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

UKOTCF online conference: booking forms (early-bird rate until 31 May); forms to offer talks/posters (deadline 30 April); other details: lower on this page

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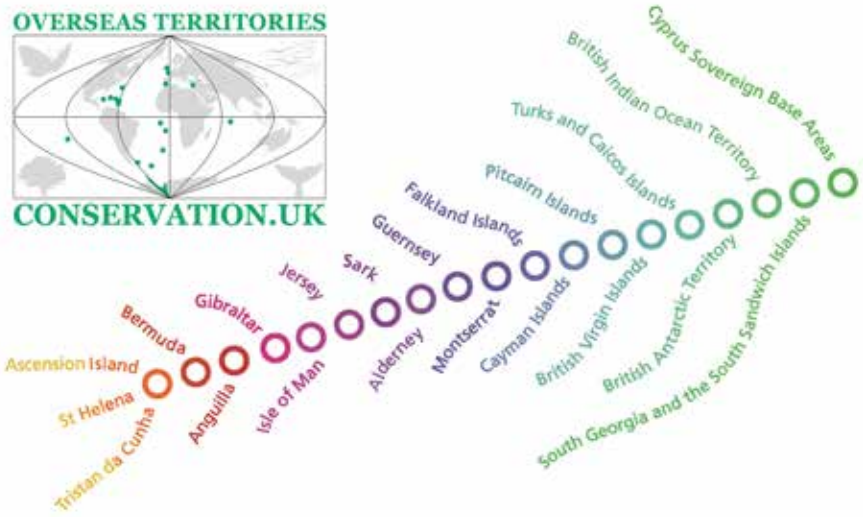
UKOTCF online conference, Monday 13 to Thursday 16 October: bookings open; offers of talks and posters open and near deadline



Probably the most frequent question that UKOTCF is asked by partners in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies is "when is the next UKOTCF conference?"

The conferences bring together governmental, NGO and other organisations in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, and other stakeholders in conserving the environment in these and some similar small countries. They draw on similarities and differences in experience, to provide insights into common challenges, leaving participants better equipped to address local needs, and to build a sense of collective identity and endeavour across the territories. The conferences are working meetings to develop capacity, exchange information on best practices, to take forward conservation issues that have already been identified and to plan positive actions, as well as integrating conservation into other sectors of the economies, especially in the context of sustainable development and international commitments.

The conferences have become recognised as a key element in the delivery of international commitments and local conservation needs. The first such conference was held in London in 1999, the second in Gibraltar in 2000 (although this was the first to be organised), the third in Bermuda in March 2003, the fourth in Jersey in October 2006, the fifth in Grand Cayman in May/June 2009, the sixth in Gibraltar in 2015 and seventh held online during the pandemic in 2021. The proceedings can be seen at https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/our-conferences/.

As some know, we had investigated the possibility of a hybrid physical/online conference in autumn of 2025. Unfortunately, after some positive initial indications, it has proved impracticable to raise the very substantial funds needed for this at present. However, our online conference in 2021 proved very successful and we now plan to hold our eighth conference, again in online mode. The UKOTCF conference will be in the period **Monday 13 to Thursday 16 October 2025**. Because of time-zone differences across the territories, the main conference sessions are likely to run from about noon to evening in UK. (At that time of year the time-zones of most territories range from 2 hours ahead of UK time to 6 hours behind – with apologies to Pitcairn, which has a 9-hour time-difference, but hope for participation somehow) . We will do our best to ensure the event is inclusive as possible, despite this and other constraints.

We have been consulting territories widely over the last couple of years, especially via regional working groups, on preferred session topics. As a result, we currently expect the main topics to be: Sharing experiences across territories; Funding/resourcing; Using technology; Handling & using data; Biodiversity strategies; and Horizon scanning.

In addition, there will be scope for poster presentations, and the 3rd Sir Richard and Lady Dace Ground Lecture.

We hope to raise some sponsorship support to assist some from the UKOTs to participate. Anyone aware of potential sources of such financial support are asked to contact UKOTCF (hello@ukotcf.org) as soon as possible.

Further announcements will be made as more information becomes available. These will be made available on https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/online-conference-2025, and via circulations through UKOTCF Working Groups and those on the circulation list for *Forum News*.

Here is a direct link to the information on offering talks or poster; please note that the initial deadline for such offers is 30 April: https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/ukotcf-conference-2025/ukotcf-online-conference-2025-offer-of-talks-and-posters/

and here is the link to the booking information and form:

https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/ukotcf-online-conference-2025-booking-page/.

New members of UKOTCF core team

At the AGM in November, we thanked Peter Beckingham who stepped down after 6 years of service, and welcomed two new Council members, Helena Bennett and Myles Darrell.

Helena Bennett

Helena Bennett is a born and raised St Helenian or "Saint" as the people of St Helena refer to themselves. Growing up on St Helena island surrounded by the ocean, marine conservation was Helena's first love and she spent most of her earlier years volunteering in marine protection.

Helena is a qualified Internal Audit Practitioner and played a key role in St Helena's auditing arena. Helena was central in setting up St Helena Government's Internal Audit Office, introducing governance and ethical assessments, and the initial risk management framework. However, the ocean which is St Helena's biggest tourist attraction remained a priority to Helena, and after 11 years of auditing, she joined the Economic Development Agency as its tourism manager, and later the Director of Tourism. Here Helena was able to work with the government and private sector in developing tourism industry best practices and had developed tourism products focused on St Helena's natural, built and cultural heritage. When the economic development project came to an end, Helena was successful for the position as Director within the St Helena National Trust, an organisation wih which Helena spent over 10 years volunteering as a council member. With the remit of the St Helena National Trust being to promote, conserve, educate and advocate for St Helena's natural, built and cultural heritage, Helena is focusing on ensuring longevity of project outputs, increasing the importance of the built and cultural heritage and developing a forum for youth advocacy in conservation.

Helena is also the Chairperson for the Liberated African Advisory Committee, who are working on interpreting the island's role in slavery and the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. She sits as a member of the St Helena Heritage Society Board, is a member St Helena Research Council whose purpose is to authorise and oversee research on St Helena, and a member of the St Helena Cloud Forest Project Strategic Board, a CSSF funded project, whose role is to ensure the multi-partner project adheres to the goals to improve the water security and wildlife for St Helena. With a current Darwin Plus project combatting plastic pollution in the South Atlantic, Helena also supports the UKOT plastics pollution network.

Myles Darrell

The Head of Natural Heritage at the Bermuda National Trust, Myles is a horticultural enthusiast and environmentalist with a commitment to environmental protection and conservation. He also has a keen interest in the traditions of agriculture, gardening, and growth, and a passion for his island home.

Most recently, Myles' primary focus has been on the conservation of Bermuda's native and endemic flora, including advocacy for their unique habitats. Engagement of the community in conservation work is also a key part of his role, and in this capacity, he regularly leads field-work for corporate volunteer groups, community groups, and students of all ages. His hope is that promoting knowledge of the environment will translate into caring for our natural heritage to protect it for future generations.

Myles was voted a Bermudian of the Year in 2023 for these works and his dedication to the community. In 2024, he was honoured as the Bermuda College Roche Science Week Speaker.

His BSc degree in biology – with a strong focus on co-constructed,

contextualised environmental science learning – was followed by a graduate diploma of teaching secondary science from Waikato University in New Zealand.

When he is not working in the community, Myles spends time in the garden and enjoying his family, wife Sara and their two teenage daughters, who he says are his greatest source of motivation.

Jodey Peyton

Jodey has, for well over a year, filled the role of Secretary of UKOTCF's Southern Ocean Working Group and several other tasks. From April 2025, Jodey has been retained on a part-time basis to continue these and other tasks as Senior Conservation/ Project Officer.

Jodey gained a BSc in Zoology from the University of Bristol and received her MSc (Distinction) from the University in Biological Recording and Data Management and her PhD in Horizon scanning for invasive non-native species in March 2025. Jodey is a Research Fellow at the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology (UKCEH) and works part time at the International Institute for Applied Ecosystems Analysis in Laxenburg, Austria. Jodey is Vice-Chair of the National Forum for Biological Recording.

Jodey started work in an environmental consultancy before going on to work as a field ecologist at UKCEH, surveying for plants and invertebrates. After 10 years of field ecology, her research turned towards invasive non-native species, with a specific focus on the UKOTs. This led Jodey to co-lead and lead several projects based on some of the UKOTs, such as:

- DPLUS056 Assessment of current and future Invasive Alien Species in Cyprus
- DPLUS088 Addressing drivers of ecological change in Lake Akrotiri SBA, Cyprus
- DPLUS151 Building knowledge of invasive non-native species on Diego Garcia
- AHRC-NERC Hidden Histories: From Blue Iguanas to Blue Vervain – sharing the colonial histories from the UK Overseas Territories

Jodey's expertise in development, coordination and delivery of research projects, project management and science communication in the field of invasive non-native species enables her to work effectively with stakeholders from government agencies, private industry and the wider community. Her current role at UKOTCF includes being Secretary for the Southern Oceans Working Group and Joint Secretary of the Wider Caribbean Working Group, as well as supporting existing current conservation and research projects co-led by UKOTCF, and developing new initiatives. Jodey's roles allow her to work closely with the biological recording community, and seeks to increase the communication of the importance of biodiversity across audiences.

Jodey has been incredibly fortunate to visit several UKOTs (BIOT, Cayman Islands, Anguilla, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhekelia, and St Helena) through her work. This work has enabled Jodey to experience the expertise and passion for conservation on the Territories and Jodey is really keen to continue to support these amazing conservation efforts.

Selected Publications

Dawson, W., Peyton, J. *et al.* (2023) Horizon scanning for potential invasive non-native species across the United Kingdom Overseas Territories. *Conservation Letters*, 16 (1), e12928. 12, pp. https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12928

Demetriou, J., C. Radea, J. M. Peyton *et al.* The Alien to Cyprus Entomofauna (ACE) database: a review of the current status of alien insects (Arthropoda, Insecta) including an updated species checklist, discussion on impacts and recommendations for informing management. *NeoBiota* 83:11-42 https://doi.org/10.3897/neobiota.83.96823

Peyton, J. *et al.* (2022) Using expert-elicitation to deliver biodiversity monitoring priorities on a Mediterranean island. *PLoS ONE*, 17 (3), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0256777

Meeus, S., Peyton, J. *et al.* Re-connecting Communities in Biodiverse Places to their Biological Heritage: The case of iguanas on Grand Cayman. *Biodiversity Information Science and Standards* 6:e93887.

