subsoil and is also very stony; almost all of the top soil has been removed. Lack of land space is also a challenge to plant tree species. Due to the sloping terrain, the area is prone to erosion and possible land-slide. A retaining wall is needed at the upper side of the house, as this area is prone to land-slide and rock-fall.

Wildlife Home 13: Hibiscus Drive (Norman Cassell)

The site of approximately 4000m^2 is about 160m from the coast on the west coast of Montserrat. Here, the land owner aims to make improvements/modifications to offer the site as a well-being area, bringing visitors to experience nature and other heritage.

Overall, 123 plant species were found on this site, with a mix of native, introduced and invasive species. The invertebrate fauna on site was not very diverse. There were some butterflies present; these will be feeding on nectar-rich plants – possibly garden species. There is a heavy domination of ants, this probably due to domination of invasive grasses.

The aim is towards restoring dry/mesic forest with medium/large-tree-dominated vegetation >5m tall. Typical taxa include: *Begonia obliqua*, Araceae, Lauraceae, *Inga laurina*, *Eugenia* spp., *Piper* spp.

Views of parts of the garden and developing well-being facility. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Mr Cassell aims to work with the Montserrat National Trust in the long term to create an area rich in biodiversity. He aims to make improvements/modifications to offer the site as a well-being area, bringing visitors to experience nature and other heritage. Mr Cassell has a lot of experience in horticulture, but admits that the species seen all around Montserrat are changing. Information about these is of great interest to Mr Cassell and he would like to learn more about them through the project. He has offered advice and support to the owners of the adjacent site (WH08; see *Forum News* 58) and will be an important partner in future conservation activities on the adjacent land owned by the MNT, separated by a ghaut. Actions on WH13 could be complementary to management of the MNT land as a natural forest.

The objectives Mr Cassell would like to achieve in collaboration with the project include (but are not limited to):

1. Identify invasive, non-native species, both plants and invertebrates.

Above: The ground under Norman's land consists of ancient pyroclastic flows from pre-historic volcanic eruptions, with many boulders. The boulders give some problems with ground-work and planting but Norman uses them to build retaining walls. Cement is now used to stabilize the walls, following the destruction of the earlier dry-stone walls by Hurricane Maria. Compost cuttings and chicken manure are used to improve the fertility of the soil.

Below: Norman is excavating ponds to help with water control.

Above: The low-growing ginger lilies benefit from shade provided by larger plants. The cuttings from other parts of the garden are used to keep weeds down, and as a mulch. Norman mixes ornamental plants, fruit trees provided by project officer Elvis Gerald, and native vegetation. This variety increases biodiversity.

Below: Norman Cassell, with Mike Pienkowski and project officer Antwone Sinclair, explains his vision for his extensive site in Hibiscus Drive. This site benefits from bordering land owned by the Montserrat National Trust. Photos in this block: Ann Pienkowski

2. Review areas to replace with native species, either via the natural seed-bank in the soil or by planting saplings from the MNT nursery.
3. Encourage replacement of invasive grass species with native grass species.
4. Encourage more invertebrate fauna found in this habitat by creation of microhabitats (with advice from project partners).
5. Identify area close to the ghaut where one can dig out volcanic ash and replace with native trees such as lignum vitae and birch.
6. Develop ideas and promotion of unique tourist products such as taste and touch, well-being tours (yoga *etc*), education tours, products made with local ingredients but also for children.
7. Facilitate development of a zen area for rest and relaxation walks down to coast.
8. Facilitate opportunities for the *Adopter* to be ambassador for project and demonstration garden.
9. Develop future plans to link with area on dry ghaut down to coast with MNT.

Restoration of more native flora, especially in the ground and shrub layer, would reduce the ants and increase other invertebrates, resulting in a more balanced ecosystem.

There are a lot of invasive grasses and a number of invasive trees. A reduction in the dominating grasses, *e.g.* Guinea grass *Megathyrus maximus* and nut grass *Cyperus rotundus*, would allow more of native ground flora to colonise or via planting, as well as more native trees. This increase in native flora, and reduction in invasive grasses, will greatly increase the invertebrate diversity present on site.

Above: MNT Council, Hon. Minister Crenston Buffonge, and project team members visit the land donated to MNT by the Piper family, Wildlife Home 04, and walk through the upper part of the site.
Below: near the top of the site, the party inspect an impressive native bamboo bush. Attractive bamboo forest used to cover a large area of the Soufriere Hills but was destroyed when the volcano erupted.
Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Wildlife Home 04: Pipers Lot

In parallel with the development and planning of the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project, negotiations were in progress for the donaton of parcels of land at Friths (near Salem) to Montserrat National Trust. Shortly after the project started, in late 2021, the Montserrat National Trust became owners of these two parcels of land (*see map on next page*) and joined them into the project as a *Wildlife Home.*

The site stretches from the side of the road from Salem down into the Belham River valley, up the hill to near the Montserrat Volcano Observatory This is a rather different Wildlife Home to most of the others. The site will be transformed throughout the project. Montserrat National Trust decided to use the land as a place where members of the community, especially children and young people, as well as visitors, could come and immerse themselves in nature. The Trust envisaged that additional resources would be required to develop and implement the management plan on this site.

It was envisaged that this new piece of land, which the Trust now owns, would become one of several sites managed by the Trust in order to protect the island's biodiversity. Initial surveys in this joint project of Montserrat National Trust and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (*Adopt a Home for Wildlife,* DPLUS155) found that the site was in fact relatively close to natural tropical dry forest habitat and that the management of this site would not necessarily hugely benefit from restoration or management to improve its condition. Instead, this area of land could be managed for the islands' young people and for its unique wildlife, several species of which are listed as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List.

With the help of UKOTCF, the Trust submitted a succesful application to the new Darwin Plus Local Fund (for small short-term funding) with a plan for how resources would be deployed to get the key initial stages of this work done, to complement and fall within the period of the current funding for *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*.

This project will enable the development of a nature trail with an environmental education and emersion area, celebrating Montserrat's

unique biodiversity and natural heritage for the benefit of Montserrat's young people and other visitors. A key role for some parts of the area will be biological surveying opportunities for students – for their training and for progressive benefit of the information-base for the site. An on-site farming area will allow for teaching farming techniques and the production of medicinal plants.

The lower area has a cleared path related to the water supply, of about 500 metres, which can be used as a trail. It consists of a gentle climb alongside a freshwater stream (or ghaut). The second section of the trail is steep and requires some steps or zig-zag trail construction, from near where the lower trail meets the water outflow pipeline, which flows into the ghaut. The Blackwood Allen Trail to the north of the island has a similar construction which was carried out (and is maintained) by MNT staff. The third section connects to the upper site.

From the top of the lower part of the site, a route will be created to and through the upper part of the site to near the Montserrat Volcano Observatory, where the trail will link to Montserrat's existing trail network.

The upper site will have basic facilities for camping, to include two toilets, an area to wash up and prepare food, store equipment and small furnishings, and a covered platform where outdoor classroom activities can take place. It is envisaged that the eco-friendly design will use compost toilets, solar panels for electricity and a water tank for rainwater catchment. The design

elements will also serve as educational topics for youth in sustainability. A small-scale farm area will be established where young people (age 14+) can partake in supervised group activities, such as farm preparation and techniques to include budding and grafting, planting of medicinal herbs and preservation of these, and contributing to a medicinal plant herbarium which the Trust is developing.

The activities planned will provide opportunities for Montserrat Community College students. There are some clubs for this age-group such as church youth groups, but they do not focus on environment or biodiversity. MNT has a children's group, *Monty's Messengers* (relaunched under *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*, DPLUS155), that caters for children ages 5-11, exposing them to biodiversity. The Trust is developing more activities for young persons and with the creation of a nature educational trail involving youths 14+ and the launch of a bird-watchers club, this age-group can now have a place in fostering and preserving natural heritage and biodiversity. This will also stimulate interest in careers in Science Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) with subjects on themes including environment, agriculture, climate change and biodiversity.

Above: Group photo of the visit by MNT Council, the Hon. Minister and project personnel, on the road below the lower part of the site, with the truck that UKOTCF helped MNT purchase (but UKOTCF's logo has faded more than MNT's). Photo: Ann Pienkowski

Below: Along the existing trail through the lower part of the site and climbing gently parallel to the ghaut. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

This project will provide practical opportunities for young people to be involved in creation of a trail, interpretation, biological monitoring and management of a natural area, alongside the future creation of a Youth Forum being explored (*Toolkit* project, DPLUS192, which began in April 2023 – see pages 1-2). They will foster a connection with nature and an understanding of traditional use of land – and natural balance between nature and subsistence, and increase the awareness and knowledge of the biodiversity value of Montserrat's tropical dry forest habitat and associated biodiversity.

This project will also create an outdoor facility for overnight camps, outdoor classroom activities for all of Montserrat children and visitors alike. MNT is developing its safeguarding policies and capacity to run these groups in line with international best practice.

The lower trail is located in globally rare, tropical dry forest. As owners, MNT will protect it forever. The lower part has never been developed on and can be used as an example of this habitat type. MNT and partners will demonstrate the importance of this habitat to biodiversity and environmental quality by comparing it with other areas on island. The project will document species found here; many are found only in the Lesser Antilles region. This will add to the knowledge-base and understanding of how tropical dry forest ecosystems work. It will also raise capacity and foster appreciation for this habitat among our youth, wider community and visitors.

Other joint projects: EcoPlay

Donations to fund the EcoPlay building are going well but more are 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/.**

St Helena recognised as an International Marine Hope Spot

On 13 November 2023, international marine conservation organisation Mission Blue recognised St Helena's Marine Protected Area (MPA) as a Hope Spot. Hope Spots are recognised as special places, areas of ocean that are scientifically identified for their uniqueness, and most importantly their community's contribution and efforts in maintaining or improving global ocean health.

St Helena was nominated as a Hope Spot by two champions, the Director of the St Helena National Trust Helena Bennett and Director of Global Policy at Georgia Aquarium Dr Dayne Buddo. This nomination was supported by St Helena Government.

St Helena is honoured that Mission Blue has assessed St Helena's efforts to safeguard the ocean and recognised this as a Hope Spot.

It also means that St Helena joins an ocean network of 156 Hope Spots around the world. These cover a combined near 60,000,000 km^2 of ocean, stretching from the Antarctica to the Arctic, and includes St Helena's sister island of Ascension.

This recognition follows a 20-year journey for St Helena in understanding and protecting the Island's marine environment. It began with projects initially assessing whales, dolphins and birds, as well as undertaking basic fisheries science to build a baseline of knowledge and understanding. In 2012, St Helena Government started to consider a potential Marine Protected Area (MPA) designation. Between 2012 and 2016 various scientific programmes were undertaken in collaboration with Island users and stakeholders, considering the social impacts of designation.

This ultimately led to 100% of St Helena's near 450,000 km^2 Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) being designated as an IUCN Category-VI sustainable-use MPA in 2016, along with the publication of the Island's first Marine Management Plan.

By comparison, only 8% of the world's oceans are currently designated as MPAs, with under 3% being highly protected. This is set amid a backdrop where our oceans have never been more at threat, from challenges including the impacts of climate change, ocean acidification, pollution and illegal fishing.

