

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Annual Report April 2023 - March 2024

Report of Council

Overview

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

Several projects are continuing with partners in the UKOTs, focusing on community conservation and partnerships. They dominate the work we are doing, as there are strict grant requirements which must be fulfilled. These projects have been designed at the request of bodies in the UKOTs seeking additional administrative and technical support, providing a personnel resource service to our partners. This enables us to be resource-enhancing and provides a buffer for times when our partners have gaps in personnel or resources. This has been a strength of the Forum for many years and, whilst it is small in itself, it always tries to meet requests from conservation practitioners in the UKOTs and CDs whatever they might be.

To support some of the influencing, awareness-raising, information services the Forum provides, we require resources ourselves. We were delighted to have received a third grant from the Garfield Weston

Foundation this year. It will allow us to deliver some of the core activities as well as enhance some of the project work, we are committed to do.

Several new persons joined our team this year and they have been providing assistance in a variety of ways to the Forum, but also to conservation in general in the UKOTs and CDs.

Organisational Development

The *Hidden Histories* project came to an end in March 2023. This project was full of outputs, some expected and some unexpected. With the start of some other work inspired by this, the Forum was provided with an opportunity to bring in a member of the *Hidden Histories* team tempted by the flexibility and focus on UKOTs & CDs that working with the Forum provides. Jodey Peyton, an ecologist at the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, was moving to Austria to work for the International Institute for Applied Systems Analysis (IIASA), but still wanted to remain involved with UKOTs & CDs after working with colleagues on Cayman, Cyprus, British Indian Ocean Territory and St Helena. Already in a short time Jodey has opened up new avenues and partnerships that will be explored in the next few years. Jodey has been working with Council member Keith Bensusan and other partners on Gibraltar, on initiatives to enhance researcher networks and make best use of the technical experts that are being built up in the UKOTs and can benefit others as well as on many other things including support to the working groups (having already had an impact as the new Secretary of SOWG), project management and developing new projects.

Building on the work of another Council member, Leigh Morris, who has been a driving force in developing novel approaches to funding conservation work, we welcomed input from Robin Clough, a UK-born entrepreneur with a background in natural sciences. Robin has been providing strategic advice and support as we open up a world of possibility by working with the private sector bodies with compatible desires to see a natural world rich in biodiversity and healthy, vibrant communities.

A third grant was awarded to UKOTCF by the Garfield Weston Foundation this year. In the previous year, it had supported ongoing work including:



Left: UKOTCF Council member and CEO of Manx Wildlife Trust conducts a horticultural course in Montserrat at part of the UKOTCF/MNT Adopt a Home for Wildlife project. Image: Montserrat National Trust.

Right: Title slide from Rhian Guillem's presentation on the ants of Diego Garcia, British Indian Ocean Territory, Building knowledge on invasive non-native species in Diego Garcia project, at the webinar "Ants of the UKOTs" on 29 November 2023, supported by UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, British Indian Ocean Territory Administration, Darwin Plus, Gibraltar Botanic Gardens and UKOTCF and organised by a team including UKOTCF Council member Dr Keith Bensusan and Jodey Peyton, Secretary of UKOTCF's Southern Oceans Working Group.



the organisation of the remote meeting of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers; UKOTCF's seminars for conservation practitioners; support capacity in the UKOTs, including support for NGOs, young people (e.g. through higher education as mentioned with new work with JICAS (the Jersey International Centre for Advanced Studies); we aim to facilitate MSc students and PhD students) throughout the year; responding (and encouraging those in UKOTs to respond) to UK Parliamentary Inquiries; expanding on work of the Darwin Plus and other projects.

We welcomed a new associate member, the Nautilus Project, to our network. Based in Gibraltar, it aims to raise awareness of environmental issues in schools and in small groups. It was founded in 2015 by several passionate divers undertaking projects such as installing artificial reefs in waters around Gibraltar, beach clean-ups and delivering educational programmes.

Several volunteer researchers have worked with us throughout the year including Benjamin Parker and Cintia Biryani to enable us to collate information on various large tasks such as a review of impacts of UKOTCF and background material for a response to UK Parliamentary Inquiries.

Projects

We are always looking at ways to expand the impact of project work and sometimes this means incorporating opportunities of technical specialists to support and build capacity. In May, Council Member and Chief Executive Officer of the Manx Wildlife Trust, Leigh Morris, volunteered to use annual leave to visit Montserrat. The purpose was to help build the horticultural skills of the Montserrat National Trust. This was specifically to help develop the nursery plant propagation at the MNT botanical garden, to increase local plant production in order to support both the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project, part-funded by a Darwin Plus grant (DPLUS155) and the *Planning Toolkit* project (DPLUS192). In addition, he engaged more widely with the Montserrat Government Departments of Agriculture and Environment, local farmers, secondary school, and public. A full article is available on the website. Leigh had followed up on the possibility of twinning secondary schools on Montserrat with the Isle of Man. A meeting with teachers and Manx Wildlife Trust and One World Island of Man was held in November.

In June personnel visited Montserrat to support the mid-term review of the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* requested by NIRAS/LTS (the administrator of the Darwin Plus grants). For best use of project resources, the opportunity was taken to include several other meetings and project activities, making the most of the trip. This required quite a lot of preparation and meant time away from project management. However, the project has made good progress. A first full year report was submitted on time by the end of April 2023 and a half-year report in October. Some new staff at the Montserrat National Trust should help to address some of the challenges of the first year including financial records and reporting, which continues to be a burden to Darwin grantees.

The visit included: meetings with Director of Montserrat National Trust to share project documents and progress; King's Birthday Parade attendance; a hike to Dry Waterfall; *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* site-visits to: Belham River Mouth, both sites off Hibiscus Drive, Cassava Ghaut, Pipers Lot, Lookout Primary School and Lawyers Mountain; a meeting with the Governor; appearances on the *MNT Heritage Radio Show*; a regular project team meeting; and a tour of Native Plant Nursery.

In April the Darwin-Plus-funded project *Delivering biodiversity and*



The Niras team supporting Darwin Plus and Adopt a Home for Wildlife team members discuss the work on Montserrat national radio ZJB. Unfortunately, overwork at Niras has prevented their report, due within a few weeks of the visit, being produced. Image: ZJB.



UKOTCF Executive Director Catherine Wensink at the launch of the Biodiversity and Well-being toolkit project at Montserrat National Trust. Image: MNT.

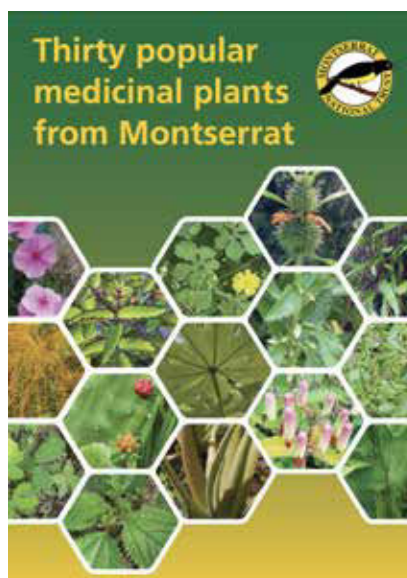
human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development (DPLUS192), with working title *Biodiversity and Well-being toolkit* or just *Toolkit* began. UKOTCF and Montserrat National Trust personnel met with Chief Planning Officer Jerome Meade to discuss the project and invited him to the official on-island project launch on 20th June. This was attended by HE Governor Sarah Tucker and Hon. Samuel Joseph, Deputy Premier and Minister for Communication, Works and Labour, and at least 28 persons; it was live-streamed by ZJB radio. At the request of Montserrat national radio ZJB, personnel gave a telephone interview on these projects for the *Culture Programme* on 24th June, immediately before driving to the airport to return home.