Peyton, Jodey *et al.* Horizon Scanning to Predict and Prioritize Invasive Alien Species With the Potential to Threaten Human Health and Economies on Cyprus. *Frontiers in Ecology & Evolution*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fevo.2020.566281

Peyton, Jodey *et al.* Horizon scanning for invasive alien species with the potential to threaten biodiversity and human health on a Mediterranean island. *Biological Invasions*. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10530-019-01961-7

Roy, Helen E., Peyton, Jodey M. *et al.* (2019) Developing a list of invasive alien species likely to threaten biodiversity and ecosystems in the European Union. *Global Change Biology*, 25 (3). 1032-1048. https://doi.org/10.1111/gcb.14527

Pescott, O.L., Peyton, J.M. *et al.* (2018) The forest on the peninsula: impacts, uses and perceptions of a colonial legacy in Cyprus. In: Queiroz, Ana Isabel; Pooley, Simon, (eds.) *Histories of bioinvasions in the Mediterranean*. Cham, Springer, 195-217. (Environmental History, 8).

Iain Orr (1942-2025) - former UK diplomat, pioneer in conservation initiatives, and UKOTCF Council Member

UKOTCF Council members and other officers were saddened to hear of the death of their friend and former colleague, Iain Orr.

Iain served on UKOTCF's Council from 2005-2021, and acted as UKOTCF's Honorary Parliamentary Adviser.

His long-term interest in islands and their environments came together in his final job at the FCO, towards the end of the 1990s. Iain had been deputy to the British High Commissioner in Ghana but was transferred to London. The newly appointed Head of the Environment, Science and Energy Department, John Ashton had the good sense to get Iain (at his own rank as supernumary) posted to the Department, which was later renamed the Environment Policy Department. They were a strong team, and also liked collaborating closely with UKOTCF. At the time, no other UK government or agency was closely involved with the UKOTs, and UKOTCF brought together the NGOs interested in conservation.

UKOTCF's Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski, recalled many days when Iain would phone him an average of twice per day, so many were the things that they were working on together. Unfortunately, one of these times tended to be close to midnight, when Iain, trying to contact people in much later time-zones, would be working also on tasks started earlier in the day. Mike retaliated (accidentally) only once when, on his return to his hotel in a Caribbean UKOT after attending an evening board meeting of a conservation NGO, received a message to "call Iain whatever time you get in." Absent-mindedly, he did - and only as the phone rang did he recall that it must be the early hours in London! Iain brushed aside Mike's apologies for waking him, and proceeded into a discussion on the points he had wanted to raise!

Iain was responsible for drafting and negotiating the environment chapter of the 1999 White Paper on UK's relationships with the UKOTs. He established, with UKOTCF's help, the 1999 London conference *A Breath of Fresh Air*, and the multi-media educational package of the same name (which received the Geographical Association's Highly Commended Award in 2002). He negotiated the 2001 Environment Charters between HMG and the Overseas Territories. In all these activities, he worked closely with UKOTCF, leading to several years of very successful collaboration between governmental and NGO bodies – including securing FCO financial support for the seabird restoration project on Ascension Island. Mike at UKOTCF and Jim Stevenson (who had taken over the role which Mike had developed at RSPB, while Mike had been on a 2-year secondment as a Department Head there) had been trying for some years to raise funding to start the re-establishment of mainland Ascension as the hugely important seabird colony that it had been before humans introduced cats. By knowing how the FCO system worked, and also having a range of bids in his pocket, Iain was able to capture some end-of-year money which had become available when a SE Asian country's election, which it had been intended to aid, could not be spent because of a delay in that election. The amount released was about the same as the total amount for conservation grants in any one year - and got the Ascension restoration, and indeed Ascension's conservation department, started.

In 2000, Iain set up FCO's Biodiversity Team, and helped UK negotiate protection for the Basking Shark and oppose the resumption of commercial whaling. He managed project funds of £1m pa, including UK support for the Great Apes Survival Project, and was member of the UK World Heritage Committee.

His career in FCO (1968-2002) had a strong China focus, and Iain spoke and read Chinese. His overseas postings included China (Beijing, Hong Kong and Consul-General Shanghai 1987-1990),

As a diplomat, Iain could put on a very formal appearance, but he did not stand on dignity, as here in field-trip mode at a UKOTCF conference.

Dublin, Wellington and Accra. In the UK Embassy in Beijing 1971-4 and later in London, he negotiated several zoological exchanges as well as political links. As Deputy Political Adviser in Hong Kong (1978-81, when Hong Kong was still a UK Dependent Territory), he negotiated new air, ferry, train and road services with China, and the resettlement overseas of boat refugees from Vietnam, as well as helping to launch WWF's Hong Kong branch.

After retiring from the UK Diplomatic Service, in 2002 Iain established BioDiplomacy, a diplomatic/environmental consultancy, whose roles included arranging visits for environmental TV teams from China. His island interests included being a Director of the Global Islands Network, and a member of the International Small Islands Studies Association, the IUCN islands taskforce, and the advisory council of the World Land Trust.

Iain was keen to continue to contribute his skills to conservation in the UKOTs through political analysis, reporting, negotiating and networking across governmental, commercial, academic, and campaigning contacts. He readily agreed to be elected to UKOTCF Council, and served for many years until health challenges made this impracticable. His skills have been deployed effectively on developing and presenting evidence to House of Commons Select Committees, amongst other roles.

Iain was a scholar with a polymath nature, invariably polite and cultured and a pleasure to work with. He was a natural networker and achieved a very great deal through that route, sometimes to the slight irritation of those who preferred a more structured route. However, few of these will have achieved as much as Iain.

Life will be much less rich without Iain around. He his sorely missed, and our sympathy and best wishes go to his wife and family.

Turks & Caicos environment attacked from Space and Sea

Conservation work in the Turk and Caicos Islands has been disrupted in recent weeks by external impacts. Although the launch failures in the early months of 2025 of two rockets of the SpaceX company hit the headlines around the world, little attention was paid to the countries who happened to be underneath these exploding space-craft.

The SpaceX explosions left debris scattered across the lands and seas of the Turks & Caicos Islands, raising serious concerns about the environmental consequences of rapid technological advancement. The event sparked widespread discussion about the risks associated with the 'fail forward' approach embraced by Elon Musk's private space exploration company, SpaceX.

In the days following the first explosion, debris from the rocket was discovered across many shorelines, adding to growing concerns over the ecological impact of such high-stakes experiments. As space technology continues to push boundaries, communities far from the launch sites are left questioning the hidden costs of innovation – costs that may ultimately fall on fragile ecosystems and coastal environments.

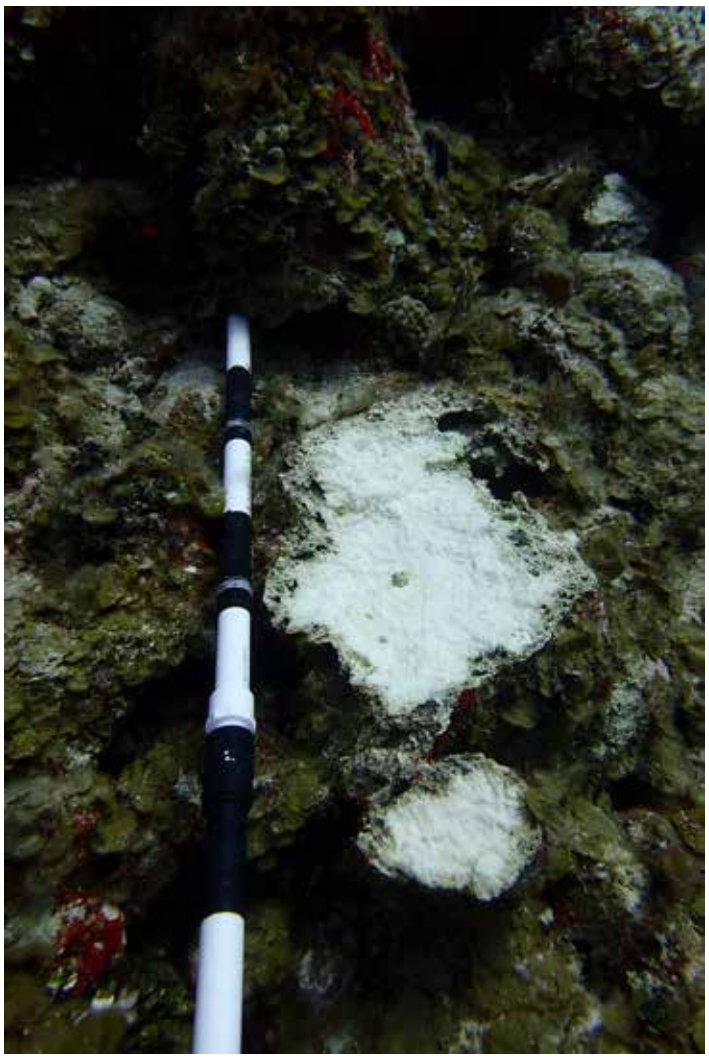
On 31st January, a super-yacht dropped anchor on a dive-site in the Northwest Point Marine Protected Area (MPA) causing considerable damage. Anchoring in such areas is illegal in order to protect coral reefs - which are suffering also from other destructive human-aided threats, such as Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease

Right: Light Trails from SpaceX debris over TCI, Photo: Alizée Zimmerman

SpaceX debris along the shoreline of Northwest Point Marine Protected Area, 18 January 2025. Photo: Wes Matweyew,

Accumulated collection of SpaceX debris along Long Bay Beach, Turtle Tail, and Bight Beach, 18 January 2025. Photo: Lori Kaine,

(SCTLD) and climate-change-assisted coral bleaching. A couple of days later, divers reported a second, albeit much smaller, anchor strike (this time vessel unknown) at another dive site in the same



One of the points where coral was broken from substrate by an anchor-chain. Photo: Alizée Zimmermann

MPA. It seems that some of the careless mega-rich cause huge environmental damage - in contrast to those of their fellows who opt to benefit environment conservation.

In parallel to its continuing pioneering work on fighting SCTLD, the Turks & Caicos Reef Fund (TCRF), has worked in collaboration with the TCI Department of Environment and Coastal Resources (DECR) to gather data on the spread of debris from SpaceX, assess the damage from the anchor strikes, and rescue corals and sponges in the affected areas.

Judicial review success for conservation in the Turks & Caicos Islands

After the successful quashing of development permission to dredge illegally through the Admiral Cockburn National Park in South Caicos, a judge also ruled that Turks & Caicos Reef Fund would be eligible for the reimbursement of the its legal expenses.

TCRF's Director, Alizée Zimmerman, said: "To date, we have committed over US$ 50,000 to this legal case, which, had we lost, would have resulted in the loss of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars in ecosystem-services and biodiversity to [built] development. Well worth it in our opinion, but only possible through the support of our community. Thank you to those who supported us financially and otherwise during this process."

Congratulations to James "Scriber" Daley

In the New Year's Honours, James 'Scriber' Daley was appointed MBE in the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, as Philanthropist and Founder, Scriber's Adventure Tours, Montserrat, for services to the Natural World and to Tourism on Montserrat.

As Montserrat Tourism Authority says, "he is a true trailblazer, an expert hiker and tour guide whose passion for Montserrat's lush trails and hidden gems is unmatched. With Scriber's love for the island and his deep connection to nature, through his guided hikes, he fosters a sense of calm, adventure, and respect for the environment, making each trek a peaceful journey through Montserrat's beauty."