Following designation of the MPA, significant work has been ongoing to improve the understanding of the territory's marine environment. This has been made possible by working closely with a variety of external partners and funders, such as the UK Government Darwin Initiative, the Blue Marine Foundation, the International Pole and Line Foundation and Georgia Aquarium.

Since 2016, St Helena has been fortunate to be a part of the UK Government's Blue Belt Programme, which supports the UK Overseas Territories with the protection and sustainable management of their marine estates. The programme has provided significant funding and capacity to St Helena. This has catapulted St Helena's science and research, in turn providing the evidence that underpins the MPA's management measures and the newly implemented 2023 Marine Management Plan.

In 2018, St Helena National Trust, with support from the Blue Marine Foundation, extended its advocacy of the Island's natural heritage to include marine-based conservation, education and outreach. The Trust continues conservation monitoring of key marine species such as whale sharks and seabirds, promoting sustainable fisheries and the reduction of plastics and marine debris, contributing further evidence to underpin the Marine Management Plan.

Many MPAs are designated in an effort to restore that area to a functional and thriving condition as a result of previous damage. St Helena's marine environment remains in near pristine condition, and the community of St Helena is rightly proud to keep watch over an area that provides inspiration to others.

St Helena's unique characteristics, most notably its remoteness and limited human pressures in the marine environment, have not only created unique habitats but also distinct assemblages of species. St Helena's MPA attracts highly migratory and globally significant animals such as tuna, whale sharks and humpback whales.

St Helena has undertaken every reasonable effort within its control to ensure marine uses limit human pressure in order to deliver sustainability, even as marine tourism becomes more popular in reflection of St Helena's amazing natural environment. For example:

- One by one, fishing practices are permitted for certain key species, and unselective fishing methods are prohibited.
- Total allowable catch limits and size limits are in place.
- Robust wildlife and habitat interaction rules have been put in place, balancing the education and enjoyment of marine users against the need to safeguard habitats and species for the future.

Feeding whale shark

Dr Sylvia Earle, founder of Mission Blue, said: *This marine protected area and new Hope Spot of nearly half a million square miles now faces pressures largely outside its control from rapidly changing climate, invasive species and pollution. By becoming a Hope Spot, St Helena can act as a beacon to the rest of the world. Although geographically isolated, it is deeply ecologically connected to many distant realms, and indeed, other Hope Spots."*

Director of St Helena National Trust, Helena Bennett, said: *"The*

ocean has a way of enchanting us, capturing our imagination and intriguing us with mysteries of the unexplored. Our Island and its surrounding waters are steeped in our culture and traditions, and have played a massive role in our history's timeline since our island's discovery in 1502, evolving our way with a sense of nostalgia and a feeling of belonging and home."

Pantropical spotted dolphins at St Helena. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office Minister David Rutley said: *"St Helena is home to a range of unique marine species and habitats creating breath-taking coastal and underwater sceneries. I'm proud to see St Helena's MPA designated as a 'Hope Spot', this speaks to the fantastic working collaborations St Helena has with its local community, Government and NGOs in creating ocean conservation consciousness through sustainable use.*

"The UK's landmark Blue Belt Programme has also enabled positive lasting change for the Island, through its facilitation of a range of support, covering innovative science initiatives such as the deployment of a network of underwater cameras to help observe and quantify ocean wildlife, a purpose-built marine laboratory to ensure evidence-based management of habitats and species is undertaken supported by a robust policy, legislation, education and enforcement. An exemplar of creating positive change for the protection of the marine environment for the rest of the world".

St Helena's Minister for Environment, Natural Resources and Planning, Christine Scipio, said: *"As a community, we are rightly proud of our unique marine environment, which is reflected in how we approach our stewardship of it. We've spent the last 20 years developing our knowledge of our special waters and ensuring we only permit the most sustainable of practices within our MPA. We're delighted that Mission Blue has recognised St Helena as a Hope Spot, and hope that we can act as an example to the rest of the world of what can be achieved despite your size and limited resources."*

St Helena Marine Protection Area:– above: position; below: showing island and sea-mounts within the MPA. Image: St Helena Government

Graham Sim, former Fisheries Officer and long term advocate for St Helena's marine environment, said: *"The thing about it is, and I don't know why, there is something about the ocean that I have always been attracted to. St Helena is in a unique position and has come a long way with the conservation and protection of the marine environment, with the local younger generations being much more aware of the need to protect the ocean, giving us all hope for the future. But, there is a lot that still needs to be done here, and elsewhere, and we need to keep focused on what is required to protect our beloved oceans."*

Mission Blue was founded by marine pioneer and explorer Dr Sylvia Earle, following a TED talk she gave in 2009 where she first promoted the idea of marine Hope Spots. It attracted support and partnerships with National Geographic, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Rolex. Mission Blue now campaigns for increased action to protect, preserve and restore the planet's oceans. In 2015, St Helena's sister island of Ascension was recognised as a Hope Spot, before going on to designate a near 440,000 km^2 MPA in 2019. More information about the Hope Spot network can be found online at www.missionblue.org/hope-spots. A video welcoming St Helena to Hope Spot network can viewed online at https://youtu.be/G-LuLRrY1Q0.

St Helena lies in the south Atlantic, over 2,500km west of the Angolan coast, with its nearest neighbour, Ascension Island more than 1,000km away. It is host to one of the world's largest MPAs. In 2023 St Helena Government updated and published a 5-year Marine Management Plan, seeking to balance the sustainable use of St Helena's marine environment against conserving what is a remarkably well preserved area of ocean compared to many other areas around the world.

In 2001/2, UKOTCF, in the person of Council Member Martin Drury (then recently retired Dirctor-General of the National Trust (of England, Wales and Northern Irelend)) visited St Helena, at the request of local conservation bodies, to help these come together to set up St Helena National Trust (SHNT). This has since been championing St Helena's built, cultural and natural heritage. The Trust is a charitable organisation funded by international programmes aiming to enhance the natural biodiversity and reduce man-made impacts on the environment.

The Blue Belt Programme is UK Government's marine conservation programme, working with 10 UKOTs, supporting them in protecting and enhancing ocean health to halt biodiversity loss, enable sustainable growth, ensure climate change resilience, and to connect people with the natural environment. This programme aims to support the Territories in the effective management of their marine environments, and in ensuring they are safeguarded for future generations.

Based on information from St Helena Government Press Office

Avian influenza reaches South Atlantic islands

Since the beginning of 2022, the increasing intensity of highly pathogenic avian influenza outbreaks has resulted in the deaths of hundreds of thousands of seabirds and many of other species in the Northern Hemisphere, around the Atlantic, Pacific Ocean and Southern Africa.

Avian influenza Type A viruses (bird flu viruses) do not normally infect people, but rare cases of human infection have occurred with some bird flu viruses, mainly involving persons working closely with poultry or other birds.

A study in Scotland, published this year, investigated what could have been causing some Northern Gannets eyes to change colour from pale blue to black. Of 18 seemingly healthy birds tested, 8 had black irises and of these 7 had bird flu antibodies. Dr Jude Lane, lead author and RSPB conservation scientist, explained the significance of the study. *"This has been a fascinating development and the discovery may prove a useful non-invasive diagnostic tool." The next steps are to understand its efficacy if it applies to any other species and whether there are any detrimental impacts to the birds' vision. Ophthalmology exams will also be needed to determine what is causing the black colouration."*

The research was carried out in collaboration with the RSPB, the University of Glasgow, the University of Edinburgh, Heriot Watt University and the Animal Plant Health Agency, in partnership with the Scottish Seabird Centre.

Here we summarise the information we have found but would welcome corrections and additions.

Falkland Islands

In November, three cases were confirmed in dead seabirds in the Falkland Islands, each apparently an isolated case. The widely separated occurrences involved two Southern Fulmars (Stanley and Pebble Island) and one Black Browed Albatross at Saunders Island.

It seems likely that the disease arrived with the individual birds as these range widely, especially outside the breeding season, which is now well underway in the Falklands, following the return of the penguins and other seabirds. Falkland Islands Department of Agriculture points out that migrant birds returning to the Islands and mixing with local wild birds could transmit the virus, but that it is also possible for avian influenza to be introduced to the Islands through visitors clothing and outdoor equipment entering the Islands. Temporary restrictions on movement of poultry and poultry products were put in place in Stanley, and biosecurity measures, including disinfectant boot-baths, there and at the two small-island sites.

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

A virulent strain of avian influenza has been confirmed for the first time in the Antarctic region. Scientists with the British Antarctic Survey noticed dead Brown Skuas on Bird Island, South Georgia, starting on 7 October. The virus, H5N1, may have been carried to the island by migratory birds returning from South America, which has been hit hard. The Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands has banned visitors to the small island, which is less than 5 kilometers long, but research on the bird and seal colonies will continue. "Bird Island is one of the most closely monitored seabird and seal colonies in the world, so ongoing studies will reveal the impacts of the disease in detail," the government said in a statement. Scientists are also monitoring to detect the virus' expected move to the Antarctic continent, home to much larger wildlife populations.

Channel Islands

In 2022, about 25% of Alderney's adult Gannet population died due to avian influenza. The colony is an important one near the southern limit of the species' breeding range.

Alderney Wildlife Trust has installed cameras to monitor breeding birds including puffins, storm petrels and gulls on Burhou - a small island to the north west of Alderney. Cameras have also been installed on the Les Etacs stacks, two rocks to the west of the island, to monitor the Gannet population.

Islanders in Alderney are being asked to report any dead seabirds they find on beaches as testing for bird flu continues.

Dog owners have also been asked to prevent their pets from making contact with dead or sick seabirds.

Jersey suffered some poultry cases in July but was able to lift restrictions within a few weeks.

Isle of Man

Around 70 dead and dying seabirds - mainly Guillemots - were collected by the Department for Environment, Food and Agriculture on the southern and western coastline over about a week in mid-July. Samples taken from some birds found on Port Erin beach confirmed at least one had the H5N1 strain, which has killed hundreds of wild sea birds in the UK in recent months. A second seabrd case was confirmed later. This outbreak was thought to have killed hundreds of birds in Peel and Port Erin in July.

In August , a third case of bird flu was confirmed by the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture as a bird of prey tested positive. The kestrel found near the Point of Ayre in the north of the island marked the first case confirmed during the current outbreak in a species that is not a seabird.

Clare Barber MHK, Minister for Environment, Food and Agriculture said: *"The risk and impact of bird flu on wild colonies should not be underestimated – but the risk to people is low and well-cooked eggs and poultry remain safe to eat.*

"We would ask people to take extra care when visiting our beaches and coastal areas and steer well clear of all sick or dead marine life – as the virus is highly contagious and can be passed from birds to other animals, such as seals."

As the virus had not been found in kept or farmed birds, no restriction zones were introduced. However, DEFA pointed out that bird keepers should always wash their hands and clean and disinfect footwear before tending to other animals, and if possible, keep their birds separate from wild ones.

Wider Caribbean

Although there have been reports throughout 2023 of many cases of bird flu in the countries of mainland North, Central and South Ameirica, we have not found reports from UKOTs in this region. However, it is not known whether this is due to an absence of cases or lack of testing.

New Partner in *Blue Belt*

The Cayman Islands joined the *Blue Belt* programme in September. The announcement was made during a visit by the *Blue Belt* representatives.