Overall, the project aims to (1) bring together voices that may not otherwise feed into public consultations; (2) create a biodiversity and human-well-being toolkit for the community, physical planners and developers; (3) monitor and evaluate outcomes for biodiversity and human well-being; (4) share outcomes with other UKOTs via existing knowledge-sharing networks. It built on ideas generated with the team on Montserrat and other newer partners including UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and Meise Botanic Gardens.

One of the first outputs of the projects was bringing together information gathered by young cadets (youth volunteers with Montserrat National Trust) from the elders in the community on traditional medicinal use of plants. The first edition published as part of the *Hidden Histories* project in 2022 included fifteen plants. The second edition, expanded to include thirty plants with, for each, a full colour image, a description, note on location found around Montserrat (where known) and their traditional use, was designed and printed by the Field Studies Council in the UK. To save on printing and shipping costs, this was delivered to Montserrat by project team members and will continue on forthcoming trips. UKOTCF is the formal publisher and Montserrat National Trust the author. It was launched at the Trust's Flower Show and Tea party, an annual event during St Patrick's Week. Sales have generated some income for the Trust.

Throughout the year, the team has conducted several consultations with the local community to understand how the Toolkit could develop management options which would benefit the islands' biodiversity and its people. The first half-year report was submitted to NIRAS/LTS in October.

UKOTCF continues to work with the Montserrat National Trust on the *EcoPlay* project, including the earlier sourcing of *pro bono* architect and the ongoing fund-raising.



Awareness raising and information management

Forum News 58 was published and circulated in July and *Forum News 59* was published in December. The newsletter provides both conservation news from *An early product for the Toolkit project: the second, double-size edition of the Montserrat traditional medicinal plants book*. Image: UKOTCF



First pages of recent issues of UKOTCF main newsletter, Forum News, and Montserrat projects newsletter, SOS Nature of Montserrat



across the UKOTs and CDs but also articles on items relevant to them and on the work UKOTCF does.

Edition 15 of *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* was published online and circulated in August. It includes articles on individual *Wildlife Homes* and *Adopters* who are participating in the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project, and introductions to some of the new team members including Fay Needham, Finance Officer, Virginie Chris Sealys MNT's Conservation Officer and Samantha Paul in the Propagation Unit.

The annual Christmas card was sent out to UKOTCF's circulation list in December with a review of the year's headlines and looking ahead to 2024.

The series of videos on *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* sites ("*Wildlife Homes*") and the "*Adopters*" have been produced by UKOTCF's Honorary Environmental Education Officer and Secretary of the Wider Caribbean Working Group (Ann Pienkowski), using material filmed during project visits. These are firstly published on YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/@ukotcf4676/videos>), with links from UKOTCF's website (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/adoptahomeforwildlife>).

Work is well in hand on writing the book *The Nature of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies*, updating the *Fragments of Paradise*, the publication which effectively founded the UKOTCF and coordinated conservation work in the UKOTs.

Influencing policy

Meetings of the Environment Ministers' Council of the UKOTs and CDs took place in May and November 2023 via UKOTCF's Zoom platform. These were the sixth and seventh meetings of the Council of UKOT & CD Environment Ministers (or equivalents). Previous meetings took place in Gibraltar in 2015, Alderney in 2017, the Isle of Man in February 2018, and online in April 2021 and October 2022. The agreed statements are available on UKOTCF's website (<https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/environment-ministers-council/>). In the first part of the 6th meeting, the Ministers were joined by the UK Defra Minister, Lord Benyon and a supporting official.

At the end of 2022, NIRAS/LTS, the consultancy responsible for

administering UK Government funding for biodiversity, via the now-called Biodiversity Challenge Funds (which encompasses Darwin Initiative, Darwin Plus and Illegal Wildlife Trade), had informed UKOTCF that they wished to undertake a mid-term review of the DPLUS155 project (see Projects). This enabled the team to provide feedback on the fund and implementing the project. These recommendations are likely to be in a report (which is running some months behind schedule) and then shared with Defra.

UK Government continues to work on its Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy. It is expected to be published in 2024. UKOTCF and the UKOTs themselves have repeatedly stressed that, unlike the review of a decade earlier, it needs to be written jointly by the UKOTs and UK Government, with conservation NGOs fully engaged. This appears to be the case given the level of consultation. It will be important to make sure that any change in UK Government does not water-down or diminish the aspirations in the Strategy as it has been a lengthy and participatory exercise.

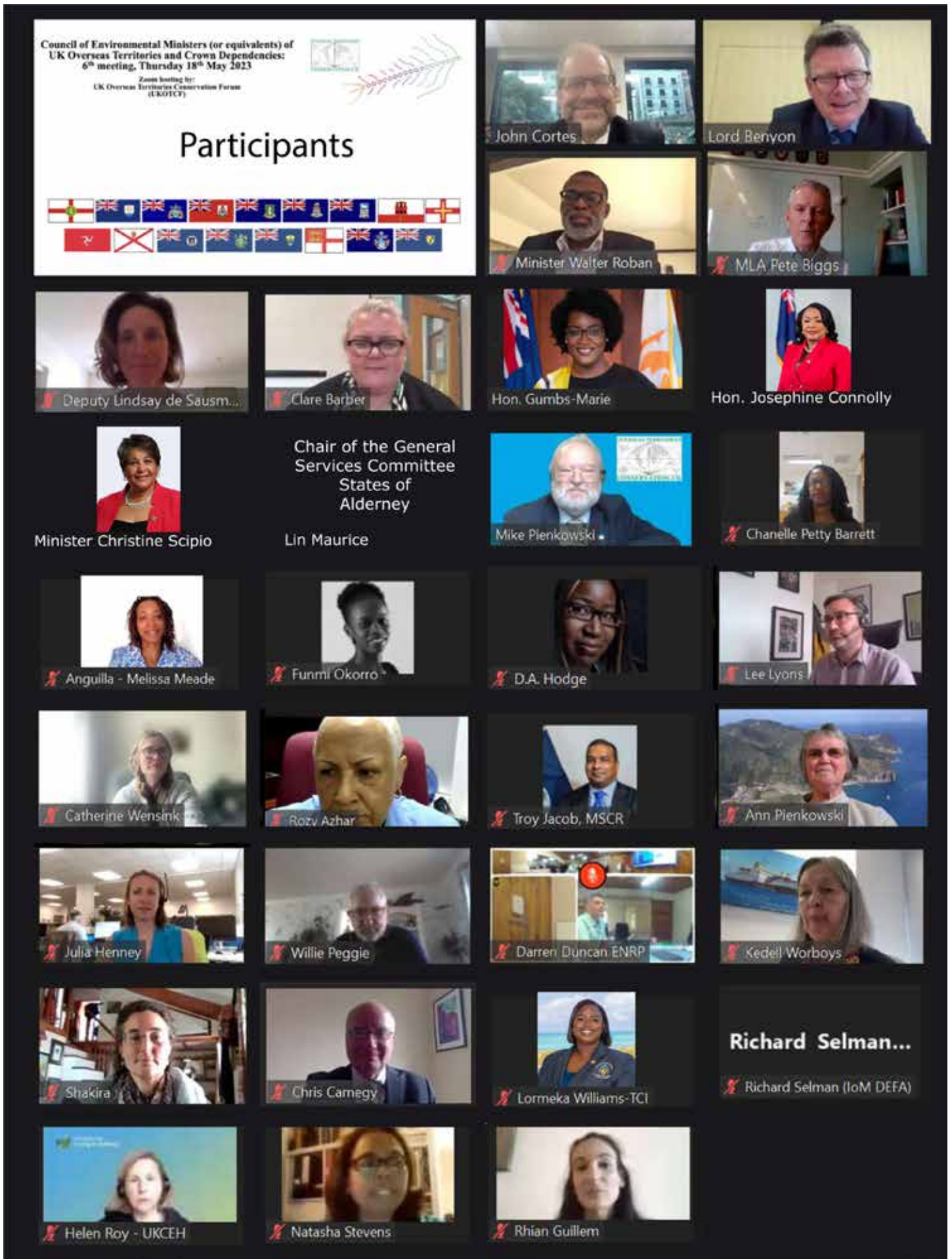
Council member and former Chair of the UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee, Joan Walley attended a meeting of the Environment Audit Committee to celebrate 25 years. UKOTCF supplied a note on what the next 25 years could focus on in terms of UKOTs and CDs.