UKOTCF has worked with Scriber for many years, including in the writing of the guide-book *Birding in Paradise: The Caribbean Emerald Island of Montserrat – A guide to bird-watching, nature and heritage sites* (https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/books-for-sale/).

New Island, Falklands – Like New

Ross James, Biosecurity & Invasives Manager, Falklands Conservation

With sprawling colonies of black-browed albatross, fur seals, sealions and penguins, and the world's largest breeding population of thin-billed prions, there is no doubt that New Island is an extraordinary place for wildlife. This is in no small part thanks to the pioneering conservation action that has taken place there over the last half century. It's also an extraordinary place for people. Visitors enjoy the contrast between the dramatic cliff scenery and the gentle sandy beaches, and the Island's rich heritage with the remains of the only land-based whaling station, and historic stone buildings.

White-chinned Petrel in burrow. Photo: K Rexer-Huber

However, this is only part of the picture. As part of the Darwin-Plus-funded New Island Restoration Project, Falklands Conservation has learnt some unsettling truths. Despite these past conservation efforts, many of the Island's ecosystems and species are still in decline. Work undertaken by the RSPB used satellite data to confirm that soil loss on New Island is an alarming problem. 23% of the Island has been eroded to bare rock or clay, half of this in the past 18 years. Nine football pitches of soil are now lost each year. If this were to continue, the island would be soil-free in 250 years. The Island's soils, and therefore habitats supporting its unique biodiversity, are quite literally blowing in the wind.

Another startling discovery was the decline in white-chinned petrels. Historically, there have been between 30-50 breeding

Evidence of seabird chick predation on New Island. Photo: Prof. Dr Petra Quillfeldt

Eroded burrow. Photo: Falklands Conservation

pairs of white-chinned petrels on New Island, but when a team conducted a survey of their population in February 2023, they found that none of the white-chinned petrels successfully raised a chick, and many of their burrows had eroded away, leaving less than ten potential breeding burrows. This species, which is in global decline and is found only at three other sites in the Falklands, is on the verge of local extinction. Unfortunately, this is a similar fate to many other species which are notably absent from New Island, such as storm-petrels, diving petrels, Cobb's wren, and camel crickets.

These examples are symptoms of an ecosystem under pressure, but what is driving it? The truth is that all the contributing factors, of which there are likely to be many, are not fully understood. However, the presence of invasive mammals is playing a role. Globally, invasive species are implicated in 86% of all recorded extinctions on islands, and on New Island there are four species of invasive mammals which are regarded to be among the world's most damaging: rats, mice, rabbits, and feral cats.

Motion-activated cameras installed at the white-chinned petrel colony showed feral cats regularly listening at the entrance of white-chinned petrel burrows and rats, mice and rabbits using the same area, sometimes the same burrows as the white-chinned petrels. Rats, mice, and cats threaten wildlife through predation, but mice and rabbits also play a large part in changing ecosystems. Mice eat insects and lots of seeds which can inhibit the recovery of native plant species. Rabbits are selective grazers,

Artificial Burrows. Photo: Falklands Conservation

Restorative action: tussac planting on New Island. Photo: Falklands Conservation

nibbling the shoots and seedlings of their favourite foods while largely ignoring some others. Combined, the effects of predation, changing ecosystems and suppressing recovery of flora and fauna, are undoubtedlly key parts of why some of New Island's habitats and species are in decline.

The good news is that, now more is known about some of the problems, Falklands Conservation is working towards fixing some of them. Falklands Conservation installed some artificial nest-burrows for the white-chinned petrels, and early indications are that the birds are keen to use them. It is also planned to tackle the causes of decline, and Falklands Conservation, along with Falkland Islands Government and RSPB, is working towards removing all the invasive mammals from New Island, halting the predation pressures and enabling the recovery of species and habitats. This would also enable continued restoration efforts, such as planting tussac-grass and other native plants. These will stabilise soils, capture carbon and provide a habitat for an increasing abundance and diversity of native species. But none of this good can happen without financial support! While we work tirelessly to tackle the challenges on New Island, we urgently need vital funds to complete this essential work. Acting now is critical to ensure we protect New Island's incredible wildlife and ecosystems before it's too late. Together, we can secure a sustainable future for this remarkable place and safeguard it for generations to come. To make a donation today, please click this link: https://falklandsconservation.com/new-island-restoration-donations/

Protecting Jersey from Invasive Species

Adam Dallas-Chapman, Scientific Officer for Invasive Species in the Infrastructure and Environment Department, States of Jersey

The Bailiwick of Jersey is the largest of the Channel Islands and a self-governing British Crown Dependency. The Bailiwick is made up of the main island of Jersey (120 km^2) and its surrounding offshore reefs. Despite being small, the Channel Islands' geographical position and favourable climate have allowed for species usually restricted to either Britain or Europe to extend their ranges, leading to a unique natural heritage.

Unfortunately, the Islands' close location to France, as well as its busy port, makes the threat of invasive non-native species (INNS) an ever-present issue. To combat this, the status of INNS in Jersey was formalised in 2021 with the adoption of the Wildlife (Jersey) Law 2021 and the formation of the invasive species team within the Natural Environment Department of Government of Jersey.

The team's first order of business was to work out what INNS were already established on the island and what species might arrive in the future. Given the similarities in environment and proximity of the sister Bailiwick of Guernsey (that also encompasses the islands of Herm and some smaller outlying islands, as well as the Crown Dependencies of Alderney and Sark), it was sensible to collaborate with officers from the Bailiwick of Guernsey and divide the work up.

In 2022, the States of Guernsey undertook a horizon scanning exercise to identify what INNS of concerns might arrive in the Channel Islands and the pathways by which they might arrive. By using several lists of species of concern, taken from across the UK and EU, 404 terrestrial, freshwater and marine non-native species were identified. Through a process of risk-assessment, this list

Alastair Christie, Senior Scientific Officer, Invasive Species (left) and the author

One of the high-risk species we deal with, Purple Dew Plant Disphyma crassifolium

was narrowed down to 118 high-risk species, based upon the risks they pose to the island's ecology, economy and/or public health.

In 2023, established INNS in the two Bailiwicks were risk-assessed, with the help of global and local experts, via a threat-score analysis and ranked according to their ecological risk, geographic spread and invasive potential. This exercise revealed 186 INNS found to be present within the terrestrial environment on Jersey (20 invertebrates, 27 vertebrates & 139 plants) and 156 found to be present within the terrestrial environment of Guernsey (22 invertebrates, 18 vertebrates & 116 plants). A similar exercise was undertaken for the marine environment revealing a further 143 INNS existing in Channel Island waters.

Since the completion of these risk-assessments, the next step was to determine how to manage the species currently on island and to create plans for when new invaders arrive. This is being done in three ways:

- Several species are under current management, including the yellow-legged hornet *Vespa velutina*, Japanese knotweed *Reynoutria japonica*, purple dew plant *Disphyma crassifolium* and sour fig *Carpobrotus edulis*.
- Management Feasibility Studies are being drawn up for the highest-risk established species found on Jersey and Guernsey. These studies are being completed in collaboration with local experts and land managers, and will identify which species are the most feasible for eradication and which will require more long-term management.
- Species Contingency Plans are being formulated for the highest-risk species identified in the Horizon Scan report. A top-10 Alert-species list of new INNS for the Channel Islands has also been produced in collaboration with Guernsey to raise awareness of these species with the general public such that they can act as an early warning system if the species do arrive!

Since the formalisation of the Invasive Non-Native Species in the Wildlife (Jersey) Law 2021, a great deal of effort has been made identify, risk-assess and manage all the different species which may threaten both Jersey and Guernsey. Continued vigilance, collaboration, and public awareness will be essential in addressing future threats and ensuring the long-term health of the islands' ecosystems.

One of the high-risk species the team deal with, Pampas Grass Cortaderia selloana

Saint Helena's spiders now best known invertebrate group on island

A historic scientific paper on Saint Helena's invertebrates has just been published. The work is a treatise of the spiders of Saint Helena, including a checklist of every species found from 1869 to 2024, including many new records, and over 300 colour and ink illustrations. The paper also describes two new genera and two new species! Thanks to this research, spiders are now probably the best-studied invertebrate group on Saint Helena, with 100% of currently known species now having scientific names.

The Martina Minuscule Spider *Anapistula martinae* is a tiny, eyeless, endemic species, named after Martina Peters in recognition of her contributions to nature conservation.

The Christy Jo Goblin Spider *Ischnothyreus christyjoae* is another small species which evolved to have plate-like armour on its abdomen. This species was named after Christy Jo Scipio-O'Dean in recognition of her contributions to invasive invertebrate management on the island.

The new genera described are *Helenidion* (name meaning Saint Helena's comb-footed spiders) and *Trust* (named in honour of the Saint Helena National Trust itself, and recognising the efforts of all staff past and present for protecting the island's natural and cultural heritage).

Authored by an international group of 18 scientists, the research was led by the renowned British arachnologist Danni Sherwood, who visited the island in 2022, thanks to Saint Helena Cloud Forest Project funding and support from the Saint Helena National Trust and Species Recovery Trust. Six Saints are co-authors of the paper, having trained in spider identification with Danni and assisted her during fieldwork. They are: Liza Fowler, Natasha Stevens, Daryl Joshua, Christy Jo Scipio-O'Dean, Martina Peters, and Gavin Ellick (Eddie Duff).

It is particularly nice to note that Daryl Joshua, who took a keen interest in spiders and consequently became a student in Danni's research group for two years, has now gone on to become the island's first local arachnologist. His dedication has been honoured through the description of the endemic Daryl Wolf Spider *Dolocosa joshuai* Sherwood *et al.* 2023. Daryl is now leading a research project of his own on the ecology of the endemic Golden Sail Spider. Thus, the future of arachnology on Saint Helena looks bright!

The paper is open access and can be downloaded here: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/385420955_Annotated_checklist_of_the_spiders_of_Saint_Helena_with_new_records_descriptions_of_unknown_sexes_new_and_restored_genera_and_two_new_species_Araneae_Araneomorphae

See next page for images and credits.

Annotated checklist of the spiders of Saint Helena, with new records, descriptions of unknown sexes, new and restored genera, and two new species (Araneae: Araneomorphae)

Danniella Sherwood, Arnaud Henrard, Rudy Jocqué, Liza Fowler, Yuri M. Marusik, Wayne Maddison, Mark S. Harvey, Gustavo Hormiga, Cristina A. Rheims, Luis N. Piacentini Martina Peters, Natasha Stevens, Daryl Joshua, Christy Jo Scipio-O'Dean, Gavin Ellick, Vicky Wilkins, Myrtle Ashmole & Philip Ashmole

Anapistula martinae

Ischnothyreus christyjoae

Funded by: UK Government

Additional thanks to: RSPB

Medicinal plants of Montserrat - Illustrations vs Reality

In February, ***Lizzie Harper*** *was a member of a cross-disciplinary team brought together by UKOTCF to visit Montserrat in support of the project* Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development*, led by Montserrat National Trust and UKOTCF and supported by grant DPLUS192. Here, she writes about the core part of her work. We include in this issue another article by Lizzie and one by Beth Penhallurick. also relating to this project, and one by Leigh Morris relating both to this project and the project* Adopt a Home for Wildlife *(part-supported by grant DPLUS155. These and many more articles on current work in Montserrat can be found in our newsletter S*aving Our Special Nature of Montserrat*: see https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/project-newsletter-1/.*

Left: Guava growing in Elvis's garden
Right: My illustration of Guava

As a result of having illustrated 30 medicinal plants of Montserrat for a booklet produced by Montserrat National Trust and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, I got to travel to the Caribbean to teach botanical illustration there for a week. It truly was working in paradise.