The Premier and Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency for Cayman Islands Government, Hon. Wayne Panton, said: *"As part of global programmes like the Blue Belt, we protect not just Cayman's future but the world's future. Just as our seafaring ancestors were citizens of the world, our youth will be citizens of a more connected global economy and environment, and we must do all that we can to leave them a homeland at least as good as our ancestors left us. The Blue Belt is one of the ways we will do that and I am proud that Cayman's participation in the programme has now begun".*

Ants of the UKOTs

On 29 November 2023, a webinar was held on "Ants of the UKOTs". This was supported by UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, British Indian Ocean Territory Administration, Darwin Plus, Gibraltar Botanic Gardens and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum. Here, Dr Keith Bensusan (Director of Gibraltar Botanic Gardens and UKOTCF Council Member) makes available his Introduction and Summary of the brainstorming in the sessions. On the next page, we reproduce the programme for the webinar.

Title slide from Rhian Guillem's presentation on the ants of Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territory. For more information on project Building knowledge on invasive non-native species in Diego Garcia*, click here*

Introductory remarks

- The workshop comes off the back of the DarwinPlus project 'Building knowledge on invasive non-native species in Diego Garcia', DG being the main island of the BIOT/Chagos archipelago.
- The project studies a wide range of plant and animal taxa.
- Ants formed an integral part of this project, because they are numerically and functionally dominant in terrestrial habitats, and include some of the world's worst invasive species, often having important impacts on native fauna and flora and being documented in many invasion meltdown processes.
- Invasive ants are a pervasive feature of island terrestrial environments, and knowledge-sharing is crucial to their understanding and control.
- We therefore thought that a workshop on invasive ants in the UKOTs would be a useful additional output, for the project and for the UKOTs to share experiences and see how we can support each other in our unique territories.

Brainstorming needs for ant monitoring / baseline surveying / cross-territories ant group

Given time constraints, I am simply going to summarise my thoughts. We could then follow up with discussion via email or follow-up Zoom sessions.

So,

- Ants are excellent ecological indicators and they include some of the most important invasive animal species.
- They are straightforward to survey and monitor – especially abundant invasive species – and training can be provided for this. This makes them ideal study subjects.

Therefore, there is a need to monitor them, and doing so is not complicated. Some cross-UKOT questions arise, which I shall raise.

In terms of surveying:

- Have all territories been thoroughly and recently surveyed for ants, particularly invasive ants?
- Do any of the territories have systematic monitoring programmes in place?
- What baseline data do the territories have? How can we achieve a scenario where all territories have baseline data, at least on invasive ants?

Following on from that, what challenges and goals do we share when it comes to tackling invasive species?

- Is there knowledge and experience to share on biosecurity? Is it realistic for biosecurity to ever be good enough?
- Are there any possible pathways that need to be prioritized, given the origin of most invasive species?
- Are there particular habitats or parts of habitats that require more attention?
- Are there species that we should be focusing on collectively, in terms of identification and planning?

In terms of planning further work:

- How much do we feel we have learnt and benefitted from Darwin funding so far? Is this the best vehicle for projects?
- Would a cross-UKOT ant group that meets regularly be beneficial? Knowledge-exchange is the key here, but it might also be a useful way to track progress in each other's territories and help us work towards common aims.
- There are other islands and territories that aren't UKOTs that might be able to share knowledge and experience. Should we be thinking about broadening participation beyond the UKOTs strictly? Hawai'i seems an obvious suggestion, for example.
- Would an online survey be beneficial to identify priorities and joint actions?
- Should we mull over what we have discussed today and plan a debrief session?
- Perhaps we can follow these two ideas up by email.

In conclusion,

- Given their ecological importance, knowledge-building on ants across the UKOTs is important, as is knowledge-sharing. After all, many territories will share important invasive ants.
- Resources to monitor them, and the training itself, are already available.
- This could provide the focus for future DarwinPlus bids, so this is definitely a possibility that we should discuss further.

Thank you very much everyone for attending, some of you at unsociable hours! It's been a phenomenally good session. Have a lovely rest of your day.

An online workshop for sharing stories of biological invasions and how we can mitigate the impacts of invasive species.

Ants of the UKOTs

on 29 November 2023 at 14:00-18:00 (UK time)

Ants are renowned invaders around the world, negatively impacting species and habitats, people and their environment. This workshop aims to highlight just some of the examples of work going on across the UKOTs on ants and showcases examples of management that could be useful for others around the world. This workshop is designed for conservationists and those working on biosecurity. We hope to see you there.

Speakers	Talks
Keith Bensusan / Karsten Schonrogge	Welcome to the event
Session 1: Distribution and impact – chair Karsten Schonrogge	
Mark Wong	Who's who in the spread of alien ants globally and in the UK's Overseas Territories
Helen Roy / Jodey Peyton	Invasive ants in Horizon Scans for INNS
Rhian Guillem	Ant ID and where to find them
Session 2: Ant invasions and management part 1 – chair Keith Bensusan	
Olivier Blight	Extent, impact and management of the Wasmannia auropunctata population in France
Robyn Tourle	A brief investigation of invasive ants in Grand Cayman
Jakovos Demetriou	Alien ant of Cyprus: Current state, knowledge gaps and next step
Rhian Guillem	Surveying for Ants on Diego Garcia
Natasha Stevens / Christy Jo	Invasive ants on St Helena
Adam Sharp.	Ant invasion and ecological impacts on Ascension Island
Session 3: Ant invasions and management part 2 – chair Jodey Peyton	
Wolfgang Rabitsch	Don't try this at home! Lessons from alien ant pathway management in Europe
Michelle Montgomery / Cas Vanderwoude	Managing the Little Fire Ant
Vicky Wilkins	Invasive ants - their impact on endemic invertebrates and approaches to their management
Keith Bensusan	Brainstorming needs for ant monitoring / base line surveys / cross territories ant group
James Millett	Managing and reducing the risk from invasive ant species
Keith Bensusan	Wrap up and any next steps

Special offer on UKOTCF-published book on major conservation success.

In November and December, ***When the kite builds... WHY and HOW we restored Red Kites across Britain***, by our Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski, has been on seasonal special offer. To allow readers of *Forum News* to benefit, we are extending the **offer until 10 January**. Until then, the price from **www.ukotcf.org.uk/kite-book/ is £24.95 + P&P (a £5 discount). All proceeds go to UKOTCF's charitable work.**

Earlier in Mike's career in the 1980s, he set up the experimental project to restore Red Kites across Britain, these previously common birds having been almost totally exterminated over a century earlier. With the programme's success, UK Red Kite numbers now constitute about 25% of the world population. The book tells the story of how this was achieved.

In *Forum News 58,* we quoted some of the independent reviews of the book. We can now add extracts from some newer ones:

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... 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)

How to restore nature – lessons from a major UK project: I should first declare an interest – Mike Pienkowski was my boss in NCC/JNCC for a while and I get a very brief mention in this book. The book describes in full detail the stunningly successful "experimental" reintroduction of red kites to England and Scotland. It is based on contemporaneous records that capture many of the nuances of the project, and not (in contrast to some works) on the memories alone. It is written in a positive sense – supporters of the project are named, but detractors or obstructers are not named. I remember some of the debates at the start of the reintroduction project, and many of my memories are correct, but some are not – it was good to be put right. This made me reflect on the nature of historical writing – just how many projects, such as this, can be now described in detail? I guess not many – Mike has obviously managed to retain copies of the relevant paperwork that would not be available to many – the paperwork around the major NCC/JNCC project that I was involved in was all thrown out during an office move some years ago, when the instruction was to only retain essential paperwork (and that was put in a remote secure store that subsequently flooded!). I hate to think about projects conducted in the electronic paperwork age…

I would recommend this book to anyone (globally) interested in larger-scale projects to enhance nature – there are important lessons here in the hurdles that may well be placed in the way. It would also be of interest to those interested in how active nature conservation actually works. Congratulations to Mike on getting the book written, and a big "well done" to all those involved in making the project work. **Mark Tasker** (NHBS, August 2023)

This book begins by reminding us how ubiquitous these birds were in early times with their role as scavengers evidenced by the quote "when the kite builds look to lesser linen", from *A Winter's Tale* Act 4, Scene 3, William Shakespeare. This explains the book's title and it includes many photos of kite nests decorated with odd items including pillaged underwear. The rationale for the Red Kite introduction initiative was not simply to restore a species lost to most of the UK but rather due to concerns regarding the viability of the global population, with increasing distribution considered as a conservation priority to increase species resilience. Despite the small remnant population in mid Wales this was plagued by very low breeding productivity combined with persistent egg collecting making spread highly unlikely.

The key characteristic of this book is the level of detail. Extracts from meeting notes are provided enabling the reader to see just how seriously all aspects of this introduction were considered, from examination of the requirements for success based on the experience of earlier projects, notably of white-tailed eagles, to the handling of public relations... Evidence of the impact for global species conservation is the dispatch of young birds to Spain, one of the original source countries, in 2022.

The politics make fascinating reading. The original lead organisation for the experimental phase of the project was the Nature Conservancy Council, the NCC. This was dissolved and replaced by the JNCC, with representatives from Wales, Scotland and England followed, overseeing operations across all the reintroduction sites in all three countries, with responsibility devolved to CCW, SNH and English Nature respectively. The latter part of the book focuses on evaluation, repeating the assertion that it is far more important to prevent loss of species and habitats than to take heroic steps to reinstate them. The author cautions against well-meaning but inappropriate reintroductions, with discussion of the impact of changes in agricultural practice on likely success. Additional benefits from the successful kite project have been greater

acknowledgement of the effects of poisoning, both direct (intentional) and unintentional, introduction of specific funding allocation for species recovery programmes, and greater public awareness of these magnificent birds of prey... Altogether a fascinating read with many excellent photographs. Hopefully those involved in current reintroduction projects will be able to learn from this book and provide similarly detailed accounts and evaluations in future... **Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Managemen**t (*CIEEM in practice* 121: 81-82, September 2023)

This is a welcome book on the restoration of the Red Kite in the UK. It details its recovery in forensic detail, giving a blow-by-blow account of the project. Its author, Mike Pienkowski (former Nature Conservancy Council, Head of Ornithology Branch, and later Assistant Chief Scientist), is well-qualified to write this book since he was the chair (1987–1995) of the group that planned and implemented the restoration. The recovery was initially a collaboration between the NCC and the RSPB although many other organizations and individuals contributed: the acknowledgements section in the book covers four dense pages. The main bulk of the book is on the intricacies of delivering the project and the results of the reintroductions. There is good detail on population biology and movements, which is summarized in clear tables, graphs and maps. We also get a smattering of autobiographical details giving us a glimpse of the man, his history and passions. This book is a clearly written cornucopia of detail – obscure, useful and critical – that illustrate the complexities of the project.

There are twelve chapters that go through the different project stages. The introduction makes the important observation that it is individuals and small groups of people that drive projects rather than the initiatives of big organizations...

In 1987 it was realized that the Red Kite was a suitable candidate for reintroduction, and a project was initiated. After a review of the species' world distribution, it was discovered that it was in worse shape than generally considered. There had been widespread declines in numbers and distribution during the 19th century and the species was still absent or patchily distributed in some countries where it had formerly occurred. The main populations were in Spain, France and Germany where the birds could possibly be sourced from. It was clear that the restoration of the species in the UK would improve the global status of the species, which in the 1980s was estimated at 17000–21000 pairs...