In December, UKOTCF wrote to the recently appointed Secretary of State for the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Shadow Secretary of State outlining the importance of the biodiversity in the UKOTs and the work of our partners.

Evidence to the UK Parliament's Foreign Affairs Select Sub-Committee inquiry on British Indian Ocean Territory was submitted in January. In it, some of the key points of associate organisation, the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) were emphasised. The evidence has been published online.

Relations with UK Government and Government Agencies

A round-table meeting was organised by UK Government's Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in January, on Teams. Those attending included: senior Defra personnel, Darwin panellists, Darwin project leaders, other UK Government officials and agencies, and



Some of the participants in the first of the two meetings of the Council of Environment Mnisters (or equivalents) organised by UKOTCF during the reported year. Image: Ann Pienkowski

UKOTCF personnel, among others. Several presentations were given, e.g. Cayman Magnificent Mangroves as well as some open discussion on various aspects of the Biodiversity Challenge Funds, particularly what are currently known as the Darwin Fellowships. An update on the Overseas

Territories Biodiversity Strategy was provided. After the meeting, Defra officials were in touch seeking feedback on the meeting as well as offering an opportunity to discuss other matters including Ministerial representation at the next Ministers meeting, engagement with UKOTs



The Rt Hon Lord Goldsmith of Richmond Park, then FCDO Minister for Overseas Territories, Commonwealth, Energy, Climate and Environment, addresses the JMC Reception in May 2023, attended by UKOTCF. Chairman Lord Goldsmith was pleased to note that he is the first UK minister with "Overseas Territories" in his title. Photo: Dr Gemma Harper, JNCC CEO

and other areas of common interest. This took place in March.

Personnel met with the new Directors at JNCC, resulting in several personnel put forward to join UKOTCF's working groups to either participate in person or receive minutes which could be helpful to their work given that issues are raised and ways to overcome these addressed.

Working for partners and responding to requests

Meetings of the Wider Caribbean Working Group were held in May, September, December 2023, and February 2024; and Europe Territories Working Group in July, November 2023 and March 2024. Southern Ocean Working Group met in September 2023 and January 2024.

Personnel had helped MNT with two applications to the new Darwin Plus Local fund (only for UKOT bodies and up to £50k). The projects aim to: develop a new trail and outdoor camping/practical education area (linked to work on one *Wildlife Home* under DPLUS155) and continue the work of the *Mountain Chicken recovery project*. Both projects, were successfully awarded funding. This was a useful exercise as it gave an insight into the application process (Darwin Local is almost a 'mini' Darwin Main application with many of the same headings). Projects in the second and third round had also been supported.

One of the questions the Forum is most frequently asked by partners in the UKOTs & CDs is "when is the next UKOTCF conference"? These have been held in 2000 (Gibraltar), 2003 (Bermuda), 2006 (Jersey), 2009 (Grand Cayman), 2015 (Gibraltar) and 2021 (online). Proceedings and other outputs are available at <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/our-conferences/>. The answer is that UKOTCF is hoping to organise another conference in 2025. At present, we do not know whether this will be in person, online or both. It depends essentially on resources available. Whichever format we eventually use, an important first stage was to consult partners on the topics that they would like sessions to address or in which they would like to present. There are always more ideas for topics than we can address in a conference if we are to make progress on each. Also, our experience



A small part of the trail preparation with steps and ropes making the part of the tropical dry forest at Montserrat National Trust's Pipers reserve accessible to many. This built on the UKOTCF/MNT Adopt a Home for Wildlife project, and UKOTCF helped MNT prepare the funding proposal. Image: Dr Mike Pienkowski

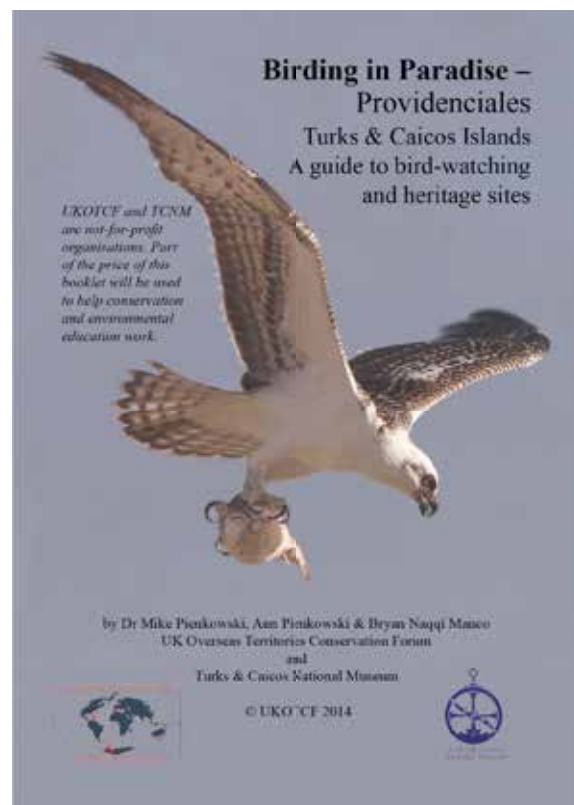
is that a great deal of preparatory work is needed to make the most of the conference sessions themselves. Accordingly, we invited suggested topics for inclusion in the conference and collated these over the summer so that we can feed into to conversations we have with potential hosts.

On request, high quality pdf copies of large information display boards, designed for Turks and Caicos National Museum botanic gardens in an earlier project, were supplied so that these could be replaced.

The RSPB and BirdsCaribbean had requested some support with their project to train bird-guiders in the Turks and Caicos Islands. They had requested physical copies of the books for participants and these were supplied at a discounted rate.

Our networks

The Inter-Island Environment Meeting, a collective of conservation bodies in the Isle of Man, Channel Islands and partners, took place over two days in September 2023 on Sark, hosted by La Société Sercquaise. UKOTCF personnel had attended with around 60 other attendees. A presentation on the work on Montserrat was given to the group, focusing on the current projects being undertaken there as an example of an integrated approach. A full article on the meeting can be found in *Forum News 59*.