Drawing plants you've never seen

I am often asked to illustrate species which I have never seen in the flesh. It's harder than drawing from life, but with photo and online reference it is possible.

Many of the plants illustrated for the booklet were new to me, or fruits that I had never seen growing *in situ*. One of the things I was keen to do whilst on the island was to find as many of these plants as I could, and compare them to my illustrations. It's nerve wracking, but important. If there are big discrepancies then the illustrations need to be done again and improved.

Fruit trees: Soursop *Annona muricata*

It didn't take long to recognize some of the plants I'd illustrated. On a guided nature hike, I was shown the soursop fruit.

I recognized it from my illustration, which is always a good sign. Having struggled with the pattern of the spines on the fruit's skin, it was a relief to see that the geometry was similar to my illustration. I couldn't reach the fruit, but was glad when our guide told me that yes, the flesh was indeed a creamy white colour.

The tree wasn't in flower, so I have to hope that the photos I amassed and worked from were accurate.

Soursop leaves are gratifyingly similar to those I'd illustrated, and to many other leaves from the list. Smooth, glossy, dark green with simple margins.

Fruit trees: Guava *Psidium guajava*

I found my Guava tree in Elvis Gerald's garden. I have seen and eaten guava before, but never noticed the tree it grows on.

The fruit are the same colours as my illustration, if a touch rounder. I didn't cut open the fruit to see if the flesh is the same pink colour I showed; that would have been rude.

The distinctive lateral veins on the leaves are clear. I intentionally toned them down a little when I added colour to my painting, I now wish I'd kept them starker.

The blossom was a bit less convincing. Although the basic colour and shape is right, in reality there are a lot more stamens than I included in my illustration. The flower is passable, but not a good representation.

Trees: Trumpet Bush *Cecropia peltata*

Another plant we were shown by our natural history guide was the

Above: Trumpet bush on the Dry Waterfall trail
Top right: My illustration of the Trumpet bush
Right: Underside of Trumpet bush leaf

Trumpet bush. The leaves are the right shape, and the way they grow from the trunk feels right too.

What amazes me is the sheer size of each leaf. They are enormous! Luckily the scale doesn't matter in my illustrations, but I am sure I have drawn them too small.

The other surprise is how very white the underside of each leaf is. Yes, I illustrated the leaves as pale below. But if I were to repeat the illustration I would make them closer to white than to pale green.

Pung Coolie *Momordica charantia*

In the car park near our trail-head, our guide Loydie pointed out the Pung coolie, growing in the grass.

This plant surprised me by being far smaller than I'd imagined.

The tendrils and pale yellow petals are the same, but I'd envisioned it as having flowers the size of courgette flowers, not these far smaller blossoms.

It looks very similar to my illustration, irrelevant of size. Saying that, the specimen I saw wasn't bearing fruit, so I can only hope these are depicted correctly.

Left: Pung Coolie or Bitter Melon
Right: My illustration of Pung Coolie

Blue Vervain or Porterweed *Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*

Driving back from the walk, I spied some spindly blue flowers. I was really pleased to see them, all along the roadside verges were lots of Blue Porterweed plants.

The flowers fell from the spikes almost as soon as I picked them, but they stayed long enough for me to realise the shapes I'd drawn

Left: Photo of Blue Porterweed
Right: My illustration of Blue Vervain

were correct, even if the shade of blue I used was not quite purple enough. I think my leaves should have been a touch smaller and a little shinier.

Aloe vera

This plant grows everywhere in Montserrat, along road sides, and more prolifically where it's a bit drier.

I know the illustration is more or less OK because I have an Aloe vera in a pot here at home. However, it's good to see that the shade of green is pretty well matched to the wild plant. As I didn't see one in flower, I have to keep my fingers crossed that the inflorescence is correct.

Left: Photo Aloe vera
Right: My illustration of Aloe vera

Love Vine

Driving up Jack Boy Hill, about a mile up the road, suddenly everything seems to be strewn with orange tangles of thread.

I'm afraid I shouted out in joy when I realised I was driving past thick nests of Love Vine. This was particularly satisfying as I'd struggled to understand the nature of the plant and the colour scheme when illustrating it.

Seeing it grow, I realise it grows like *Dodder cuscata* in the UK. And looking closely, the colours on individual tendrils do indeed fade from light green through yellow to a rich orange. This plant was my happiest comparison.

Resurrection Fern *Pleopeltis* or *Polypodium polypodioides*

The last plant I saw growing that I remembered to take a photo of was the Resurrection Fern.

This was on trees and tree trunks in the mesic wet forest areas. The sori do indeed leave prominent marginal bumps on the leaves,

Left: Photo Love Vine on an Acacia; Right: My illustration of Love Vine

and the central stem is almost as hairy as I showed it (but less purple).

What I got wrong is that on the plants I saw growing, very few had mature sori pointing upward. This could have been chance, or perhaps it's the way the plant grows. I think the leaves I illustrated could have been a richer and shinier green. Saying that, the plant is recognisable and that's the acid test.

Left: Photo of Resurrection fern; Right: My illustration of the Fern

My illustrations of Mimosa *and Bush-tea Tree*

Other plants I saw...and failed to photograph

Unfortunately, I failed to take photos of the Sensitive Plant *Mimosa pudica*, West Indian Bay-leaf *Pimenta racemosa* or Lemongrass. I ate leaves of the latter two in Elvis's garden, so it's not as if I didn't have the chance to examine the plant where it grew.

My biggest regret is not taking photos of the very beautiful Bush tea or Quickstick *Gliricidia sepium* tree. These were in full bloom, dotting the wooded hillside with delicate pink tree crowns. I picked some of the flowers, and even had them in a jar on the table. But I failed to draw them from life or to photograph them.

Ah well, I'll just have to go back next year....

Conclusion

On the whole, I'm pleased with how closely my illustrations tally with the plants I saw growing in the wild in Montserrat. Inevitably there's some discrepancy of scale. Luckily this doesn't matter in drawings. Colours are occasionally slightly different. I didn't get to see every plant I've illustrated, nor see every life stage of each plant.

What I really love is being able to touch the growing plants, rotate them, smell their leaves and flowers. Yes, I can work from photographs and picture reference. But the experience is much more exciting and far easier if you're able to hold the plant in your hand as you paint.

Progress and Forthcoming Plan on the South Atlantic Plastic Project

Hannah Hughes, Zoological Society of London

Plastic pollution is a global issue that impacts people and wildlife in even the most remote corners. The South Atlantic Plastics Project, funded by the Darwin Initiative and the John Ellerman Foundation, has been addressing the pressing issue of plastic pollution across St Helena and Ascension Island. Specifically, the project has aimed to map the single-use plastic (SUP) systems on each island, trial interventions for reducing SUPs, investigate the impact of plastic pollution on wildlife and establish a UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (UKOTs & CDs) Plastic Pollution Network. Now in its final year, the project is focussed on St Helena Island which, as a biodiversity hotspot, faces significant threats from external and local plastic waste. Project partners Zoological Society of London (ZSL), St Helena National Trust (SHNT) and St Helena Government (SHG) have made great progress towards these aims in recent months in St Helena. Work is underway with retailers to seek further sustainable alternatives to SUPs, in efforts to reduce plastic imports in the future. A feasibility report that assessed market options for SUP alternative products is being developed and, to complement this effort, a workshop will provide retailers with opportunities to examine these alternatives and make informed decisions about their adoption.

Addressing the island's unique challenges, the export of recyclable materials, such as aluminium, has been essential. With limited capacity to process recyclable materials on-site, waste practitioners have also developed innovative strategies, including

St Helena is a remote tropical island in the South Atlantic Ocean. Like many other UKOTs, it suffers from the pervasive impacts of plastic pollution, both washing up on its shore and generated on the island.

The Horse Point Landfill Site, the only landfill facility on St Helena, will be nearing capacity in the coming years.

using plastics to extend the lifespan of its Horse Point Landfill Site. Exploring waste-management technologies can also offer further promising solutions. As part of this project, a comprehensive waste-management report is expected to be completed by the end of March. The report will delve more deeply into waste -management options, assess landfill-impacts, and identify pathways to commercial partnerships in ports overseas. Efforts to address littering hotspots have also made headway in recent months. Trials with waste-disposal infrastructure at a popular beach are ongoing, targeting plastic pollution in BBQ areas. Seven fortnightly surveys have been conducted to evaluate the impact of new Olympic bins, with data being assessed to guide future waste-management strategies. This collaborative approach, involving the St Helena Government Environmental Risk Management Section, provides insights into littering behaviour and the effectiveness of enhanced waste management.

Public awareness is a cornerstone of this project. Educational campaigns are underway, with 2,700 leaflets to be distributed,

Team members from the St Helena National Trust undertaking a workshop on ZSL's FAIRER conservation framework for equitable conservation practices. The National Trust is actively involved in many education and outreach initiatives.

aiming to inform residents about the proper separation of recyclable materials from general waste in accordance with the island's new recycling facilities. A student competition to design "waste-management superheroes" has engaged schools across the island and was concluded on 14th February 2025. Entries are now being collected from the schools and certificates and prizes will be awarded to recognise the competition entrants and winners on World Recycling Day. Building on previous engagement, in January and February 2025, year-5 and -6 students from all three primary schools on the island will have received lessons on the theme of sustainability and waste-management practices, furthering education and interest in this area.

Finally, The UKOTs and CDs Plastic Pollution Network, which was established at the start of the project, promotes knowledge sharing and collaboration on plastic pollution research, plastic waste management strategies and policy. The last network meeting, held in September 2024, united 43 representatives from seven UKOTs and CDs, along with organisations including Defra, RSPB and the Marine Management Organisation. Discussions focused on updates from members about work to address plastic pollution in their organisations, and contributions to the forthcoming UN Plastic Pollution Treaty, with the next meeting scheduled for 12th March 2025.

To learn more about the project or join the UKOTs and CDs Plastic Pollution Network, please contact Jess Vagg at Jessica.Vagg@zsl.org. Together, we can enhance our collective efforts to combat plastic pollution and protect these unique ecosystems.