As a result of all this work it is estimated there are around 6000 breeding pairs in the UK, representing at least 15% of the European and world population, a project justifiably called the biggest species success story in UK conservation history.

I enjoyed reading this book, it is refreshing since we get an honest account of the complexity of a large reintroduction programme: the intricacies of Government departmental politics, interactions with other organizations (which were apparently mostly amicable) and some of the personalities involved. The book is well referenced, although disappointingly it does not have an index. The book is a rare account showing how projects really work. All too often the accounts of conservation projects are sanitized, and the facts retrofitted into a story. The book is one I shall be dipping into regularly to enjoy its content and to learn some of the lessons on the benefits of collaborations and how we can restore populations and how these can contribute to rebuilding ecosystems. **Carl G. Jones** (November 2023) *Ibis* (Journal of the British Ornithologists' Union): vol. 166.

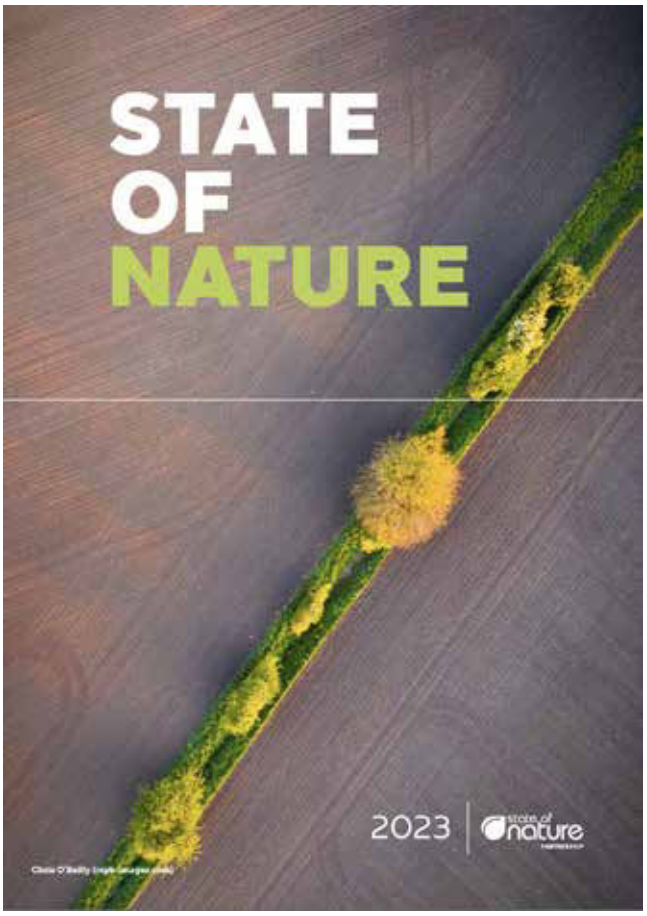
State of Nature report 2023

State of Nature is called the most comprehensive report on the UK's current biodiversity. It uses "the latest and best data from biological monitoring and recording schemes, collated by the incredible work of thousands of skilled people, most of whom are volunteers, to provide a benchmark for the status of our wildlife."

The *State of Nature* report was published in November. In its headlines it reported that: " 94% of the species unique to the UK and its territories are found on the Overseas Territories. Across the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, 11% of 6,557 species assessed are threatened with global extinction."

The report includes seven pages dedicated to the UKOTs and CDs, with key findings, good and bad news, progress in biological monitoring, extent of terrestrial and marine protected areas, habitat restoration, impact of invasive species and more.

The full report can be seen here: https://stateofnature.org.uk



Pitcairn opens world's most remote marine science base

In October, the Governor to the Pitcairn Islands, H.E. Iona Thomas, visited Pitcairn to open officially the new UK government-funded marine science base, providing a platform for scientists to visit the area and study its unique marine habitats.

Scientists from around the globe will be able to explore some of the world's most untouched marine habitats and potentially discover new life underwater thanks to the creation of a new marine science base on the remote Pitcairn Islands.

This remote volcanic outcrop and its three neighbouring islands in the South Pacific are a UK Overseas Territory and the third largest continuous 'Highly Protected' Marine Protected Area (MPA) in the world. The surrounding waters of the Pitcairn group's four islands were declared an ocean sanctuary in 2016, in an initiative supported by the British government and UK and international NGOs. The designation of the MPA and the construction of the base are testaments to the 40 residents' dedication, as they constructed the marine science base themselves.

The base will provide visiting scientists with a range of equipment – from remote operated vehicles to cutting-edge underwater video technology – to allow them to monitor the health of marine habitats that are mostly untouched by humans.

Iona Thomas, Governor to Pitcairn and British High Commissioner to New Zealand, said: *"The ocean around the Pitcairn Islands is one of the most pristine places on earth and home to a treasure trove of sharks, fish, corals and other marine life not seen anywhere else in the world. I'm delighted to be able to open the new marine science base here in Pitcairn with the support of the local community. I hope this base will attract a continuous cycle of scientists to the islands and provide a huge boost to our knowledge of marine science in what is one of the last remaining untouched marine habitats on the planet."*

The crystal-clear waters surrounding the islands allow corals to thrive at unusual depths in cooler waters, potentially enhancing their resilience to climate change and offering refuge to these vulnerable ecosystems.

In 2012, Pitcairn Council unanimously voted to establish the marine protected area (MPA), aiming to safeguard their waters from illegal foreign fishing fleets. This initiative required the support of the British government, ultimately leading to the establishment of a "no-take" zone – with no commercial fishing allowed – spanning 834,000 square kilometres, ranking as the world's third-largest marine reserve, home to over 1200 species of fish, marine mammals, and birds. As a 'Highly Protected' MPA with fully intact marine ecosystems, across the 842,000 square kilometres of waters around Pitcairn's four islands, this makes Pitcairn an important reference point to help scientists study marine biodiversity and assess the impacts of climate change – and in turn measure the benefits of marine protected areas.

Humpback Whales close to Henderson Island. Photo: Steve Darroch

Governor Iona Thomas opening the new Marine Science Base. Photo: British High Commission Wellington

To combat unauthorized fishing, an oceanic drone has been deployed since 2016, while a network of underwater cameras was set up in 2021 for continuous surveillance.

Collaborating with the University of St Andrews in Scotland, the British government plans to promote research and visits to Adamstown, Pitcairn's remote settlement, situated 5333 kilometres from Wellington and 5776 kilometres from Santiago, Chile.

Accommodating up to four visiting scientists, the laboratory is fully equipped with meeting rooms, internet connectivity, and multimedia facilities. The first scientists have already arrived on the island, with one studying the migration of humpback whales, which visit the tranquil waters between May and October for breeding.

Over 1,250 marine species have been recorded in the waters around Pitcairn, including 3 species of whales that are listed as endangered on the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List.

The area is also home to hawksbill and green turtles (critically endangered and endangered, respectively); as well as 3 species of endangered seabirds; one critically endangered fish and one endangered fish. There are also 5 species of endemic bony fishes found nowhere else on Earth.

One of Pitcairn's outer islands, Ducie, plays an important role as a shark nursery and there are growing numbers of Humpback whales coming into Pitcairn's waters every year to calve.

Pitcairn's MPA was awarded a Platinum Status 'Blue Park Award' by the Marine Conservation Institute in February in recognition of its exceptional marine wildlife conservation.

A pair of Kermadec petrels in display flight over the breeding grounds on Ducie Island. Several species of petrels breed on Ducie, Henderson and Oeno Islands (Pitcairn group), in some cases constituting major parts of the world populations. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Cayman Sustainable Development: a road review

Sustainable Cayman, a non-profit which aims to promote sustainability and conservation in the Cayman Islands and to create healthy communities and a flourishing natural environment issued a press release in November outlining an asessment of route options for the East-West Arterial - Alternative Route 2 stating that it is "cheaper, shorter, safer"

The report evaluates three different alternative routes based on:

i) social impacts & accessibility,
ii) environmental impact,
iii) climate resilience,
iv) the potential cost of building the road.

The report concludes that the alternative Route 2 (middle (purple) route on map), is the most cost-effective option, as it has the lowest costs among the feasible alternatives. The report estimates that Route 2 would cost $61.90 million to construct compared to over $70 million for the NRA proposed route (northern-most route, yellow with black dots). These figures are based on an FOI which gave the budgetary costs for materials and labour estimated in 2015.

The report also acknowledges that no alternative route would fully solve the existing bottleneck problem at the intersection of Hurley's roundabout, as it would only increase the capacity to the east of this point. However, the report argues that Route 2 would still improve the traffic flow and reduce the travel time for the average commuter.

Further, Route 2 would have the least negative impact on the environment and the community, as it would avoid cutting through the Central Mangrove Wetland and the associated flood risks for the surrounding communities. The traffic issues currently faced in the Cayman Islands cannot be solved by a new road in isolation; the planning of infrastructure and development need to be looked at holistically and any development should be designed and planned with the best interests of the people in mind and not just development economics.

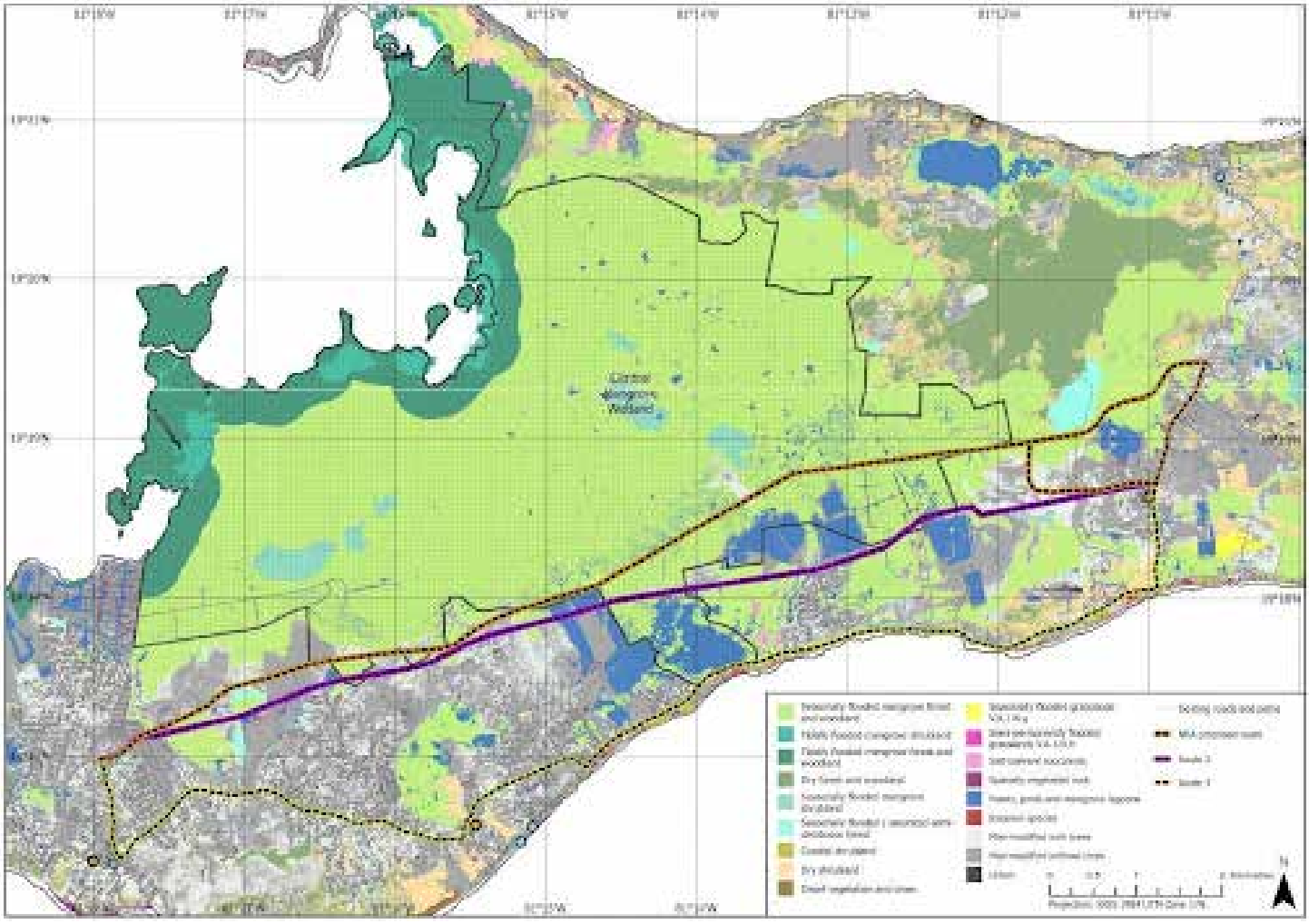
The report invites the public to review the option in the road route report and provide feedback, and to engage in discussion with their MP. It is Sustainable Cayman's view that taking care of our environment provides for a better quality of life, health and well-being. This is one of the main components of why we need to ensure that proper decisions are taken today to build a safer and more resilient future.