UKOTCF has published guides to birds, other wildlife, heritage and general information guides to Turks & Caicos (5 guides covering the various islands) and Montserrat. All are available to purchase as printed editions (sent by post) or pdf files (supplied online) from <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/books-for-sale/>.

Print copies for the relevant territory are on sale also at Turks & Caicos National Museum and Unicorn Bookshop (TCI) and Montserrat National Trust.

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

A meeting of a newly established UKOTs & CDs Plastic Pollution Steering Group was held in April. This is part of a Darwin Project being undertaken on Ascension and St Helena, supported by ZSL. Meeting notes, speaker slides, and access to the Zoom meeting recording are available here: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1YqFix3dsOetbk6XaY0oJfZQjyCPK0eGn>.

The second meeting was held in September. Personnel attended this and found it quite useful, especially as HMG were working at high-level on formulation of a UN Plastics Treaty. Some information was passed on to the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council, discussed with the Chair and worked into the agenda, given its relevance and leaders of the project were invited by Ministers to present at their 7th meeting.

Co-ordinating with Others

As previously reported, links with Jersey International Centre for Advanced Studies (JICAS) continue. An MSc student visited the Turks and Caicos Islands in summer looking at the carbon footprint of the tourism industry on Providenciales and working with Dr Eric Salamanca (Energy Analyst at Energy and Utilities Department, Turks and Caicos Islands Government; previously in TCI's Dept of Environment and Coastal Resources) and colleagues. They had now graduated after receiving a favourable mark in their dissertation.

Together with Dr Awantha Dissanyake from the University of Gibraltar, links with JICAS are being made and developing an early-career research group (or ECRN) is being explored. A concept note was being developed for the group and a first meeting took place in November with PhD students from Gibraltar, Jersey, Cayman attending.

An invitation to a reception at the UK Parliament Speaker's House was



Screen-shot a part of a Zoom meeting of the newly established UKOTs & CDs Plastic Pollution Steering Group

received. This was to celebrate the work of the St Helena Cloud Forest project. UKOTCF personnel attended, along with many partners and supporters of the project. The Speaker Sir Lindsay Hoyle MP and the then FCDO Minister Lord Goldsmith as well as Chief Minister of St Helena, Julie Thomas, and CEO of the RSPB, Becky Speight, provided presentations.

Other meetings attended included a reception in UK Parliament for the Great British Oceans in June, and the UK Marine Climate Change Impacts Partnership (MCCIP) online workshop in January as a follow-up to the 2021 MCCIP UKOT climate change assessment.

Acknowledgements

UKOTCF Council would like to thank the individuals and representatives of member and associate organisations who have given numerous hours of voluntary time to the Forum, both in the UK and the Territories including: Benjamin Parker, Cintia Biryani, Robin Clough and others. Although all Council members donate time to UKOTCF, Council would like to acknowledge the very large quantities donated by Mike and Ann Pienkowski, on which UKOTCF depends and to Lady Dace Ground for continuing support to the Forum. The Forum would also like to thank its members organisations and individual supporters who support us via our Friends of the UK Overseas Territories membership. Those who have an interest in the UKOTs/CDs are encouraged to join us. The Forum is very grateful for financial assistance from the UK Government's Darwin Initiative and the Garfield Weston Foundation and anonymous donors.



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

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum: Summary Statement of Financial Activities (including Income and Expenditure Account) for the year ended 31 March 2024

	2024	2024	2024	2023
	Unrestricted Funds	Restricted Funds	Total Funds	Total Funds
Incoming Resources				
Voluntary Income	376,638	73,493	450,131	267,747
Investment Income	2,634	-	2,634	508
Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities				
Project Income	3,385	265,197	268,582	94,123
Total Incoming Resources	382,657	338,690	721,347	362,378
Resources Expended				
Charitable Activities	101,495	288,671	390,166	330,088
Governance Costs and Other Resources Expended	8,512	-	8,512	8,402
Total Resources Expended	110,007	288,671	398,678	338,490
Net incoming/outgoing resources	272,650	50,019	322,669	23,888
Balance brought forward at 1st April 2022	112,491	926	113,417	89,529
Balance carried forward at 31st March 2023	385,141	50,945	436,086	113,417

Note: Incoming and outgoing resources include donated time and expenses of £175,330 (2023: £201,086).

Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

Wider Caribbean Working Group met, via Zoom, four times, in May, September and December 2023, and February 2024.

Information sharing, communication and networking are a key part of the work of Wider Caribbean Working Group, and in this period colleagues shared information and sought views on:

- Topics for a possible UKOTCF conference in 2025;
- The state of coral reefs and actions being taken to conserve and protect, including land-based and in situ nurseries, continuing treatment with antibiotics whilst the potential for use of probiotics was being explored, monitoring, and taking part in international workshops and conferences;
- The Blue Belt Programme;
- Darwin Funding via Darwin Local grants, and the review of the Darwin Fellowship award;
- Opportunities for cross-territory Darwin Application proposals;
- Use of climate-change data to aid planning and mitigation of severe weather events;
- Invertebrate monitoring;
- Invasive species;
- Bird 'Flu.

As ever, WCWG members were very interested in finding out what was happening in other Wider Caribbean territories. Some of these areas of interest are given below.

Anguilla

Many partners in Anguilla, as well as international partners, have contributed to the eradication of rats on Dog Island and Prickly Pear Cays. Monitoring has revealed how successful this has been. Sooty terns, boobies and frigatebirds are now thriving there. The invasive alien green iguana was threatening the Lesser Antillean iguana on Prickly Pear East. Eradication of the green iguana here has allowed the population of the Critically Endangered Lesser Antillean iguana to increase. Now an ambitious project is underway to create an invasive-free "island" within the mainland of Anguilla, the first in a UKOT, at the Fountain National Park. An exclusion fence has been constructed which will keep out the most destructive invasive species and domestic animals. Those currently inside the fence will be removed.

Bermuda

Bermuda, like many Caribbean UKOTs, has a great deal of development pressure. Over the year colleagues in Bermuda have expressed concern about the use of Special Development Orders to facilitate built development. The Bermuda National Trust, and other environmental organisations, have run great public awareness campaigns, but success has been limited. Bermuda's drowned caves contain at least 84 species of identified invertebrates such as crustaceans (shrimps, pill bugs, etc.), mites, worms and snails. Many of these species and genera are known from only one cave, making these caves critically important habitats and



Juvenile endemic Bermuda Greater Land-snail. Photo: Dr Mark Outerbridge, Bermuda Department of Conservation Science

globally significant. It was sad to learn that permission had been granted for house construction on top of Leaning Tower Cave, threatening it, and that Wilkinson Quarry cave has now almost completely gone. The Bermuda National Trust website has an excellent section on their advocacy actions, which gives a lot more information: <https://www.bnt.bm/environment/advocacy/>.

On a much more positive note, there are many successful species recovery programmes. CNN has produced a video about three of Bermuda's endangered species recovery programmes – the endemic land snails, the Bermuda skink, and Bermuda petrel (cahow) (see https://edition.cnn.com/videos/tv/2023/07/10/edge-of-extinction-gerardo-garcia-bermuda-conservation-c2e-intl-spc.cnn?fbclid=IwAR1iwS-ZB7M9OLpbccbMsApqe72T_uHaBS0VLIE3yJTBiteHYdavVVYcOEQ).

In 2023, there was a new record number of 164 breeding pairs of the Bermuda cahow, with 76 successfully fledged chicks, nesting on six islands (including Nonsuch Island) totalling 22.5 acres in area.