UK PM & colleagues guarantee UKOT constitutional positions

Following the UK government's stated intention to transfer sovereignty of the Chagos Archipelago to Mauritius, and reminders of Argentina's claim to the Falkland Islands, UK Minister of State for Europe, North America and the Overseas Territories, Stephen Doughty MP, stated on 5 October 2024 that the UK is "*resolutely committed"* to all of its overseas territories, and that *"British sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, Gibraltar or any other of our Overseas Territories is not up for negotiation. The Chagos Islands are a very different issue with a very different history. The UK remains resolutely committed to all our Overseas Territories*."

Luke Pollard, the armed forces minister, added: "*UK Armed Forces support our Overseas Territories, protect sovereignty and operational capabilities and our commitment to them remains unwavering and resolute.*"

This was underlined by the Prime Minister, The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer KCB KC MP, at the Joint Ministerial Council on 21 November 2024: "*I am able to promise you Britain's unwavering support and I know that is really important for you. That is an ironclad commitment to democratic autonomy and your right to self-determination. It's working in partnership on the issues that matter to us all. Partnership is an important word - with a commitment to the principle of "nothing about you without you.*"

"[Chagos] *was a unique situation, ... And it has no bearing on other overseas territories* [...]"

Montserrat: A Model Garden

*Here is another article from **Lizzie Harper**'s highly productive visit to Montserrat.*

Some months ago I worked on a diagram of an idealised garden which grew flowers, fruit, herbs, and vegetables all year round. The most unusual thing about this job is that the garden was on the island of Montserrat, in the Caribbean (see *SOSNoM* 16: 20-21).

As I drew up my pencil rough, including all the species listed as growing on this plot of land, I wondered how on earth anyone could ever be expected to have such a wide variety of plants in one garden. Little did I know then, I was soon to see the garden in real life.

Elvis Gerald's Garden

One of the many highlights of my recent work trip to Montserrat (see pages 11-14) was visiting Elvis's garden.

Elvis Gerald is a remarkable and extremely knowledgeable man. Working in Montserrat's Department of Agriculture, for RSPB, liaising with Montserrat National Trust and responsible for ensuring imported fruit and vegetables don't carry harmful invasive species (as well as one of the Project Officers in the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project); he is also a very busy man. Which is why it was all the more wonderful to meet him at his home and get a tour of his amazing garden plot.

Guava blossom in Elvis's garden

Caribbean garden: Temperate orchard

The very first thing I clocked about Elvis's garden was that it's on a slope. I had not even considered this when I was drawing it, and was wondering about the layout. It made the whole enterprise even more remarkable. The first area we saw was on a gentle gradient. The same is not true of areas round the back of the house.

Apple and pear trees aren't commonly grown in the Caribbean. They are temperate fruit. So imagine our surprise to see several varieties of apple, pear and even nectarines thriving. Elvis shields the tree trunks from scalding by the sun with white paint, and mulches the base of the trees with shredded paper.

The fruits are protected from pests by being individually bagged, and tinsel and tin foil festoon the trees to dissuade hungry birds.

Above: Mulching around apple trees with shredded paper
Below: Pears protected in bags

Between the trees, Elvis grows peppers and chilis. Pots of herbs and squash plants are dotted around.

Grass is allowed to grow to protect the soil, and carefully placed irrigation pipes provide water during drought. In my diagram I put these in a corner; in reality irrigation tubes stretch the width of the plot.

Guava, Banana and Papaya

I was thrilled to see a Guava tree growing, complete with blossom. Other tropical fruit trees grew alongside. There were bananas and plantains.

Lots of Papaya grew, with fruits still green. The lobed leaves, and the way they grow out from the trunk is instantly recognizable. These trees grow throughout the garden, often on very steep areas. Some grew alongside pomegranates.

Above: Elvis's banana palms; below: Papaya tree alongside my diagram

As suggested in my species list, there were also Dragon Fruit, Figs, Mulberry, and Barbados Cherry

Native and other species growing in amongst include the Rainfall Bush, Gumbo Limbo, Noni, Broadleaf and Bay-leaf. The Bay was fascinating. It's far larger than our European Bay and has shiny, leathery leaves. Although the smell is similar, it's more nuanced. Elvis uses the leaves for tea and to flavour porridge.

There is also a hedge of Pribby, an endemic species.

West Indian Bay-leaf
Pimenta racemosa

Cabbages

I love a beautiful cabbage as much as the next person, and have delighted in illustrating them in the past.

However, I was not expecting to see some of the most perfect cabbages I've ever encountered growing on a steep hill in Montserrat. Elvis says slugs and snails are not a problem, so the cabbages thrive. As do the lettuces, salad leaves, seedlings, and other low-lying plants.

As with the diagram, amongst the cabbage beds, Elvis grows peppers and other plants. This shields the earth from the hot drying sun, a concept my illustration has failed to capture.

Left: One of Elvis's cabbages; Right: My Savoy cabbage completed for Rodale Publishing's Vegetable Garden Problem Solver

Companion planting is part of Elvis's armoury. There are French Marigolds and plenty of Tridax Daisy *Tridax procumbens*. This pretty little plant provides ground cover and is important for pollinators.

Pests

I was grateful that there was netting underfoot in amongst the sweet potatoes, squash and cabbages. I assumed it was there to stop Elvis from sliding down the hillside as he gardened. The slope below the house is quite extreme.

No. It's there to attack the iguanas. These lizards grow to massive sizes, and are the bane of many gardeners on Montserrat. Tinsel scares off the birds. Netting shields vegetables from iguana. Companion planting encourages natural predators of insect pests. And these are only the pest deterrents I noticed! I have no doubt that many more are also at play.

Herbs and Spices

Tucked amongst the trees and vegetables are lots of pots of herbs, for example Chocolate mint, Cinnamon and Lemon Basil, Coriander and Rosemary, Thyme and Tarragon.

Elvis also grows Ginger and Turmeric. I'd not seen turmeric growing before, and was surprised to see how close to the surface the root is. It reminded me of an iris. Earlier in the day, Elvis had harvested some cucumbers.

Pots of herbs

Above: Turmeric; Below: Lime

Dry Garden

It came as something of a surprise when Elvis pointed out that he had a second garden too, further down the hill. Luckily for us, he was willing to show us around there too.

Endemic Pribby in Elvis's garden

This garden was flatter, and much drier. It was rich in fig trees, avocado, and limes. Montserrat used to be known for its lime juice, until scale insects wiped out many of the citrus orchards. It was sad to see some evidence of these insects on Elvis's trees, too, although the fruit looked healthy.

Sweet potato flowers alongside diagram of the plants growing with Tridax daisy and squash

There were lots of sweet potatoes growing. I was relieved that the unlikely purple trumpet-shaped flowers I had found in research were indeed the right flowers for a Sweet Potato plant.

Conclusion

We left Elvis's gardens in awe. That someone holding down several jobs and no small level of responsibility could also maintain two beautiful and productive gardens was almost alarming. So much produce, year round. Unencumbered by long European winters, and only fettered by droughts and animal pests, Elvis has created the sort of garden anyone would be jealous of.

It is also the only time in my life that I have seen reality being more organised and perfect than my idealised diagrams. Elvis Gerald, I salute you.

Elvis Gerald with some of the UKOTCF team: Catherine Wensink and ecologist Jodey Peyton

Stopping the invasion of reptiles and fire ants

Dr Chris Malumphy, Plant Health Consultant - Entomology, Fera Science

A regional workshop on "Meeting the Challenge of New Biosecurity Threats in the Caribbean: Strengthening Biosecurity Against Invasive Reptiles and Managing Invasive Fire Ants" was held in Road Town, Tortola, British Virgin Island on 20th-23rd January 2025, organised by James Millett of the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat, UK Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and the Government of the Virgin Islands. The training event was attended by biosecurity officers, agriculture and environmental staff, customs and public health officers from all the Caribbean UKOTs and some neighbouring territories.

Opening remarks on the importance of the workshop and conserving biodiversity were made by His Excellency the Governor Daniel Pruce. Joe Wasilewski (known online as the snake man of the Everglades and Croc Doc) gave a fascinating but alarming presentation on the rapid influx of invasive reptiles and amphibians into Florida and the risk of them spreading to The Bahamas and the rest of the Caribbean region.

Green iguana, beautiful but dangerous!

The impact that green iguanas are having in parts of the Caribbean is well known, but there are many other invasive herpetofauna that could have a significant negative impact, if introduced. Jane Haakonsson gave a captivating presentation outlining lessons learnt from the management programme for green iguanas in the Cayman Islands. This was followed by a series of excellent presentations from the other Caribbean UKOTs sharing their experiences of invasive species and best practices to manage and mitigate the impacts.

Chris Malumphy (Fera Science Ltd) gave a presentation on new and emerging arthropod pests and Noel Tawatao (Fera Science Ltd) delivered a two-day training course on identifying fire-ants and discussed a range of control options. Noel also showed how safely to apply an insect growth-regulator to a fire-ant nest just outside the venue, and close to the pier where the cruise ships dock. Chris and Noel also surveyed farms, nurseries, the botanical garden, parks and forest areas in Tortola and Anegada for invasive arthropod species and infestations of fire-ants.

Noel demonstrating how to safely apply an insect growth regulator to control fire ants

The workshop was well organised, with interesting content, and practical and useful advice. All the participants were fully engaged, openly shared their experiences, developed networks, and learnt a great deal about invasive reptiles, fire-ants and other arthropod pests. Overall, it was a very successful workshop, proven by the positive participant feedback.

Attendees of the workshop 'Meeting the Challenge of New Biosecurity Threats in the Caribbean'

Building environmental education links between UKOTs & Crown Dependencies

As part of project Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development (or Biodiversity Toolkit) *(supported by grant DPLUS192) and building on from* Adopt a Home for Wildlife *(previously suppported by grant DPLUS155), the Manx Wildlife Trust's* ***Beth Penhallurick*** *reports here on her visit to Montserrat in late 2024 and the collaborative environmental education efforts of Montserrat and the Isle of Man during November 2024 to support the delivery of Darwin Plus Project 192.*

Introduction

My name is Beth Penhallurick, and I am the Education Officer at Manx Wildlife Trust (MWT), the Isle of Man's largest wildlife conservation charity. Hosted by the Montserrat National Trust (MNT) – a leading organization dedicated to conserving Montserrat's natural environment and cultural heritage – I worked closely with the Ministry of Education and Youth Affairs and the Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing, and Environment (MALHE). Together, we enhanced existing environmental education programmes and explored new opportunities for cross-territory collaboration.

School Twinning Programme

A highlight of my visit was the launch of a school twinning initiative between Ballakermeen High School in the Isle of Man and Montserrat Secondary School. The programme aims to foster connections between young people in UKOTs and Crown Dependencies, encouraging the exchange of cultural and environmental knowledge. By sharing their experiences and discoveries, students can develop a deeper appreciation of their heritage and broaden their understanding of environmental opportunities.