"I believe that infrastructure development should not come at the cost of environmental degradation. That is why we should always conduct rigorous environmental impact assessments before initiating any project. We should also adopt a holistic approach to development, which considers both human and natural systems, and the long-term sustainability of interventions. By doing so, we aim to create infrastructure that is not only functional and efficient, but also harmonious and resilient. The traffic issues currently faced by Caymanians cannot be solved by a new road in isolation" said Natalie Hall of the RSPB.

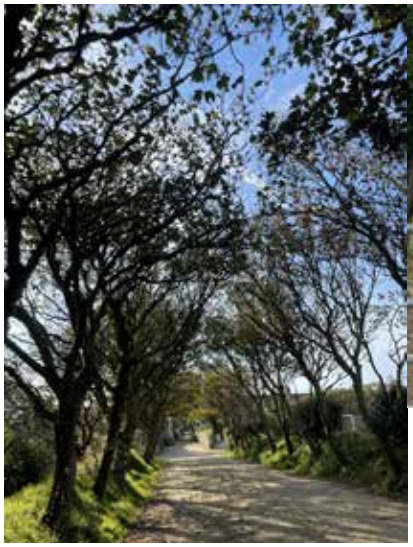
"Sustainable Cayman is an organisation with a mission to promote environmental sustainability and conservation of our natural assets and therefore we have a keen interest in resolving the best outcome for transport connectivity and quality of life in the Cayman Islands for both current and future communities."

A copy of the report can be downloaded from their website here: https://bit.ly/3SYA1v3

For those interested in finding out more or supporting Sustainable Cayman, you can contact them on: info@sustainablecayman.org, follow social media channels or join Facebook community: https://www.facebook.com/groups/wetlandsthrivelifesurvives/ .



Sark holds Inter-Island Environmental Meeting in September



Above: a few views from Catherine's tour of the island: a typical roadway, the dairy farm (Axton's Crossing), and La Coupée, the narrow, high causeway linking Sark to Little Sark.
Below: A visit to Sark's Ramsar Convention Wetland of International Importance at Gouliot Caves, carpeted with sea anemones (including Jewel anemones shown), sponges, soft corals and sea squirts - the first place where many of these normally sub-tidal species were described. All photos in this article: Catherine Wensink

This year the Inter-Island Environmental Meeting took place on Sark in the Channel Islands. It was Executive Director Catherine Wensink's turn to attend the IIEM for UKOTCF. It being her first trip to the island, she recalls her first impressions.

Landing on Sark reminded me of the life my grandparents would have had growing up in rural Ireland. No cars, no noise, no litter, no street lights.

With the help of Sue Daley, local naturalist, diver and all-round fixer, I picked up my bike which I would use for the next few days. The island has a population of around 500 people. The lanes and houses are picture-postcard cottages surrounded by green, ancient trees and stone walls.

There was a packed schedule of presentations, mixers and events coming up over the few days I was on island, so I spent the first afternoon orientating myself by cycling around the island. I covered most of it! I lost an hour somewhere as I crossed the time zone into France even though I had

Above: the meeting venue at the community hall
Below: the meeting in progress

not left the island.

Several fascinating aspects of the visit were getting to see what Sark is becoming known for. Its International Dark Skies Designation really is such an impressive feature it can boast about. We had the pleasure of visiting the observatory with a brilliant volunteer guide who was very patient with the group and made an excellent attempt at answering all our questions.

I was staying near the Island's dairy farm; a legacy of the late Richard Axton, a man I had long admired and enjoyed speaking with. I think that my accent reminded him of the county he grew up in back in the UK. It was nice to see an image of him in the dairy he was passionate about.

The Sark cheese made with milk from the gentle cows in the fields near where I stayed was delicious.

Overall, it was a great trip and was great to meet up with colleagues (and friends) in the conservation community.

All the presentations from the meeting have been published here by the organisers, Société Sercquaise: https://www.socsercq.org/iiem-2023

The meeting will take place in Jersey in 2024. In 2025, the meeting will take place in the Isle of Man for the first time.

Workshop on Biodiversity Strategy in Cayman

Most of the consultations being done by the UK's Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) have been undertaken, but it was Cayman's turn in June. JNCC is leading on developing a shared UK and UKOT governments' vision and strategic priorities for biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories, which will be published when all information has been gathered.

In a local press release, the Cayman Islands Director of Environment, Gina Ebanks-Petrie said: *"This workshop comes at an opportune time, following the introduction of natural capital accounting to the Cayman Islands."*

"It coincides with efforts to develop a national Climate Change Policy and an increased call from the local community to safeguard the ecosystem services our unique species and habitats have provided to our people for centuries."

"This will support our national conservation goals and identify funding gaps that can be filled by Darwin Plus grant schemes."

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

As noted in *Forum News* 58, over decades, with the encouragement of UKOTCF and others, the UK Parliament has shown an increasing interest in the UK Overseas Territories, particularly via 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 still welcoming written submissions beyond the original deadline of 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 submitted its evidence in September and the Committee published it on 5th December (https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/124152/pdf/). We reproduce the summary below..

Written evidence from The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) (SOT43)

Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee

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

Summary

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) is a charity that promotes the conservation of biodiversity, ecosystem services, and their contribution, together with other aspects of natural and human heritage, to the well-being and sustainability of the UK's Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and Crown Dependencies (CDs) and their local communities. UKOTCF has no competing business outside UKOTs and CDs and brings together organisations in the territories. Its some 30 member and associate organisations include leading environmental bodies in the UKOTs, the Crown Dependencies and UK, linking in also a wide network of other organisations and individuals with experience of UKOTs and CDs and others with experience relevant to them. Much of UKOTCF's work is in facilitating mutual assistance between these and other UKOT bodies, including government departments. In this memorandum, UKOTCF makes the following main points and recommendations, the background and rationale for which are included in the body of the memorandum:

A. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges UK Government promptly to meet the reasonable requests of individual UKOTs and CDs to be included in particular international conservation conventions (para 7).

B. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee calls on UK Government to take the opportunity of its forthcoming Biodiversity Strategy and other means to reaffirm its commitment to the Environment Charters, which summarise the basis of the UK Government's and UKOT governments' treaty commitments for the conservation of the environments of the UKOTs (paras 12 & 33ii).

C. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee calls for UK Government to make efforts to ensure that relationships with the UKOTs are based on (i) inclusivity, whereby the interests of the UKOTs are duly represented in decision-making that concerns them; (ii) differentiation, whereby the nuances of each UKOT are suitably reflected in tailored, territory-specific approaches; (iii) responsiveness, whereby the UK and UKOTs endeavour to understand the interests of each other, and respond to them in the spirit of mutual ambition and obligation; (iv) reciprocity, whereby both the UK and UKOTs recognise that the partnership can be mutually beneficial and to invest in it; and (v) comply with the Framework of Best Practice and encourage others to do so (paras 13 & 29).

D. UKOTCF recommends that Committee urges the Ministry of Defence to continue to enforce bird-protection legislation, and to review its physical planning policies to ensure avoidance of potential further damage to critical ecosystems in the Cyprus SBAs, in order to meet its international commitment to monitor and ensure sustainability of any use of its Ramsar Convention Wetland of International Importance (para 15).

E. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges the UK Government to continue recent efforts by DEFRA, and encourage other government departments, to re-engage with key NGOs with long-standing involvement across UKOTs, in order to restore some of efficiencies experienced before UK Government broke off these communications more than a decade ago (para 18).

F. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges DEFRA and its agencies to continue to bolster their support to the UKOTs and understanding of their needs. Central to this process will be effective engagement with the relevant UKOT bodies and bodies with a strong understanding of UKOT environments, like UKOTCF. Furthermore, it is important that these UK Government bodies receive the required funding from the UK Government – but not via grant funds previously devoted to supporting effective NGOs and UKOT bodies (para 19).

G. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee stresses that UK Government grant funds for environmental conservation in the UKOTs must not be reduced in future UK Government cuts. They are central to the stability and long-term planning of conservation activities that are, and will be, crucial to the survival of many of the endemic wildlife and special environments of the UKOTs and UK's fulfilling its international commitments (para 22).

H. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee calls on Darwin Plus to be mindful of the comments made by the Statements

of the meetings of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers' Council in order to counter the issues, including those above, identified as reducing the effectiveness of the deployment of UK funds. Much of the progress in conservation has depended on NGOs deploying their staff and volunteers; it is important that grants reinforce that, while recognising that the UKOT remit of DEFRA's own agencies (and some other bodies) with their own operational support and less dependent on grants have grown recently. Personnel on the Darwin Plus panel and those administering the funds should have a comprehensive and up-to-date understanding of the priorities in the UKOTs; and sufficient grant-support is made available for continuing and building on work that has already proven to be effective. Given the continuing relevance and importance of the Environment Charters to UKOT environments, fulfilling them needs to remain a core role in Darwin Plus (para 23).

I. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges the UK Government to continue its valuable role in UKOT marine conservation. This role includes ensuring that any UKOT marine conservation initiatives are context-appropriate (e.g. some cases might require a no-take zone, whereas others might require a sustainable offtake approach), and providing the necessary resources for management, enforcement, and monitoring. There is no one-size-fits-all, but a programme which is supportive and progressive could succeed (para 24).

J. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee calls for CSSF's application and funding procedures be made transparent (para 24).

K. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee emphasises that UK Government should bear in mind that most of the endemics [species which occur naturally nowhere else] which depend on the UKOTs are terrestrial, and important work on them should not suffer neglect due to concentration of resources in the marine realm (para 24).

L. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges the UK Government to encourage and support due engagement with all relevant sectors of society in UKOT environment work in which it is involved, and that proper credit is given to them by the UK Government when it communicates progress (para 25).

M. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges Ministers in UK Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport to give a direction to the Lottery distributing bodies to make National Lottery funding available to UKOTs, and that the Lottery bodies change policy accordingly, and set up systems for applications that includes an office and supporting committee that understand the UKOTs (para 26).

N. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges UK Government to earmark some of its International Climate Change Fund for relevant UKOT-based work (para 27).

O. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges the UK Research Institutes to develop further the inclusion of UKOT environmental bodies as partners for grant funding (para 28).

P. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges UK Government to follow the "Framework on Best Practice" in respect of research and conservation and encourage others to do so (para 29).

Q. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges the UK Government to value NGOs as assets in matters related to the environment of the UKOTs (para 30).

R. UKOTCF emphasises that it is important for both the UK and UKOTs that UKOTCF continues to carry out periodic reviews of UKOT biodiversity conservation. The UK Government should therefore resume contributing significantly towards the costs of doing so (para 31).

S. UKOTCF recommends that the UK Parliament advocates for continued funds for UKOT biodiversity conservation, including Darwin Plus, to not be vulnerable to future cuts, and, if anything, to be increased and improved; as well as, for other funds to be made available (e.g. National Lottery funds and International Climate Change Fund) (para 33i).

T. UKOTCF recommends that the UK Parliament encourages its own and UK Government personnel and bodies to engage actively and enthusiastically with NGOs, including with UKOTCF (para 33iii).

U. UKOTCF recommends that the UK Parliament encourages the UK Government to support research to inform conservation efforts in the UKOTs, as well as encourage and support initiatives to treat UKOT researchers as equal partners in terms of resources and recognition (para 33iv).

V. UKOTCF recommends that the UK Parliament encourages the UK Government to support proven initiatives (e.g. conferences, webinars, workshops) that allow key UKOT personnel and bodies to meet and exchange knowledge, especially about issues that they may well have in common (e.g. invasive species, unsustainable development, climate change). Importantly, such initiatives enable them to protect UKOT wildlife and environments more effectively and efficiently. (para 33v).

W. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges UK Government to provide sufficient help, directly or indirectly (e.g. via NGOs) to UKOTs that need assistance with drafting and implementing environmental legislation, as it has done recently with biosecurity legislation through its work with the GB Non-Native Secretariat, and Freedom of Information legislation. This is in line with the UK Government's responsibility for good governance in the UKOTs, and could well benefit UKOT wildlife and environments. This is especially important for environmental legislation that is needed to align with international commitments (paras 34 & 35).

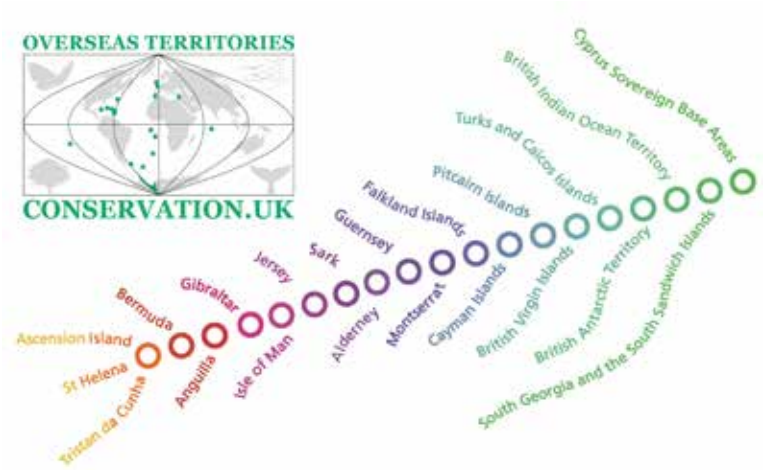
X. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges the UK Government to establish systems to ensure that UKOTs are represented as full members of UK delegations to CoPs and other relevant meetings (para 36).

Y. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges UK Government to assist UKOTs fulfilling environmental convention reporting requirements and presses for these to be scaled appropriately for the UKOTs (para 37).

Z. UKOTCF recommends that the Committee urges the UK Government to provide sufficient support for climate-change mitigation work in the UKOTs, which, in many cases, will involve maintaining, or even bolstering, their natural assets (e.g. mangroves to buffer against storms) (para 38).

Council of Environment Ministers (or equivalents) of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies: 7th meeting, Tuesday 21st November 2023

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



Seventh UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council Meeting, 21st November 2023

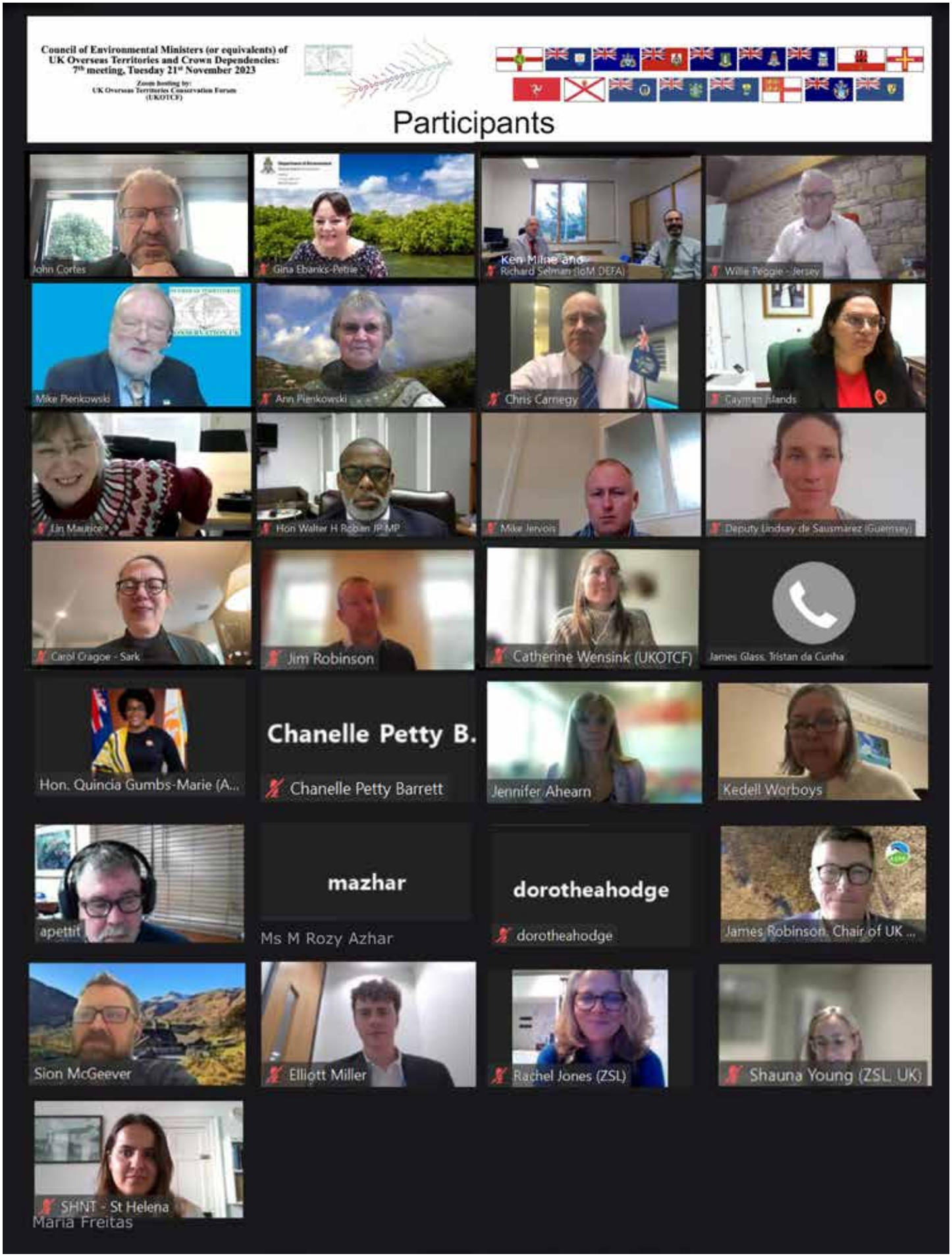
UKOTCF was pleased to be asked again by the Council of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers (and their equivalents in non-ministerial systems) to provide the secretariat for their meeting and again to host it on UKOTCF's Zoom platform.

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, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change, Heritage, Technical Services and Transport, Gibraltar (accompanied, off screen, by Dr Liesl Mesilio, CEO & Chief Scientist, Department of the Environment, Heritage and Climate Change)*
Ms Gina Ebanks-Petrie, *Director of Environment, Cayman Islands*
Mr Ken Milne, *Director of Environment, and Dr Richard Selman, Head of Ecosystems, Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture, Isle of Man*
Mr Willie Peggie, *Group Director - Natural Environment, States of Jersey*
Dr Mike Pienkowski, *Chairman, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (Secretariat)*
Mrs Ann Pienkowski, *Environmental Education Coordinator, and Secretary of the Wider Caribbean Working Group, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (Secretariat)*
Mr Chris Carnegy, *UK Representative, Tristan da Cunha*
Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, *Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency, Cayman Islands*
States Member Lin Maurice, *Chair of the General Services Committee, States of Alderney*
The Hon. Walter H Roban, JP, MP, *Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs, Bermuda*
Mr Mike Jervois, *Biodiversity Protection Advisor, Falkland Islands Government*
Deputy Lindsay De Sausmarez, *President of the Committee for the Environment & Infrastructure, States of Guernsey*
Dr Carol Cragoe, *La Société Sercquaise, Sark*
Mr Jim Robinson, *Director – Natural Environment, States of Guernsey*
Mrs Catherine Wensink, *Executive Director, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (Secretariat)*
Mr James Glass, *Chief Islander and Director of Fisheries, Tristan da Cunha*
Hon. Quincia M. Gumbs-Marie, *Minister of Sustainability, Innovation and the Environment, Anguilla*
Ms Chanelle Petty Barrett, *Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Sustainability, Innovation and the Environment, Anguilla*
Ms Jennifer Ahearn, *Chief Officer, Ministry for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency, Cayman Islands*
Mrs Kedell Worboys, *UK Representative, St Helena*
Mr Andrew Pettit, *Director of Environment, Bermuda*
Ms M. Rozy Azhar, *Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Home Affairs, Bermuda*
Ms Dorothea Hodge, *UK Representative, Anguilla*
Dr James Robinson, *Chair of IUCN-UK Protected Areas Working Group*
Mr Sion McGeever, *Deputy Director for Access, Landscapes, Peatland and Soil, UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*
Mr Elliott Miller, *Team-leader on 30-by-30, UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*
Ms Rachel Jones, *Zoological Society of London*
Ms Shauna Young, *Zoological Society of London*
Ms Maria Freitas, *St Helena National Trust*
Not captured on screen: Ms Terri Clingham, *Environment, Natural Resources and Planning, St Helena*

Apologies for absence
[British] Virgin Islands; Pitcairn; Turks & Caicos Islands


Council of Environmental Ministers (or equivalents) of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies: 7th meeting, Tuesday 21st November 2023
Zoom hosting by: UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF)
Participants
John Cortes
Gina Ebanks-Petrie
Ken Milne and Richard Selman (IoM DEFA)
Willie Peggie - Jersey
Mike Pienkowski
Ann Pienkowski
Chris Carnegy
Cayman Islands
Lin Maurice
Hon Walter H Roban JP MP
Mike Jervois
Deputy Lindsay de Sausmarez (Guernsey)
Carol Cragoe - Sark
Jim Robinson
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James Robinson, Chair of UK ...
Sion McGeever
Elliott Miller
Rachel Jones (ZSL)
Shauna Young (ZSL UK)
SHNT - St Helena
Maria Freitas

Seventh UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council Meeting, 21 November 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.