Pollution and invasive species management at Spittal Pond is improving the health of the pond. Research is ongoing on Bermuda's vegetation communities, particularly invasive plant species.



Following fencing and an embankment to prevent cattle and runoff polluting the water, volunteers planted the embankment with native and endemic trees.

British Virgin Islands

The collaborative efforts of key stakeholder organisations in BVI have achieved very positive results. A Darwin-funded project has addressed



the issue of integrating climate-change resilience into protected area design and management. BVI was spared major impact from hurricanes in 2023, but Tropical Storm Philippe caused a lot of flooding, mud-

In May 2023 National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands terrestrial wardens planted mangrove seedlings sourced from the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College Mangrove Nursery at Sandy Cay National Park. Photo: NPTVI

slides, rock-fall and power outages in Road Town. Other Darwin-funded projects have addressed: genetics and identification of key plant species, goat eradication and habitat restoration on Great and Little Tobago, multi-purpose soil survey, mangrove planting and flamingo monitoring.

A sea-turtle recovery plan is being drafted, alongside updating of the turtle fishery legislation. This would probably involve management with conventional methods like size limits and open and closed season. The community voice method had been effective in getting input from local stakeholders, whose views were being taken into account.

Cayman Islands

As in many other places, invasive species are a great threat to the biodiversity of the Cayman Islands. The good news is that the alien species regulations have been implemented. Work continues on the Blue Iguana Conservation programme to support a sustainable wild population. International Blue Iguana Day was celebrated on 8 May 2023. However, there are still threats from feral cats and dogs. Feral dogs and cats are severely impacting the Sister Islands Rock Iguana, native to Little Cayman and Cayman Brac only. Culling programmes have been implemented by the Department of Environment, but there has been resistance from some quarters, often due to misunderstandings. The Department of Environment and the National Trust for the Cayman Islands are working to correct misinformation.

The critically endangered endemic ghost orchid is struggling to pollinate in the wild due to the loss of habitat to development. *'Out of Flask, Outcrossed, and Out of Danger'* is a long-term project to conserve the species. It involves hand-pollinating the flowers of *Dendrophylax fawcettii*, raising seedlings in sterile flasks of nutrient-rich material for a year or more, and then ultimately planting the seedlings into the wild. In 2023 this project showed very promising results.

The National Conservation Council has been successful in establishing that it has the right to direct planning authorities not to allow development that would affect protected areas. Part of the problem may be that Government generates income from work permits, stamp duties, etc. A sea-surge in February 2024 demonstrated that much flood damage could have been avoided if the advice of the Department of Environment about coastal setback had been followed

The proposed East-West arterial road in Grand Cayman has caused great concern over its environmental impact. Land clearance apparently does not need planning permission.



Critically Endangered endemic Ghost Orchid. Photo: M.C. Rose-Smyth

Montserrat

UKOTCF has been involved in several projects in Montserrat in the reporting year. *'Adopt a Home for Wildlife'* (part-funded by Darwin DPLUS155) is successfully encouraging local people and groups to



Stills from some recently published videos of Adopters and their Wildlife Homes in UKOTCF/Montserrat NT Darwin+ project Adopt a Home for Wildlife. Above: Norman Cassell at WH13 on Hibiscus Drive; below Veta Nicholas, with project officer Elvis Gerald at WH10 at Lawyers Mountain, working to overcome the very steep slope of her land. All the many (and still increasing) videos can be viewed at <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/adoptahomeforwildlife/>. Images: Ann Pienkowski



improve the local biodiversity of their "patch" by removing invasive plant species, and replacing with endemic and other native species. The project also recognises the needs of farmers and fruit-tree growers, stressing the need to manage these plants so that they do not become invasive.

In May 2023, UKOTCF Council Member Leigh Morris visited Montserrat to conduct horticultural training workshops, to support the production of plants for "Adopters" in the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project.

The series of videos about *Wildlife Homes* continued to be produced, and can be viewed on the UKOTCF website, as can the *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* newsletters.

Another part-funded Darwin Plus project (DPLUS192), *'Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development'*, in its first year has been successful in:

- Developing a framework toolkit which enables biodiversity and well-being to be integrated into physical development
- Developing a Youth & Education Programme
- Starting the establishment of biological collections on island, and expansion of the Montserrat National Trust Botanic Garden
- Getting the views of the community.

Turks and Caicos Islands

Several Darwin Plus funded projects have built on early work in TCI carried out by UKOTCF, and UKOTCF has been pleased to provide whatever information it had to these projects. These have included for DPLUS181 *'East Caicos Wilderness Area: Protecting the Caribbean's largest uninhabited island'*. UKOTCF had also previously worked in the establishment of the Ramsar Site of North, Middle and East Caicos, and was very pleased that research funded by DPLUS129 *'Understanding Ramsar Wetland dynamics for marine conservation and environmental resilience'* looked to enable the extension of the boundaries of the Ramsar Site on East Caicos.

The coral reefs of TCI have been devastated by Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease, but with the reefs around East Caicos showing encouraging resilience, possibly due to lack of anthropogenic factors. Exceptional work by the NGO Turks and Caicos Reef Fund has resulted in an



As we look forward to the results of the new work at East Caicos, here is a flash-back some 20 years to UKOTCF work on managing the area around the North, Middle & East Caicos Ramsar Site: here, UKOTCF Chairman is part of the team clearing a nature trail along the line of the donkey-drawn railway, partly on an embankment, which 100 years earlier had been used to export crops and minerals. Meanwhile, famingoes travel by a more comfortable route. Images: Ann Pienkowski



encouraging coral-reef conservation programme, with corals being rescued from development areas, in-water and ex situ coral nurseries, and continuing monitoring and in-water treatment. However, the corals were impacted by high sea temperatures, and coral-bleaching. An innovative measure adopted by TCRF was to shade the in-water coral nurseries and reduce the stress from the sun and high temperatures. As a flat series of

cays and islands, with much of the land only a little above sea-level, TCI needs its coral reefs and mangroves for protection against sea-surges and hurricanes. Healthy coral reefs are also an important tourism resource. TCRF is also doing great work in public outreach and education regarding the importance of natural coastal defences.

Report of the UKOTCF Southern Oceans Working Group

Between April 2023 and March 2024, the Southern Oceans Working Group (SOWG) held two online meetings via Zoom, in September 2023 and January 2024.

As with all the UKOTCF working groups, SOWG continues to provide links between UKOT personnel and a wider stakeholder group to facilitate and enhance the exchange of information and reports between group members on topics where there is a shared interest.

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

Ascension

In partnership with Zoological Society London, staff in Ascension led the UK Overseas Territories Plastics group meeting which took place in October 2023.

A new species of ground spider from Ascension was named by arachnologist, Danni Sherwood, in 2023 after Vicky Wilkins from the Species Recovery Trust, in recognition of her years of work in conservation. The ground spider is named *Australoechemus vickyae*. More information can be found on this in *Forum News 59*: https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Forum59_December2023.pdf.

The Ascension Island community got together for the annual beach clean in November 2023. The annual beach clean aims to eliminate Mexican poppy *Argemone mexicana* and other invasive non-native plant species from critical turtle nesting beaches. Plants are removed to make it easier for adult turtles to dig their nests and for hatchlings to have less chance of being obstructed on their way to the sea. More information can be found here: <https://www.ascension.gov.ac/beach-clean-2023>.