The twinning programme is structured around a UN Award for Biodiversity, known as the YUNGA Biodiversity Challenge Badge, which offers participants an internationally recognised accreditation. During my visit to Montserrat Secondary School, I collaborated with MNT Conservation Officer Chris Sealys and Youth Coordinator Sandrae Thomas to introduce students to the programme and complete their first YUNGA biodiversity activity. This activity involved a bioblitz of the school grounds, during which students catalogued species in an iNaturalist folder. The folder serves as a shared digital resource which students from both Montserrat and the Isle of Man can view and to which they can contribute, fostering a collaborative learning environment.

Later, students visited MNT for a video call with their counterparts in the Isle of Man. During the session, Montserratian students shared their bioblitz findings and discussed their island's unique wildlife, while learning about Manx biodiversity. These interactive calls are scheduled monthly, with students working towards completing the YUNGA award by the end of the 2024/25 academic year. This will allow for a programme review in summer 2025 and the consideration of future training opportunities.

Engagement with Local Schools

During my visit, I delivered a series of engaging educational

iNaturalist Twinning Project page

sessions at all three primary schools and Montserrat Community College, emphasising the importance of integrating environmental education into the curriculum.

After a productive meeting with MALHE, the MNT team and I developed a lesson on food-chains, focusing on local biodiversity through creative activities. Trialled at Brades Primary School, the lesson was designed to be easily adapted for various age-groups. Highlighting Montserrat's unique biodiversity ensures that the next generation grows up with a strong appreciation for its value and the need for its conservation.

Assemblies were delivered also at St Augustine Primary School and Look Out Primary School. These assemblies focused on highlighting the key species of Montserrat and the Isle of Man. Students were asked to vote if they thought each species is found in Montserrat, the Isle of Man or both and this brought up interesting conversations of migration, non-native invasive species, and endemic species. It also made the students aware of the wildlife across over UKOTs and Crown Dependencies as well as the projects in place to conserve it.

My visit to Montserrat Community College included a meeting with the executive team to discuss the forthcoming Higher Education Evening and its focus on career pathways in the environmental sector. Thanks to Chris Sealys' expertise, students also planted native fruit trees on campus, initiating discussions on how to make the college grounds more wildlife-friendly.

Montserrat Secondary School students at Montserrat National Trust, with MNT Director Mrs Sarita Francis OBE, for a video call with Manx students

Activities at primary schools (from left): Food Chain Lesson at Brades Primary School; Assembly at Lookout Primary School; Wildlife Activity at St Augustine's Primary School

Supporting Youth Initiatives

In addition to working with schools, I collaborated also with MNT's youth programmes: Monty's Messengers (ages 4-12) and Monty's Ambassadors (ages 13-25).

For Monty's Messengers, Chris Sealys and I led a tour at the MNT gardens, focussing on medicinal plant identification. Children created teabags using dried native plants, leaving with both tea and an identification booklet to continue their learning at home. This group is vital in igniting the interest of young conservationists who now have the option to progress to the Monty's Ambassadors

Tree Planting at Montserrat Community College

youth group once they reach their teens.

The Monty's Ambassadors group has an executive team made up of the young people themselves who are given the guidance and authority to make youth-led decisions for the group. During my visit, the newly formed Monty's Ambassadors group met at MNT for a social evening of games and food which was an opportunity for the executive team to gauge the interests and ambitions of their peers for future activities.

The MNT staff and I later met with the Executive team at the Montserrat Museum to have their first official planning meeting. During the meeting the execs were asked to consider first the aims of the group to ensure the young people's goals, and the conservation focus of MNT were aligned. They were then asked to consider what events they could feasibly run to achieve these aims. The mind-maps you can see on the next page are a clear example of the high capability of young people when they are given the space and respect needed to express their ideas.

Youth Coordinator Sandrae Thomas and I also accompanied the young executive team on ZJB Montserrat Radio to share the group's aims with the island community in the hope of raising awareness and recruiting fellow young people.

Conservation Careers

During my trip I participated in two major events hosted by the Montserrat National Trust.

On 14 November 2024, I joined local experts as a panellist for the "A Call to Action: Youth and the Future of Conservation of Montserrat's Environment and Cultural Heritage" discussion, exploring how young people can shape the future of Montserrat's conservation efforts. My responses aimed to highlight the importance of international collaboration and the role of the mainstream education system in inspiring environmental action from a young age.

On 21 November 2024, I delivered a keynote address to local students at MNT's Higher Education Evening, highlighting the wide range of careers available in the environmental sector and a variety of paths the young people could take to build such a career. Following the talk, young people were encouraged to walk around and engage with the stalls set up by many of the key Montserratian organisations. Numerous sectors were represented including tourism, agriculture, and conservation to highlight the need for cross-sector collaboration to conserve our environment.

The event was a success with over 30 young people and many significant

Left: Monty's Messenger holding his teabag made from native medicinal plants; below: the Monty's Messengers group holding their homemade teabags at MNT

Mind maps of ideas from the Monty's Ambassador Executive Meeting

Montserratian organisations in attendance. A big thank you to Sandrae Thomas and the entire MNT team for their outstanding effort in organising such an inspiring and informative event for the young people of Montserrat.

Building Relationships with the Montserrat Community

Beyond schools and youth initiatives, I engaged also with the wider Montserrat community through two appearances on local radio. The first was a live conversation with local icon Basil Chambers at ZJB Radio to share about the collaborative initiatives between the Isle of Man and Montserrat through UKOTCF and the second being a recorded programme with the Monty's Ambassadors Executive team to promote young people in conservation.

My itinerary included also a visit to the Disaster Management Coordination Agency (DMCA) and the Montserrat Volcano

Panel at the "A Call to Action: Youth and the Future of Conservation of Montserrat's Environment and Cultural Heritage" discussion

Group photo of the young people present at MNT's Higher Education Evening

Observatory (MVO) to find out what qualifications and skills young Montserratians will need to secure jobs at these vital organisations and ensure their longevity. I was accompanied by MNT Youth Coordinator Sandrae Thomas who will seek to use this information to inform the training available to the young people of Monty's Ambassadors.

Looking Ahead: Strengthening Environmental Education Links

Visiting Montserrat was an invaluable opportunity to share knowledge, strengthen environmental education efforts, and build lasting connections between the Isle of Man and Montserrat. My thanks must go to the incredible UKOTCF and the MNT team for kindly supporting the trip and valuing inter-island collaboration.

Looking ahead, the call for young voices within the environmental sphere is evident. Therefore, establishing and connecting youth-led initiatives across all UKOTs and Crown Dependencies could create a vital network, empowering the next generation to build on current efforts and drive conservation into mainstream policy, action, and education.

Gibraltar meeting

Taking advantage of a private visit to Gibraltar in April 2025 to update on UKOTCF and UKOT/CD Environment Ministers' Council matters, from right: Hon. Prof. John Cortés (Gibraltar Minister for Education, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate, Heritage, Transport and Technical Services), Dr Liesl Mesillo (Principal Secretary of that Ministry); Dr Keith Bensusan (Director Gibraltar Botanic Garden, GONHS & UKOTCF Council Member; Mrs Ann Pienkowski (Secretary, UKOTCF WCWG; Dr Mike Pienkowski (UKOTCF Chairman)

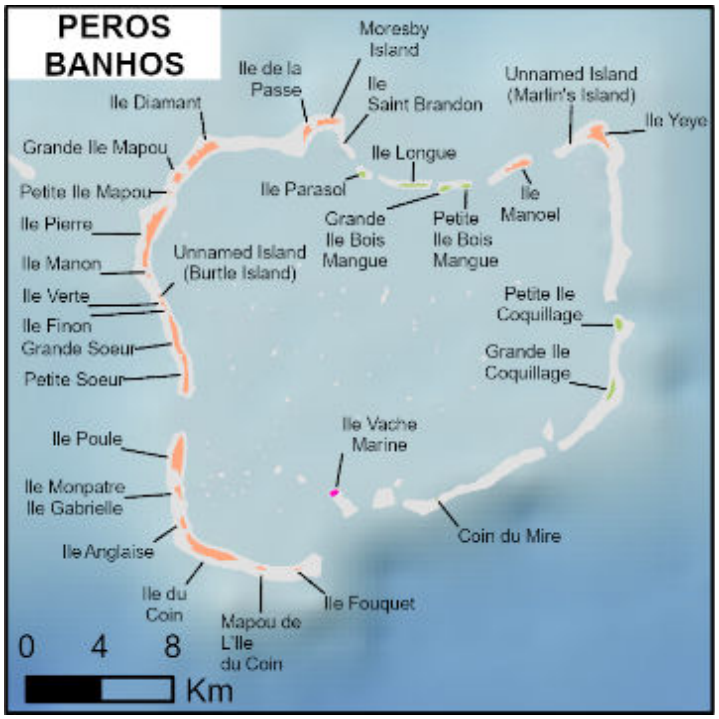
Vache Marine – 10 Years After

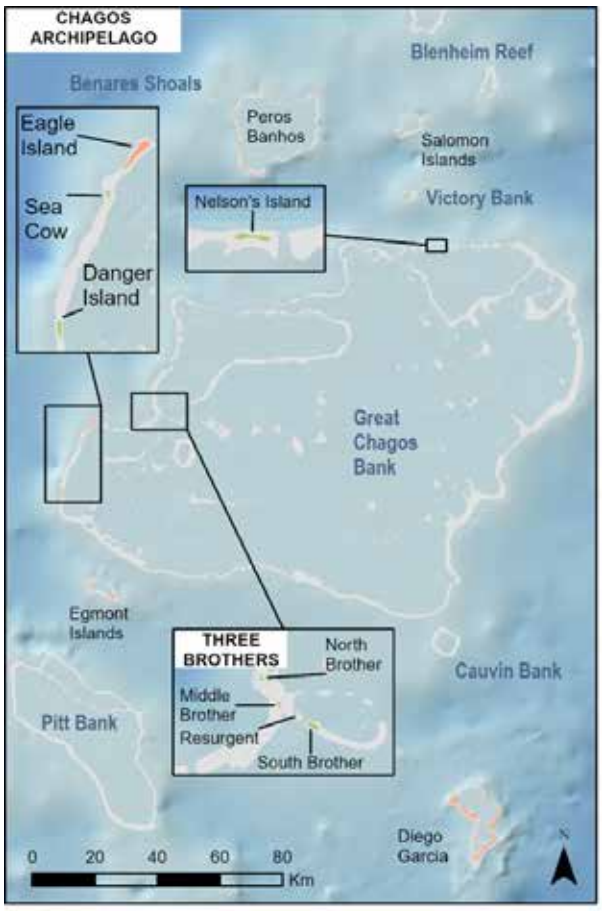
Dr Peter Carr, Chagos Conservation Trust

In 2014, the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) led a Black Rat *Rattus rattus* (hereafter rats) eradication operation on the small (12.4 ha, 2 m asl) island of Vache Marine in the south of the Peros Banhos atoll, Chagos Archipelago (Fig. 1). The operation was funded by the UK government Darwin Plus grant scheme (project DPLUS011 - https://darwinplus.org.uk/) and was conducted with significant assistance from the UK military based on Diego Garcia and the Captain and crew of the BIOT Patrol Vessel (BPV). Declared in 2017, the operation was the first successful rodent eradication in the central Indian Ocean. The full story of this venture is contained in Harper, Carr and Pitman (2019).