We received presentations relating to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity's Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework commitment to conserve 30% of land and sea areas by 2030, from the IUCN-UK Protected Areas Working Group (PAWG) on that Group's work and impending report on matching types of protected areas in UK to 30-by-30 requirements, Defra on the approach in England to 30-by-30 on land, and from several colleagues on their approaches and challenges on this issue. Several general points made in discussions included: the sharing of good news on progress; the importance of clear objectives, approaches developed to achieve these, monitoring, adjustment of approaches in the light of this, open-ness and reporting, as well as co-operation between territories and with others, collaboration with NGOs and recognition of their work, and inclusiveness; the challenges of enforcement, especially in extensive marine areas, where the lack of appropriate patrol vessels is a major challenge even when some coverage can be given by satellite surveillance; the challenges of: limited human capacity in small communities; integration with other economically necessary land- and sea-uses; remoteness; the continued major threats from invasive non-native species; and others. We welcomed the offer by UKOTCF and PAWG to use the approach of the UK analysis to do similarly for one or two pilot UKOTs or CDs

We welcomed presentations on the work coordinated by Ascension Island Government, St Helena National Trust, St Helena Government and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), to address the problem of plastic pollution and the negotiations around the UN Global Plastics Treaty. The trans-boundary nature of the problem was stressed, as was the nature of the substrate which could bring plastic waste to key wildlife sites, *e.g.* deep sand is needed for turtle-nesting but also favours plastic-accumulation. Local uses for recycling plastic are needed, using processes appropriate for small, in some cases remote, territories. We heard some examples of new emerging technologies that could provide sustainable solutions to utilising the never-ending tides of plastics that wash up on shorelines. At least 8 territories were already involved in the project, which is centred on community needs and participation, and there was enthusiasm on all sides to bring in more.

We discussed the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference which will convene from 30 November to 12 December 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). Those participating invited any input from those who would not and undertook to supply a report after the meeting. We welcomed and provided support for the UKOT Climate Change Pledge, prepared by the UK Overseas Territories Association (UKOTA), building on our united voice at COP26. We agreed that we are louder with one voice on this issue which impacts us all. We thank UKOTA for their support.

We discussed the challenges, including the risk of fire as well as of pollution, from lithium-ion batteries and their disposal, and agreed that should be a topic at our next meeting. The topic of vapes, especially disposal ones and – whilst noting the benefits of vapes to present smokers – compared our approaches to addressing their threats both to the health of children and other non-smokers and to the environment.

We underlined the value of these meetings, which give us the opportunity to discuss issues and approaches shared by the participants as elected environmental leaders in the UKOTs and CDs, with also possibilities to invite to certain sessions within the meetings UK ministers to enable time-efficient discussion, as well as to invite in certain sessions UK government officials or our own, and NGOs or others, to provide presentations on, and discuss, particular topics. We thanked UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum for continuing to organise these meetings and asked them to organise the next, by remote communications in May 2024, when we would like to discuss conferences of the parties to environmental conventions, lithium-ion batteries and other topics, and receive an update on plastic pollution.

Main Text

1. We, the portfolio holders for the environment in our respective territories or dependencies, held our seventh Environment Ministers' Council meeting by Zoom on Tuesday 21st November 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.

2. The UKOTs boast some of the world's most delicate and complex ecosystems and habitats, with at least 3,300 species which occur nowhere else in the world. Collectively, they harbour a truly staggering amount of biodiversity, which in turn provides them with many goods and services (*e.g.* fishing, tourism, storm-protection, renewable energy supply). In terms of endemic species (*i.e.* those occurring nowhere else), proportions of other species supported, sensitive ecosystems and threatened species, they hold even greater importance than that of the metropolitan UK. In fact, an estimated 90% of the biodiversity for which UK is internationally responsible is in the UKOTs, rather than in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

3. 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 vital to the delivery of UK's global environmental promises.

4. 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.

5. We again recall our governments' commitments to biodiversity conservation and sustainable development by choosing to be included in various international environmental agreements. 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.

6. We received a presentation relating to the 30-by-30 commitments[1] from Dr James Robinson, Chair of IUCN-UK Protected Areas Working Group, updating from his presentation to our meeting a year ago on that Group's work and impending report on matching types of protected areas in UK to 30-by-30 requirements and requested that report, when published, be circulated to us by the Secretariat. We welcomed the offer by UKOTCF and Dr Robinson to use volunteer support from some of the persons who worked on the UK analysis to do similarly for one or two pilot UKOTs or CDs, and encouraged each other to contact UKOTCF to explore, as one did during the meeting.

7. We received also a presentation from Mr Sion McGeever, Deputy Director for Access, Landscapes, Peatland and Soil, UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with his colleague, Mr Elliott Miller, on the approach in England to 30-by-30 on land, the presenters noting that work was in progress on marine areas too (and in the other countries of UK) but that they were aware of the very great progress the UKOTs were making in marine protected areas. Stressed were: it is up to individual UKOTs and CDs to decide how to approach the issue; the need for implementing well designed management plans as well as effective protection; there are many approaches that can be made to achieve the ends, rather than some prescribed route; the appropriateness of individuals who provide the public goods of environmental conservation being paid from public funds; and the importance of NGO involvement at all stages. The offer of these Defra officials to supply via the Secretariat their report, when published, and to be available for advice was noted with thanks. We encouraged that the approach be shared across governmental departments, not just environmental ones.

8. We enjoyed also presentations from colleagues on the experiences and challenges in their own territories:

- Mike Jervois, Biodiversity Protection Advisor, Falkland Islands Government, on plans for their new national park, ambitions for new marine managed areas, and a forthcoming review of the entire terrestrial reserve network.
- UK representative, on behalf of Chief Islander James Glass, on the importance of Tristan da Cunha for endemic species and others of global importance, and noting that it is way past its 30-by-30 targets with 40% of land and 90% of sea protected, as well as an exemplary sustainably managed fishery. He noted that Tristan, alongside other territories, had allowed UK to reach its marine area protection targets in the previous (Aichi) targets. The Atlantic Guardians initiative is providing a platform for community-led marine conservation to inspire others.
- Dr Richard Selman, Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture, outlined a very public participatory approach, with much online material (with safeguards for personal privacy) and close collaboration with the NGO Manx Wildlife Trust as well as farming, fisheries and other partners. Overall 20% of land and 11% of marine areas are protected and this will increase as other types of protection are included. However, 87% of the Isle of Man's total area within the 12-nautical-mile limit is marine, so that much work is in progress to consider and negotiate options there.
- Lin Maurice, Chair, General Services Committee, noted that Alderney had in 2005 designated 15,629 hectares (approximately 12%) of marine habitat under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands for conservation and sustainable use; and also the challenges of agreeing a strategy and a new approach addressing agriculture and fisheries alongside conservation.
- Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency, on Safeguarding Biodiversity and Habitats in the Cayman Islands, noting that approximately 12% of their terrestrial environment is protected, with areas being added. Challenges include; rapid land-use change and illegal land-clearing; lack of funds for protection; lack of buy-in for conservation agreements; pollution; illegal, unregulated and unreported fishing; and climate-change.

9. Several general points were made in discussions:

- The sharing of good news on progress (and we encouraged each other to provide brief summaries of this, to circulate ourselves and by the Secretariat);
- The importance of clear objectives, approaches developed to achieve these, monitoring, adjustment of approaches in the light of this, open-ness and reporting, as well a co-operation between territories and with others, collaboration with NGOs and recognition of their work, and inclusiveness;
- The challenges of enforcement, especially in extensive marine areas, where the lack of appropriate patrol vessels is a major challenge even when some coverage can be given by satellite surveillance;
- The challenges of: limited human capacity in small communities; integration with other economically necessary land- and sea-uses, *e.g.* agriculture, fisheries and tourism; remoteness, leading to higher costs and longer lead times and difficulty in securing support from elsewhere; physical challenges;
- The continued major threats from invasive non-native species, and the need for action to prevent further introductions and remove or manage those already introduced by previous human action;
- The need to encourage fulfilment of the Paris Agreement;
- The need for territories to shape their own solutions but informed by the experience of others.

10. We welcomed presentations on the work coordinated by Ascension Island Government, St Helena National Trust, St Helena Government and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), to address the problem of plastic pollution and the negotiations around the UN Global Plastics Treaty. The presentations were:

- Shauna Young, ZSL: Introduction to ZSL's plastics work across the UKOTs, including the UKOTs steering group being built and the UN Global Plastics Treaty work ZSL is leading on.

1 by 2030 at least 30% of terrestrial, inland water, and of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem functions and services, are effectively conserved and managed through ecologically representative, well-connected and equitably governed systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, … and integrated into wider landscapes, seascapes and the ocean, while ensuring that any sustainable use, where appropriate in such areas, is fully consistent with conservation outcomes,…

- Rachel Jones, ZSL: ZSL's plastics project in Chagos (BIOT) – wildlife impacts and local solutions
- Maria Freitas, St Helena National Trust; and Tobias Capel, Ascension Island Government: South Atlantic Plastics Project in St Helena and Ascension.

11. The trans-boundary nature of the problem was stressed, as was the nature of the substrate could bring plastic waste to key wildlife sites; for example, deep sand is needed for turtle-nesting but also favours plastic-accumulation. Local uses for recycling plastic are needed, using processes appropriate for small, in some cases remote, territories. In this regard, investigation of new technologies able to recycle some plastics into an equivalent of plywood is under investigation; the report of this, once published, would be made available for circulation via the Secretariat. At least 8 territories were already involved in the project, which is centred on community needs and participation, and there was enthusiasm on all sides to bring in more. Lively discussion followed, and we asked the Secretariat to investigate making these and as many as possible of other presentations to the meeting available to use more widely.

12. We discussed the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (COP28) which will convene from 30 November to 12 December 2023 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE). Bermuda is resourcing coordination between UKOT delegates, and those participating invited any input from those (UKOT or CD) who would not; they undertook to supply a report after the meeting. Mrs Kedell Warboys had asked the Secretariat to circulate an updated version of the UKOT Climate Change Pledge that was prepared by UKOTA and made at COP26:

> **United Kingdom Overseas Territories Climate Change Pledge**
>
> We, the Governments of the United Kingdom Overseas Territories have a shared ambition to work towards Net Zero as we are all on the front line of climate change. We are custodians of internationally important habitats which span the globe from the Antarctic to the Caribbean, the South Atlantic to the Indian Ocean. Together with the UK we represent the world's fifth largest marine estate; over 90% of the UK's biodiversity; and are essential to the UK meeting its pledge by 2030 to protect 30% of the world's oceans. Climate change will have a profound impact upon our environments, economies and societies, a failure to act will impact not just us, but our children and all generations to come. To overcome the climate crisis facing our communities we must increase global solidarity and align our actions.
>
> As coastal and island communities, our economies rely upon maintaining healthy, sustainable marine and terrestrial environments. We commit to take action to protect our fisheries resources and to conserve and, wherever possible, restore our marine ecosystems and biodiversity. Building on the good work already undertaken by the Overseas Territories, we reaffirm an alliance to take action to tackle the harmful effects of plastic pollution and marine litter, often as a result of other countries which have impacted our shores.
>
> Our biodiversity, terrestrial and marine, support not only our wellbeing, but also contribute to our uniqueness, our nature-based fight against climate change and are important to those of us where tourism makes an important contribution to our economies.
>
> It is imperative that all nations prioritise their response to prevent further acceleration of human-induced global warming, and collectively commit to developing preventative measures to ensure the surface temperature does not exceed an increase of 1.5C.
>
> We, as individual Territories, pledge to work with the UK Government to develop Territory-led actions that tackle the specific challenges climate changes poses for each of us, to use our oceans and natural resources sustainably, for the benefit of current and future generations, and to take action to protect and restore our biodiversity.
>
> As Overseas Territories we pledge to work with others in a spirit of cooperation to secure meaningful outcomes from COP28 that will make a tangible difference in tackling the impacts of climate change in our territories.