Views of *Australoechemus vickyae*. Photos: Danni Sherwood

The Ascension Shark Tagging Programme sampled 101 sharks in 2023 (69 Galapagos sharks *Carcharhinus galapagensis* and 32 Silky sharks *C. falciformisi*). Sharks are being tagged to increase the understanding of their behaviour and patterns in migration.

British Antarctic Territory

The British Antarctic Survey (BAS) has found, using satellite data, that an ice-shelf which extends into the ocean from Cadman Glacier, on the west of the Antarctic Peninsula has collapsed. Unusually warm water is considered to be the cause. See here for more information: <https://www.bas.ac.uk/media-post/scientists-track-rapid-retreat-of-antarctic-glacier>.

BAS launched Antarctica "Live Lessons", a new interactive learning resource in November 2023. The lessons are aimed to engage and inspire young researchers in Antarctic research. More information can be found at <https://www.bas.ac.uk/media-post/new-antarctica-live-lessons-offer-interactive-learning-for-kids/>.

British Indian Ocean Territory (Chagos Archipelago)

Major fieldwork for the *Healthy Islands, Healthy Reefs* programme was undertaken in July/August 2023 across the Chagos Archipelago. The Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) rewilding programme aims to eradicate invasive black rats and convert the abandoned coconut plantations in the four northern atolls into habitat that will increase biodiversity. Specifically, it aims to encourage breeding seabirds back to the islands as recent research in the Chagos and Palmyra Atoll has clearly demonstrated the link between ‘healthy islands’ and ‘healthy reefs’. CCT is now in a position, having completed the rat eradication plans and the vegetation management Feasibility Study and Environmental Impact Assessment, to draft the Vegetation Management Operational Plan. By September 2024, CCT will have finalised all the necessary plans to rewild the northern atolls of the archipelago.

In August 2023, CCT launched its new five-year [strategy](#), which outlines its commitment to supporting conservation in the Chagos Archipelago. CCT Chair Natasha Gibson stepped down in March 2024, with the CCT Membership Secretary and long-term Board member Chris Davis taking over.

Several new books have been published by CCT, the first is *The Sad Story of the Conceição* which gives the first English translation of a Portuguese shipwreck survivor’s story in 1555 from what is presumed to be the Chagos Archipelago. CCT also published the second edition of Dr Pete Carr’s book, ‘*A Guide to the Birds of the Chagos Archipelago*’ which can be purchased via the CCT website: <https://chagos-trust.org/news/eagerly-awaited-guide-to-the-birds-of-the-chagos-archipelago-is-for-sale>.

The new Chagossian community website was also launched with support from CCT. More can be found on the work of the Chagos Conservation Trust in the recent edition of the *Chagos Newsletter*: https://chagos-trust.org/images/uploads/documents/Chagos_2023_2024_compressed_auto.pdf.



Above: Dr Pete Carr on fieldwork in BIOT.

Below: the CCT team at their AGM and Speaker Event in March 2024.
Photos: Chagos Conservation Trust



Falkland Islands

There have been three major public consultation activities for the Falklands Island Government in 2023/24. The *Hill Cove Mountains National Park: Policy & Management Plan* outlines the policy basis for the designation of a national park in the Hill Cove Mountains on West Falkland. The document includes a management plan to ensure suitable management of the national park. The proposed park covers an area of 12,000 hectares where one third of the native plant species found in the Falklands exist. The previous two consultations were a *Policy on Pollution and Waste Management*, which would create a framework to manage pollution, and the second consultation was on the energy direction for the Falklands. This consultation aims to support the creation of an energy strategy for the Falklands for the next 20 years.

There were reports from Falklands of local droughts in September 2023, with some ponds drying up. On West Falkland Diddle-dee *Empetrum rubrum* bushes were seen to be dying; this, and the drying out of soil, have led to some soil-erosion. The Falklands Islands Government will be undertaking environmental monitoring to investigate responses under changing weather conditions.



Above: Western shoulder of Mt Adam with views towards Saunders Island.
Below: “The Hole” at Mt Robinson. Photos by Falklands Conservation



Pitcairn

In September 2023, a new Marine Science Base in Pitcairn was opened to facilitate scientific research on climate-change and endangered species. This base will enable researchers from across the globe to study increasingly rare species such as humpback whales *Megaptera novaeangliae*, green turtles *Chelonia mydas*, and seabirds like the Henderson petrel *Pterodroma atrata*. It will serve also as a monitoring station for some of the last remaining near-pristine coral reef atolls and ecosystems on the earth: <https://www.visitpitcairn.pn/the-pitkern-blog/governor-iona-thomas-opens-pitcairns-marine-science-base>.

There are several Darwin Plus projects ongoing: *Inhabited Territory restoration: completing preparations for a rodent-free Pitcairn Islands* (<https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPLUS178>) and a project looking at Ecotourism, both ending in 2025.

Saint Helena

The St Helena Education Department has taken the stance to include more local learning (meeting the National Curriculum objectives) within local schools. As part of this, the St Helena National Trust created an educational pack that they shared with schools and local youth groups to support the Invertebrate Education Pack that is already in use. The Invasive Invertebrate pack has been used by the Trust-run bug club, and also in local primary schools for classes and field sessions. Youth groups also used some of the activities in the pack to support their badge work. The Trust continue to work with schools to support lessons by facilitating sessions, team teaching and provided guidance and advice on pack content. The St Helena Education Department has been very supportive in encouraging schools to include the pack within their curriculum. Recent feedback from Key Stage 2 pupils has shown that, for their classification lessons, pupils can now complete simple identification of St Helena invertebrates as well as sort them into invasive, native and endemic species. The pupils have enjoyed learning about what they could find in their environment. Key Stage 1 pupils have been having fun with the bug hunts and making wasp traps (for invasive wasps). Following a review of the existing materials, there is an identified need for additional resources, like species-specific sheets to link to topics such as the ladybird identification sheets that include, for example, the harlequin ladybird.

Two sympatric species of pirate spider genus *Ero* were described by Danni Sherwood (*et al.*) in 2024 and are named after two key conservationists on St Helena, Liza Fowler and Natasha Stevens, who are based at the St Helena National Trust (SHNT). Sherwood *et al.* (2023) described three new species of wolf spider on St Helena in 2023, and all are already considered to be Endangered. This brings the number of endemic species on the island to more than 500. There is an IUCN Red Listing project on cloud forest endemic invertebrate species. One hundred and six species are being assessed with the Species Recovery Trust and SHNT. SHNT is starting to trial common wasp *Vespula vulgaris* control at Diana's Peak, focussing on where the majority of the population are located. Further updates will be given in 2024. The SHNT has also carried out the annual invertebrate monitoring survey in the Peaks. These surveys aim to determine the population sizes, any distributional shifts into areas where habitats have been restored and looking at population changes.

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

In October 2023, cases of the Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) were confirmed on South Georgia on Bird Island, in the brown skua *Stercorarius antarcticus* populations. A number of other cases of symptomatic birds and above-baseline mortality were also reported to the Government of South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI). In March 2024, cases were recorded also in several gentoo *Pygoscelis papua* and king penguin *Aptenodytes patagonicus*: <https://www.bas.ac.uk/media-post/penguins-test-positive-for-avian-flu-on-south-georgia>. GSGSSI and British Antarctic Survey, are working together on testing. A high level of mortality has also been detected in southern elephant seal *Mirounga leonina* pups at three sites around South Georgia, with animals displaying symptoms consistent with HPAI. However, swab samples did not confirm HPAI. More information can be found here: <https://www.bas.ac.uk/media-post/additional-cases-of-avian-flu-hpai-confirmed-on-south-georgia>.