In October and November 2024, as part of the Bertarelli Programme in Marine Science (BPMS), I was assisting Hayley McClennan, a PhD student from St. Andrews University. Hayley's thesis is looking at associations between trophic levels, sub-surface through to aerial. The research was conducted at sea from the bridge of the BPV and had to dovetail into the ship's programme. This, fortunately, meant occasionally we would have the opportunity to visit islands. On 1 November 2024, we visited Vache Marine, some 10 years after the successful eradication of rats.

It was my first time back on Vache Marine since January 2018. Whilst the island had been declared rat-free by an internationally recognised expert in 2017, on approaching the island by small craft, there was still a slight nervousness in me. What if a tiny rat population was missed in 2017 and 2018? Highly unlikely but, what if a pregnant female rat had rafted over to Vache Marine from the rat-infested islands of western Peros Banhos? Along with a full ornithological census, I was taking this opportunity to check again that rats had been eradicated and had not reinvaded. After swimming ashore, along with the Fisheries Protection Officer, we set off to circumnavigate the island – two of us counting breeding seabirds and looking for signs of rat presence (Fig. 2), while the FPO conducted his island tasks that included monitoring breeding turtles.





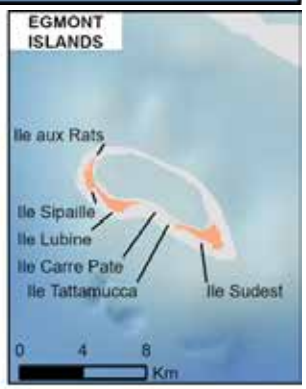


Figure 1. Black Rat Rattus rattus *distribution in the Chagos Archipelago (see enlarged version of Peros Banos above), showing Vache Marine in southern Peros Banhos, the site of a successful rat eradication operation in 2014, led by the Chagos Conservation Trust. (Map produced by T Wilkinson, RBG Kew and used with permission).*

Figure 2. Dr Peter Carr and St Andrews University PhD student Hayley McClennan on Vache Marine in November 2024, censusing breeding seabirds and checking for the presence of rats.

After walking the perimeter coast with no signs of rat presence, we pushed our way into the interior of the island where, if rats were still present, their signs would be more evident. It is pleasing to report that, after a comprehensive check of the island, no sign of rat presence was detected.

On the ornithological side, 25 pairs of Great Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* (Fig. 3), 10 pairs of White Tern *Gygis alba* and eight pairs of Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* were recorded as breeding, along with some 15 pairs of the introduced, finch-like Red Fody *Foudia madagascariensis*, that have colonised all islands of the archipelago.

After swimming out to the craft waiting to pick us up and as we headed back to the BPV across the calm seas of the atoll lagoon, I pondered on the results of our visit: certainly, no rats but, no significant increase in breeding seabirds since the successful eradication 10 years ago. Why was that? Later as I sat on the bow of the BPV hoping to see the "green flash" [on the horizon to the west immediately after sunset with a clear sky], I came to some simple conclusions.

- Vache Marine was selected for a rat eradication operation due to its isolation - being distant from other islands, it was highly unlikely to ever be 'naturally' reinvaded. The nearest rat-free 'seabird islands' are the Coquillages in eastern Peros Banhos (Fig. 1), some 16 km away. Whilst not far as the breeding seabird flies, it takes time for founding breeding populations to discover that an island is rat-free.
- Most breeding seabirds do not tolerate disturbance by humans. Vache Marine is in the Strict Nature Reserve half of the Peros Banhos atoll. However, despite visiting yacht crews not being allowed to land on the island, in the early 21st Century it was a favourite island for beach BBQs, overnight camps and unlicensed visits (pers. obs.). As witnessed elsewhere in the Chagos Archipelago, it has taken up to 80 years before seabirds returned to some, now undisturbed, islands, e.g. the Red-footed Booby recolonisation of the Egmont Islands.
- The vegetation communities on Vache Marine are not conducive to most breeding seabirds. Recent scientific research in the Chagos Archipelago has demonstrated that, when an island has had its natural vegetation cleared and monospecific stands of Coconut *Cocos nucifera* dominate **and** there are rats present, both of these breeding seabird inhibiters need to be managed before true seabird-island status can be regained (Carr *et al.* 2021). Whilst Vache Marine is not a "coconut-chaos" island, there are no open fayres for ground-nesting seabirds and none of the classic lowland rainforest trees are present that arboreal breeding seabirds favour (Carr 2013).

Figure 3. Great Crested Tern Thalasseus bergii. *Twenty-five pairs were breeding on Vache Marine in November 2024.*

Restoring seabird-driven ecosystems to environmentally degraded islands often takes decades and depends upon a multitude of factors. In the Chagos Archipelago, some seabird species are naturally expanding their distribution, e.g. Red-footed and Brown Boobies. But, their range expansions are limited by the number of rat-free islands that are available (Brown Booby) and the vegetation communities available (both species). For seabird islands to be restored successfully in the Chagos Archipelago, three essential ingredients are needed: rat eradication, vegetation management and **time**. Time for the founding populations of breeding seabirds to discover where successful conservation interventions such as those being championed by the Chagos Conservation Trust have occurred.

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Thanks...

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Antarctica 2023/2024

Lt Cdr Philip Boak RN, Chairman, Royal Naval Bird-Watching Society

1. Introduction. Over the Austral summer of 2023/2024, the author was fortunate to spend seven weeks on the *Royal Research Ship Sir David Attenborough*, followed by seven weeks on-board the Royal Navy's Ice Patrol Ship *HMS Protector*. Whilst the core aim was to gain experience operating in the polar region prior to joining *HMS Protector* as First Lieutenant from August 2024, the period gave an invaluable opportunity to experience and learn about the unique wildlife and heritage of the Antarctic and adjoining regions.

2. The ships. Whilst both *RRS Sir David Attenborough* and *HMS Protector* are outwardly similar in their distinct red -and-white livery, and both rated to Polar Class 5 , there are several noticeable differences between the ships. (Polar Class 5 relates to year-round operation in medium first-year ice which may include old ice inclusions.)

RRS Sir David Attenborough (SDA)

The *SDA* (www.bas.ac.uk/polar-operations/sites-and-facilities/facility/rrs-sir-david-attenborough/) is one of the world's most advanced polar research vessels, brought into service Autumn 2021, with an expected 35-year lifespan. The ship is 128m long, 15,000 gross tons, and operated by a crew of approximately 30, with up to 60 embarked scientists. The SDA was commissioned by the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and is operated by the British Antarctic Survey (BAS). The ship is designed to support scientific operations in an extreme environment, with a wide range of specialist scientific facilities, instruments and laboratories. The SDA also plays an important diplomatic role for the UK, providing a continuing presence in British Antarctic Territory, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, and the South Atlantic.

Above: The SDA alongside Rothera Research Station (67°34'8"S) 25 November 2023.

Below: The winch-room onboard SDA. The SDA has an enhanced science winching capability reliably to deploy and retrieve scientific equipment, including marine robotics and oceanographic equipment. There are nine scientific winches on board the ship, with a combined 61,000m of cable.

HMS Protector

HMS Protector was built in Norway in 2001 and launched as *MV Polarbjorn* (Polar Bear). She was chartered by the Royal Navy as an interim replacement for *HMS Endurance* and commissioned into the Naval Service on 23 June 2011, before being purchased by the MOD in September 2013 as the permanent Ice Patrol Ship. The ship is 90m long, 6,700 gross tons, and operated by a crew of 90, divided into three 'watches' of 30 personnel each. Due to the three-watch system, some two-thirds of the ship's company are routinely on-board at any given time. The mission of *HMS Protector* remains 'to patrol and survey the Antarctic and South Atlantic, maintaining UK Sovereign presence with wider regional engagement, supporting the global community of Antarctica'. *HMS Protector* carries on-board a variety of specialist equipment to enable her to carry out her role as the Ice Patrol Ship, including the Ice Variant Survey Motor Boat *James Caird*, which enables the gathering of bathymetric data close to shore. Carrying out a wide range of tasking over the 2023/2024 season, *HMS Protector* supported directly the BAS, United Kingdom Antarctic Heritage Trust (UKAHT) and Scott Polar Research Institute (SPRI).

HMS Protector *off Dundee Island (63°30'S) February 2024. Note the Adélie penguins in the foreground.*

3. The locations and wildlife. The following provides a brief precis of some of the locations visited by *SDA* and *HMS Protector* over the 2023/2024 season. The locations have been ordered roughly from north to south.

Falkland Islands. The Falkland Islands are located on the South Atlantic at a latitude of 52°S, roughly the same latitude south as the UK is north. The Islands provide a vital staging post for vessels proceeding to the Antarctic, in particular due to their communication links and port facilities. Both the *SDA* and *HMS Protector* travelled to and from the Falklands during their respective operations down south. The wildlife on the Falkland

Commerson's Dolphins Cephalorhynchus commersonii *off Bertha's Beach, East Falkland, encountered by the ships company of* HMS Protector *February 2024.*

Islands have been well covered by previous articles in *Forum News* and *Sea Swallow*. However, one of the highlights this time was being able to swim with Commerson's Dolphins off Bertha's Beach.

South Georgia – King Edward Point (KEP). KEP Research Station (www.bas.ac.uk/polar-operations/sites-and-facilities/facility/king-edward-point/) is located on the island of South Georgia, at a latitude of 54°16'59"S. The station has been occupied since 1909, now supporting some 44 staff during the summer and 12 during the winter. KEP is primarily a marine and fisheries research station, owned by the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) and operated by the BAS. Surrounded by mountains and glaciers, the subantarctic island of South Georgia is an important haven for wildlife. The area has also a rich heritage, with several abandoned whaling stations. These include Stromness, famous for being the end location of Shackleton's epic journey from Elephant Island to seek help for the stranded crew of the *Endurance*. These factors have led to South Georgia being a popular destination for tourists, with in excess of 10,000 visiting each year onboard cruise-ships and expedition-vessels. Both the *SDA* and *HMS Protector* visited KEP over the 2023/2024 season.