We approved that document and also thanked UKOTA for this and their other support.

13. At the suggestion of States Member Lin Maurice, we discussed the challenges, including the risk of fire as well as of pollution, from lithium-ion batteries and their disposal, and agreed that, given that it was a challenge shared by many UKOTs, it should be a topic at our next meeting. The need for separate arrangements from other batteries for their collection and recycling was noted. The topic of vapes, especially disposal ones and – whilst noting the benefits of vapes to present smokers – compared our approaches to addressing their threats both to the health of children and other non-smokers and to the environment.

14. We underlined the value of these meetings, which give us the opportunity to discuss issues and approaches shared by the participants as elected environmental leaders in the UKOTs and CDs, with also possibilities to invite to certain sessions within the meetings UK ministers to enable time-efficient discussion, as well as to invite in certain sessions UK government officials or our own, and NGOs or others, to provide presentations on, and discuss, particular topics. We thanked UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum for continuing to organise these meetings and asked them to organise the next, by remote communications in May 2024, when we would like to discuss conferences of the parties to environmental conventions, lithium-ion batteries and other topics, and receive an update on plastic pollution.

Appendix: List of Ministers and other lead representatives participating

Alderney: States Member Lin Maurice, Chair of the General Services Committee, 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: Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency

Falkland Islands: Mr Mike Jervois, Biodiversity Protection Advisor (on behalf of Hon. Pete Biggs MLA, portfolio holder for Environment and Public Infrastructure)

Gibraltar: Hon. Prof. John Cortés, Minister for Education, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change, Heritage, Technical Services and Transport

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

Isle of Man: Mr Ken Milne, Director of Environment, and Dr Richard Selman, Head of Ecosystems (representing 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: Mrs Kedell Worboys, St Helena UK Representative (representing Minister Christine Scipio, Minister of Environment)

Sark: Dr Carol Cragoe, 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 James Glass, Chief Islander

Apologies for absence

[British] Virgin Islands; Pitcairn; Turks & Caicos Islands

Some ministerial changes

UK

In November, the Rt Hon Steve Barclay MP was appointd Secretary of State for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, replacing the Rt Hon Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, who has left the government.

Following the resignation of Lord (Zak) Goldmith in June, the Prime Minister left the role of ministerial responsibility for UK Overseas Territories vacant for some time before downgrading it from Minister of State to Parliamentary Under-Secretary level, appointing David Rutley MP to the role. However, in November the lead was returned to Minister of State level by the appointment of Lord (Richard) Benyon as Minister of State for Overseas Territories, Commonwealth, Energy, Climate and Environment. Lord Benyon remains also a Minister of State at the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra). Also in November, the Prime Minister arranged for the former Prime Minister (2010-2016) David Cameron to be given a seat in the House of Lords, as the Rt Hon. the Lord Cameron of Chipping Norton, and appointed Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development.

In the Official Opposition (the Labour Party), Steve Reed MP has been appointed Shadow Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

The Rt Hon David Lammy MP is Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs. Stephen Doughty MP is Shadow Minister for the Overseas Territories (and for Europe and North America).

Gibraltar

Gibraltar held a General Election in October. In a close race, the existing govenment was re-elected. Environmenal responsibility remains with Hon. Prof. John Cortés, who is now Minister for Education, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change, Heritage, Technical Services and Transport.

Cayman Islands

In November, the ministerial responsibilities in the Cayman Islands government were reorganised. Premier Hon Wayne Panton (with a strong interest in the environment but many other responsibilities too) split off, from his own direct ministry, environmental matters, with Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks as Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency.

National Trust for the Cayman Islands supports young people at climate COP

Several Environment Ministers from the UKOTs were expecting to attend the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in the United Arab Emirates. As they did in Glasgow, the National Trust for the Cayman Islands has supported the involvement of young Caymanians in attending (photo below) to represent the views of the young persons on the island.

It is possible to follow their journey on the National Trust for the Cayman Islands' Facebook page.

Joint Ministerial Council

The Overseas Territories Joint Ministerial Council (JMC) brings together political leaders from the UK Overseas Territories and UK Ministers. Its postponed November 2022 meeting eventually met in May (see *Forum News* 58).

Getting back on the normal schedule, it met again in London on 15-16 November.

It is understood that, on this occasion, the agenda was primarily on matters other than the environment.

France launches eco-research scheme for its overseas territories

Earlier this year, the French Government announced the launch of an environmental research programme in France's overseas territories. Scientists will get €15 million to monitor threats to fragile terrestrial and marine environments. This is part of the France 2030 investment plan and is overseen by the Institute for Development Research.

IRD is a multidisciplinary French public research organization committed, for nearly 80 years, to equitable partnerships with countries in the Global South and in the French overseas territories.

Darwin Plus Local Projects 2023, round 2

The first round of Darwin Plus Local projects grants (part of the UK Government's Biodiversity Challenge Funds) were listed in Forum News 58. Below are the results of round 2, as announced by Defra. Round 3 closed in December, with Round 4 expected in 2024.

Project	Title and duration	Amount	Lead; partners	Territory
DPL00047	Increasing environmental monitoring capacity on FI: a Thermal Imaging UAV 2023-10-01 - 2024-03-31	£24,570.00	SAERI - South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute	Falkland Islands
DPL00048	Native Plant Nurseries Refurbishments for Habitat Restoration and Climate-Friendly Landscapes 2023-10-01 - 2024-03-31	£49,300.00	Department of Environment and Coastal Resources	Turks and Caicos Islands
DPL00049	Beyond The Reef BVI- Ghost Gear Cleanup 2023-10-01 - 2024-03-01	£0.00 [sic]	Beyond The Reef	British Virgin Islands
DPL00050	Increasing Cayman Youth Environmental Awareness Through Immersive Education 2023-10-01 - 2024-03-31	£38,657.00	Central Caribbean Marine Institute	Cayman Islands
DPL00051	Enquiry into the Pontodrilus sp. earthworm's consumption of sargassum seaweed 2023-10-02 - 2024-03-31	£48,501.00	Good Moon Farm	British Virgin Islands
DPL00052	Unveiling the Unrecognized: Sea Cucumbers' Role in Coral Reef Health 2023-10-01 - 2024-03-31	£49,203.00	Central Caribbean Marine Institute	Cayman Islands
DPL00053	Emergency Recovery Plan for the world's rarest coral, Ctenella chagius 2023-10-01 - 2023-10-31	£49,576.00	University of Oxford	British Indian Ocean Territory
DPL00054	Can crushed recycled glass help solve environmental problems in Cayman 2023-10-01 - 2024-03-31	£35,408.00	Junk	Cayman Islands
DPL00055	Cost-effective habitat monitoring to understand seagrass decline in Bermuda 2023-10-02 - 2024-03-31	£48,430.00	Station-B	Bermuda
DPL00056	Hedgehog conservation initiative at the Western SBAs Cyprus 2023-10-02 - 2024-03-31	£19,985.00	Eloise Springate and Department of Environment, Republic of Cyprus, Enalia Physis	Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia (on Cyprus)
DPL00057	Oyster restoration in British Gibraltar Territorial Waters: locating suitable sites 2023-10-01 - 2024-03-31	£37,245.00	University of Gibraltar	Gibraltar
DPL00058	Fire Contingency Planning for Offshore Islands 2023-10-02 - 2024-03-29	£48,118.00	Falklands Conservation	Falkland Islands
DPL00059	Permanent survey plots for baseline and long-term woodland ecological assessment 2023-10-02 - 2024-03-31	£42,583.00	The Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park (QEIIBP)	Cayman Islands
DPL00061	Demonstrating Adaptation and Sustainability at the Montserrat National Trust's Botanical Gardens 2023-10-01 - 2024-03-31	£44,988.00	Montserrat National Trust	Montserrat

A network for early career researchers holds it first meeting

For emerging academics and researchers, taking part in discussion groups and technical meetings such as conferences can have a profound impact on their research and communication of their work.

Researcher events are a chance to share research, learn about the latest developments in similar areas of work, learning from others and building valuable professional networks. The benefit to researchers is that they are better informed and connected with new knowledge that can be shared among colleagues and peers.

This Early Career Research Group has been established by the University of Gibraltar, Jersey International Centre for Advanced Studies (JICAS) and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF). It can recognise the valuable research being undertaken in or in conjunction with/across UKOTs and Crown Dependencies which leads to knowledge-transfer and capacity-building opportunities. While focusing on UKOTs and CDs or small island jurisdictions, it provides also a critical mass for those working in some of the most biodiverse regions of the world.

In November, the first meeting was held hosted by UKOTCF with Dr Awantha Dissanyake from the University of Gibraltar. Ten PhD students attended. It was an opportunity for some of the students to present posters and short presentations on their research.

Participants are conducting research in Anguilla, Bermuda, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Gibraltar, and Jersey. Research studies included:

- Monitoring of vulnerable priority habitats in Gibraltar
- Marine Invasive Species of Gibraltar
- Conservation advice for Marine Areas in Gibraltar
- Feeding ecology of an Apex predator
- Marine Recreational Fishing Impacts in Gibraltar
- Barbary Macaques in Gibraltar
- Other Area-Based Effective Conservation Measures
- Bermuda's vegetation communities: origin and ecology of the invasive plant species
- Mow vs Moo: Restoring Natural Grazing Equilibriums for Carbon Sequestration and Biodiversity gain across the Channel Islands
- Iguana-based projects in the Caribbean UKOTs
- Carbon credit project related to rodent eradication in UKOTs
- Assessing the Macroalgae Contributions toward Jersey's Blue Carbon
- Medicinal plants in Cayman

ECRN aims to: ***facilitate networking opportunities:*** connect researchers across disciplines, institutions, and geographic locations to foster collaboration, knowledge exchange, and interdisciplinary research across the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies and beyond; ***enhance professional development:*** provide resources, discussion space, mentorship, and training programmes to support researchers in developing essential skills, including research methodology, grant and technical writing, project management, and communication & outreach; ***promote research dissemination:*** encourage researchers to share their findings and insights through technical meetings (*e.g.* workshops, conferences), publications, and other platforms, thereby increasing their visibility and impact; ***create a supportive community*** by establishing a supportive and inclusive community that fosters peer-to-peer learning, emotional support, and camaraderie among researchers.

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/.