The first record of an introduced ladybird *Coccinellidae* species was made from South Georgia in 2023: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/ecc3.10513>. The eleven-spotted ladybird *Coccinella undecimpunctata*, which may already be established on South Georgia, could have originated in the Falkland Islands and shows the importance of biosecurity measures between the two territories.

Amdeep Sanghera forwarded to SOWG for interest two reports from Phil Trathan (British Antarctic Survey). One is explicitly tied to the SGSSI MPA review; the other evaluates the current krill management situation in CCAMLR and links this to the opportunity to act in SGSSI.

Tristan da Cunha

UK's Maritime and Coastguard Agency included Tristan da Cunha (TDC) to review a 'heavy deployment' pollution-control exercise off Aberdeen on 11th October 2023. The exercise demonstrated how multiple vessels deploying specialist booms would respond to an oil spill if it were to



St Helena school-pupils in their enthusiastically received invertebrate sessions. Above: being preying mantises; below: identification in the field. Photos: Sheena Benjamin



occur. The exercise offered an opportunity for TDC personnel to plan how best they can prepare in case there are further oil spills off their waters: <https://www.tristandc.com/government/news-2023-10-16-mcaoilspilleexercise.php>.

Andy Schofield, who has worked on TDC for many years, was awarded a British Empire Medal in the King's New Year's Honours list: <https://www.tristandc.com/news-2023-10-02-andyschofieldbem.php>.



Healthy gentoo penguins return to their colony from a fishing trip. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Report of UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group

Avian flu has been a topic of some discussion throughout the year. A webinar is being planned for 2024 to address some of the challenges and some of the innovative research and conservation work going on across the UKOTs, CDs and the world.

Areas of collaboration between the group have included seagrass restoration and mosquito control.

Alderney

In December, the Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT) published a review of achievements over its 20 years.

Particularly noteworthy is the extensive research carried out on Alderney, particularly around its Ramsar Site and across the island. The AWT has been carrying out research for over 18 years around the Ramsar Site, a wetland site of international importance, giving insights and trends of populations of seabird species. The extensive biodiversity in the marine environment enables them to monitor changes including on the impact of climate-change and non-native species. The records they collect are included in national databases and allow science-based conservation actions to be undertaken. The AWT's blog, on their website (<https://www.alderneywildlife.org/blog/20-years-and-20-achievements#:~:text=In%202022%20we%20honoured%20our,those%20that%20involve%20Alderney's%20community>), outlined 20 major achievements at this important milestone.

There have not been any recorded deaths from bird flu on island. Interestingly, some gannets had been returning to the area with the black-eye phenomenon. It is thought that those birds with a black iris had been infected with flu but had survived. It is unclear if this causes blindness or impaired vision. There have been some reports of some individuals with two black eyes.

Cyprus SBAs

Several Darwin Fellowships have been completed. Some of this work was presented at the UKOTCF-organised webinar last March.

The Joint Services Health Unit is looking at molecular capacity (including eDNA) to monitor vector-borne disease, particularly on West Nile and malaria.

Developments around the Akrotiri Wetland, a Ramsar Site, are putting considerable pressure on it. This is the biggest wetland in the south east Mediterranean. A casino has been constructed next to the wetland, which will have a huge impact on insects, birds and rare plants.

New personnel at the SBAs Administration have been invited to take part in the group during the year.

Gibraltar

Gibraltar conservation groups were involved in two new Darwin Local projects which were launched this year. On the first, a workshop was held, led by Prof Helen Roy, from the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology,



Ocellated lizard *Timon lepidus*. Photo: Júlio Reis, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Timon_lepidus.jpg)

on a project looking at non-native invasive species across the UKOTs. As part of this, and another project to learn more about the invertebrate fauna of the British Indian Ocean Territory, Gibraltarian researchers at the Botanic Garden had been leading on collections of ants, culminating in an ant webinar held in March.

The second project is led by Prof Fa from the University of Gibraltar. It aims to assess site suitability for the possible introduction of the ocellated lizard *Timon lepidus*, known to be the largest species of lizard in Europe. Historically, this was found in Gibraltar until around the 1990s. Invasive predators including rats and cats were thought to be responsible for its decline. The Ministry of Defence is on board with the project and has an important site with restricted access in which to work. Local cat welfare people have been in discussion from the start. These became interested quickly when they thought the project was about removal of cats. Insect surveys will determine richness as the lizards will feed on specific groups of insects. This will help assess the carrying capacity and how many could potentially be introduced. Partners also include the University of Malaga.

Dr Awantha Dissanyaka is leading a new environmental science programme at the University of Gibraltar, with new MSc courses starting in September. Several MSc students will be conducting their research at the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens - a great way to fill some of their research gaps.

Jersey

A review of the National Park is being undertaken by UK Consultants Heritage Naturally to provide recommendations for better governance set-up, funding and proposals for some paid posts within the National Park. If there is to be an expansion of the National Park in future, it would be tied in with exciting opportunities for nature conservation projects and green infrastructure for the island, including linking stepping-stone habitats and corridors, restoration of the north coast of Jersey (which has pockets of habitats but lots of bracken beds) and a grazing regime to restore coastal grasslands along the coast.

Storm Ciaran came through in October which led to roads closed and some people made homeless. There was a massive loss of trees across the island. It coincided with the consultations around a new Tree Law. Amendments are being considered following these consultations and changes in government.

A consultation on a Marine Spatial Plan for Jersey is ongoing. It acts as a marine island plan and will define spatial areas within waters where the use of mobile gear is restricted but also addresses opportunities for renewable energy developments such as off-shore wind turbines.



Jersey's Marine Spatial Plan involved consultations with stakeholders across the island; Photo: Jersey Marine Resources Department

Isle of Man

Plastic regulation bans on the EU list, including oxy-degradables, came into effect in October but local businesses were given a year to use up their stock.

The island is progressing rapidly towards renewable energy generation on island, particularly harnessing wind. Several large initiatives on land and



Manx Wildlife Trust (MWT) launched the Island's first Carbon Credit Project this year. The MWT team were joined in a tree-planting session at The Crossags Fields by representatives from Resilience Asset Management, Hansard, software firm PDMS, Lloyds Bank International, ESG KPMG and The Rotary Club of Douglas. Photo: Graham Makepeace-Warne

at sea are moving ahead.

Research on aspects around blue carbon, such as seagrasses, mud and fisheries management, has taken place throughout the year.

The Nature Recovery Network was launched with the Manx Wildlife Trust (MWT). It is made up of an online map and dashboard which pulls together figures on protected area designations and Other Effective Area-Based Conservation Measures (OECMs). Other layers will be added in time. MWT has developed a web-form where members of the public are able to supply information about how they are managing areas for wildlife.

The Manx Wildlife Trust launched "Action for Wildlife" which aims to foster public support and seek funding for the implementation of biodiversity action plans.

During the year, the Trust celebrated its 50th year. It launched its temperate rainforest project. MWT is part of 47 Wildlife Trusts and, through this federation, they secured £38m from Aviva for the project. Royal representatives visited the 105 acres of farmland. Funding so far has enabled land purchase, with legal fees and staff costs being only less than 1% of budget. Additional land purchases are being explored.

The Agri-environment scheme is progressing with the birds scheme (although currently on a small-scale) already showing signs of great success, with sparrows, curlews and lapwings increasing in numbers.

Several events were held during the year including: Manx Wildlife Week, held in May and organised by Manx National Heritage; and the Festival of the Sea.

Guernsey

The Nature Commission was set up this year with funding from government and charities. The aim is to help support local NGOs to deliver the States' Strategy for Nature and facilitate private sector investment in the environment. A Board has been appointed and paid staff started in the summer. The first £15k grant had been awarded and would be disseminated amongst NGOs for woodland management and planting as a response to Storm Ciaran. It was a good example of how the Commission would work with NGOs to deliver conservation on island.

There had been a significant increase in the number of Asian hornets from last year. This was probably due to persistent north-easterly winds during the spring. Many more hornets were also caught in Sark, Alderney and Jersey than in previous years. In total, 38 queen hornets and 5 primary nests were caught and/or destroyed in Guernsey this year as part of the 'Spring Queening' campaign.

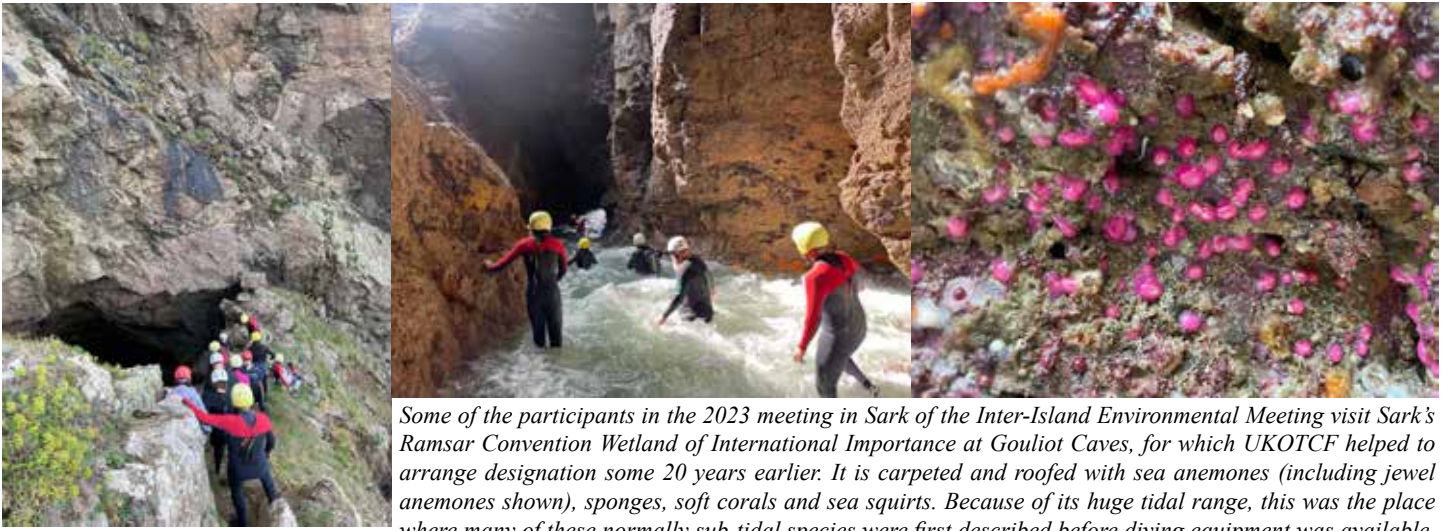
These and other invasive non-native species (INNS), were considered at a workshop on risk assessment of established INNS for the Channel Islands. Experts from within the Channel Islands and internationally gathered together in June to carry out a risk assessment of established non-native species, to determine the ecological impact, geographic extent and invasion risk. 149 plants, 37 invertebrates and 35 vertebrates were



The final count of Asian hornets in (above) in Guernsey at the end of the spring trapping in 2023 was 37 queens captured. However, some avoid the traps or arrive later. The Asian Hornet Team know that the offspring of these surviving Asian hornets build large secondary nests (sometimes in difficult places! – see below), but they track them down and take them away to be destroyed. There were 6 confirmed locations in July that had to be dealt with. Photos: Asian Hornet Team Guernsey



assessed. The results of this will be used to inform future management; i.e. those with high ecological impact and high invasion risk, but low geographic extent may be prioritised for eradication or control. Guernsey was very grateful to Jersey colleagues for including the whole Channel Islands in this exercise.



Some of the participants in the 2023 meeting in Sark of the Inter-Island Environmental Meeting visit Sark's Ramsar Convention Wetland of International Importance at Gouliot Caves, for which UKOTCF helped to arrange designation some 20 years earlier. It is carpeted and roofed with sea anemones (including jewel anemones shown), sponges, soft corals and sea squirts. Because of its huge tidal range, this was the place where many of these normally sub-tidal species were first described before diving equipment was available.

Photos: Catherine Wensink

A trial to remove bulbs of three-cornered leeks (an INNS) from a bluebell-dominated wood appears to have been successful. This work will be expanded to a larger area in autumn, along with tree-surgery to introduce more sunlight to encourage pollination of native bluebells. Due to poor weather at the start of spring, there appears to have been a lack of pollinators early in the season, leading to a reduction in seed production in native bluebells.

A ban on use of glyphosate by non-licensed persons was brought into force this year, in response to high levels being detected in the water supply in some catchments. Guernsey Water continues to monitor this closely.

A Channel Islands Records Centre (CiRecord) is being established on a Drupal multi-site with two website interfaces; one for the Bailiwick of Jersey and one for the Bailiwick of Guernsey. It was launched at the IEM in September.

Sark

Sark hosted the Inter-Island Environment Meeting in September. It was organised by La Société Sercquaise with partners. Around 60 attendees visited the island, a welcome boost for the economy. All presentations were made available after the meeting and are available online: <https://www.socsercq.org/iem-2023>.

Biological surveys including bats and moths, continue on Sark in collaboration with partners throughout the Bailiwick. There had been some visits to Sark from Nature Trek “professionally organised, expertly guided, and dedicated wildlife holidays”. As part of this, visitors provide records of sightings which are very helpful to those monitoring biodiversity.

The Société continues to discuss hedge cutting practices with the Chief Pleas. Currently these are considered too close and at the wrong time of the year for nesting birds and other island biodiversity.

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Membership

UKOTCF's current Member and Associate organisations linked to a particular UK Overseas Territory or Crown Dependency: Alderney Wildlife Trust; Anguilla Archaeological & Historical Society; Anguilla National Trust; Ascension Conservation Centre; Ascension Heritage Society; Bermuda Audubon Society; Bermuda National Trust; UK Antarctic Heritage Trust; Chagos Conservation Trust; National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, BVI; Jost van Dykes Preservation Society, BVI; National Trust for the Cayman Islands; Central Caribbean Marine Institute; Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre, Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas; BirdLife Cyprus; Falklands Conservation; Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society; The Nautilus Project; La Société Guernesaise; Société Jersiaise; National Trust for Jersey; Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture; Manx Wildlife Trust; Montserrat National Trust; Pitcairn Natural Resources Division; St Helena National Trust; La Société Sercquaise; National Trust of the Turks & Caicos Islands; Turks & Caicos National Museum; Turks & Caicos Reef Fund. UKOTCF's current Member and Associate organisations not linked to a single Territory: Amphibian & Reptile Conservation; Army Ornithological Society; Royal Air Force Ornithological Society and Royal Naval Birdwatching Society.

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