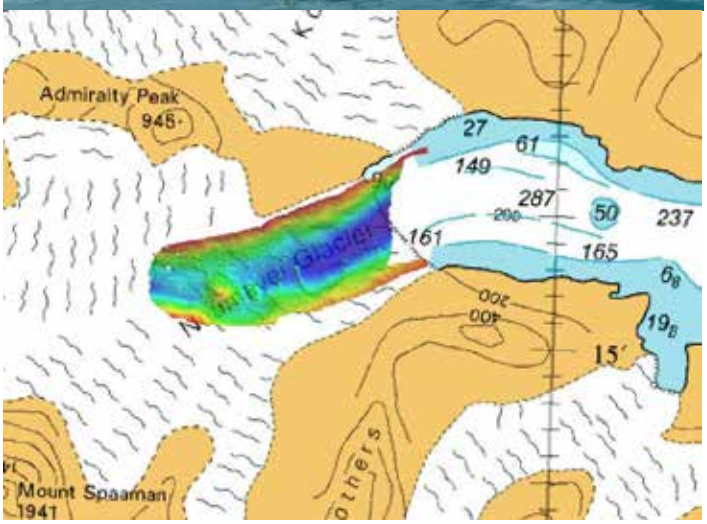
Above: The SDA *alongside KEP 17 December 2023. King Penguins* Aptenodytes patagonicus *can be seen in the foreground. Strict guidelines are in place for visitors in order to protect the wildlife from unnecessary stress and harm.*

Opposite (and above), from top: The whalers' church at the former Grytviken whaling station. The pre-fabricated church was assembled 1913, and is now part of the Anglican Communion's Diocese of the Falkland Islands. KEP and the SDA *can be seen in the distant backgrounnd.*

Southern Elephant-seals Mirounga leonine *hauled out in front of former sealing vessels, abandoned at Grytviken. Elephant-seals were hunted to the brink of extinction for oil by the end of the nineteenth century, but their numbers have since recovered.*

HMS Protector's SMB James Caird IV *surveying off the Neumayer Glacier, South Georgia, February 2024. The* SMB *is named in honour of Shackleton's famous lifeboat, the* James Caird*, which made the epic 800-mile journey from Elephant Island to South Georgia in 1916.*

The modern-day survey operations conducted by the SMB *revealed an alarming level of glacial retreat, with the* SMB *surveying in waters previously covered by the Neumayer Glacier some two decades previously, shown in the multicoloured multibeam echosounder trace above.*



South Georgia Pipit Anthus antarcticus *in the South Georgia Museum. The pipit was threatened by the human introduction of rats, but has undergone a remarkable recovery following the success of the ambitious South Georgia restoration project. The RNBWS was delighted to award a small grant to help better assess the population of South Georgia Pipits. We look forward to a report in the 2025 edition of* Sea Swallow.

The endemic South Georgia pintail Anas georgica georgica. *An omnivorous dabbling duck, the pintail is known to scavenge seal carcasses.*

South Georgia - Bird Island. Bird Island Research Station (www.bas.ac.uk/polar-operations/sites-and-facilities/facility/bird-island/) is located to the west of South Georgia, at a latitude of 54°0'0"S. The station has been occupied intermittently from 1957-1982, and on a continual basis from 22 September 2022. The research station supports some ten personnel, including researchers specialising in seals, penguins and albatross.

Fuelling hose from the SDA*'s tender* Terror *supplying fuel to the research station 20 December 2023.*

From top:

Northern Giant Petrel Macronectes halli *patrolling the beach on the hunt for dead or dying animals. Northern and Southern Giant Petrels are almost identical; the only difference is the colour of their beak tip. Northern Giant Petrels have a red tip, and Southern Giant Petrels have a green tip.*

Snowy Sheathbill Chionis albus *feeding on a seal carcass, probably from a male fur seal. The males have a hard existence, on maturity returning to the beaches to defend their territory and harem of females from other males. Often, they die from complete exhaustion.*

Female Antarctic Fur Seal Arctocephalus gazella *and pup. The specific scientific name is thought to have come from the German vessel* SMS Gazelle*, which was the first to collect specimens of this species from the Kerguelen Islands. However, they are also extremely fast moving, as experienced by the author when chased on numerous occasions!*

Bird Island is considered one of the world's richest wildlife sites, home to 50,000 breeding pairs of penguins and 65,000 pairs of fur seals. Crucially the island is rat-free, supporting large numbers of small burrowing birds such as petrels and prions, as well as larger species including the wandering albatross. Over the austral summer, the beach in front of the station becomes a vital breeding ground for fur seals, with giant petrels, skuas and sheathbills actively patrolling to make short work of dead and dying seal pups and exhausted males. The *SDA* carried out vital resupply work to the station December 2023.

Signy. Signy Research Station (www.bas.ac.uk/polar-operations/sites-and-facilities/facility/signy/) is located on Signy Island, of the South Orkney Islands, at a latitude of 60°43'0" S. The station has been occupied since 18 March 1947, but since 1996 this has been as a summer-only station.

The research at Signy focuses on bird populations and terrestrial ecology, with long-term studies conducted on several species including the Adélie, Chinstrap and Gentoo Penguins, and the Southern Giant Petrel. One in ten of the world's 50,000 southern giant petrels live around Signy, but there have been worrying population trends; in 2015 it was reported that the population had halved over the last 50 years. The terrestrial ecosystem is also of much interest, with Signy's soils and vegetation being colonised by large numbers of invertebrates, including mites, springtails, protozoa, nematodes and tardigrades. Both *SDA* and *HMS Protector* carried out resupply work to Signy over the 2023/2024 season.

Above: Signy Research Station. The SDA *can be seen in the background, with the tender* Terror *alongside the jetty carrying out vital resupply of the research station 2 December 2023.*

Below: Discarded harpoon heads at Signy. Whaling started in the South Orkney Islands in 1907–08. Petter Sørlle, captain of the whale-catcher Paal*, surveyed the island in 1912–13, naming Signy after his wife.*

Left: Gentoo penguins Pygoscelis papua *at Signy.*

Below: Predatory mite on moss. With no indigenous terrestrial vertebrates on Signy, predatory mites occupy the top of the island's terrestrial food web.

Bottom: Southern Elephant-seals Mirounga leonine *are plentiful, forming large pods on suitable beaches during the summer.*

Deception Island. Deception Island (www.bas.ac.uk/about/about-bas/history/british-research-stations-and-refuges/deception-island-b/) is an active volcano, at latitude 62° 59′ S, famous for its horseshoe shape which allow ships to sail into the caldera. The 'safe' anchorage has been well utilised, with the Norwegian Aktieselskabet Hektor whaling station previously established at what is now called Whalers Bay. During Operation Tabarin, the British established a base at Whalers Bay 3 February 1944, designated Station B. (The role of Operation Tabarin was ostensibly to deny safe anchorages to enemy raiding vessels and to gather meteorological data for allied shipping in the South Atlantic. Tabarin also actively reinforced British territorial claims in the Falkland Islands Dependencies [as SGSSI and BAT were

then termed] at a time when this was being challenged. www.bas.ac.uk/about/about-bas/history/operation-tabarin/) The Station utilised several of the former whaling station buildings, including a dormitory which became known as Biscoe House. The station was evacuated temporarily on 5 December 1967 after volcanic eruptions. It was evacuated again on 21 February 1969 when further eruptions damaged the station buildings. The station was finally abandoned on 23 February 1969.

Due to its relatively easily accessible location and the somewhat unique opportunity to sail into an active volcano, Deception Island is a popular location for visiting expedition ships. *HMS Protector* visited the area February 2024 to report on the state of the former British Station, and provide a chance for the ships company to 'step ashore'.

Above: The remains of Station B, Deception Island, February 2024. A cooker unit stands on the site of the former cookhouse, with the main accommodation building in the background.

Below: Equipment from the Norwegian Aktieselskabet Hektor whaling station, Whalers Bay, Deception Island, February 2024.

Detaille Island. Detaille Island (www.bas.ac.uk/about/about-bas/history/british-research-stations-and-refuges/detaille-island-w/) is located to the west of the Antarctic peninsula at a latitude of 66° 52' S. The base, once designated Station W, was occupied from 21 February 1956 to 31 March 1959. The station at Detaille Island, along with its counterpart on Horseshoe Island, was at the centre of Britain's contribution to the International Geophysical

Right column, from top: Work party from HMS Protector approaching Detaille Island February 2024.

The main building at Detaille Island, once designated Station W.

The interior of the main building at Detaille Island is preserved as a time capsule, following its hasty abandonment in 1959.

Weddell Seals Leptonychotes weddellii *hauled out on the ice surrounding Detaille Island.*

Year (1957-58). Detaille was evacuated in dramatic circumstances on 31 March 1959 when sea-ice and weather made relief by ship impossible, and the occupants had to sledge over 30 miles over the sea-ice to meet the waiting ship. Due to the sudden evacuation, the base provides something of a time-capsule and is now managed by the UKAHT under a Memorandum of Understanding with BAS. *HMS Protector* visited the site on two occasions over the 2024/2024 season in order to offload and onload supplies used in the maintenance of the historic site.

Rothera. Rothera Research Station (www.bas.ac.uk/polar-operations/sites-and-facilities/facility/rothera/) is located on Adelaide Island, at a latitude of 67°34'8"S. The station has been occupied from 25 October 1975, and is a centre for biological research and a hub for supporting deep-field and air operations. The station operates throughout the year. In summer, the population peaks at just over 100 people, while during the winter months, from April to mid-October, a 22-strong team continues the science work and maintains Rothera's infrastructure. This includes a crushed rock runway, hangar and wharf for large vessels including the *SDA* and *HMS Protector*, which visited over the 2023/2024 season.

Left: The hangar at Rothera, with De Havilland Canada Twin Otters (DHC-6) in background, and the tail of a De Havilland Canada Dash-7 (DHC-7) in the foreground.

Below: Adélie Penguin Pygoscelis adeliae *at Rothera.*

Above right: Antarctic Tern Sterna vittata *at Rothera.*

Weddell Sea. The Weddell is part of the Southern Ocean, located to the east of the Antarctic Peninsula, covering an area of approximately 2.8 million km^2. Over a ten-day period in November/December 2023, the *SDA* conducted the 'BIOPOLE Southern Ocean Cruise' (https://biopole.ac.uk/tag/rrs-sir-david-attenborough/), which was the first 'formal' scientific voyage of the ship . The cruise sought to understand the role that annual sea-ice retreat plays in setting the conditions for the spring bloom and how this bloom acts to draw down carbon from the atmosphere and sequester it in the deep ocean. The scientific operations included the regular deployment of nets (photos below) and the Conductivity Temperature Depth (CTD) carousel, as well as obtaining ice-cores from the sea ice. Various marine organisms were encountered as part of the study, including an abundance of bird-life.

Left: 'Mammoth net' being deployed onboard the SDA *8 December 2023. The net is carefully lowered to a designated depth, before being slowly recovered. During the ascent, a pressure sensitive mechanism will open and close up to ten-separate nets at different depth ranges. This enables the unique biota of the Antarctica water column to be recorded as it changes with depth.*

Right: 'Bongo net' being deployed onboard the SDA *8 December 2023. This net is typically lowered to a depth of approximately 200m, before being slowly recovered, sampling the organisms of the Antarctic waters.*

Through repeat samples and careful extrapolation, an estimate may be made of the total biomass in the Antarctic waters.

Left: Marine amphipod of Antarctic waters trapped by the SDA 10 December 2023.

From top: Marine copepods trapped by the SDA 10 December 2023. The emphasis on copepods was part of the core BIOPOLE objective of quantifying the lipid component of the biological carbon pump.

(Left): Copepod Calonoides acutus*. This copepod was of particular importance to BIOPOLE. Over the course of their development,* C. acutus *develop a large carbon-rich lipid sac, primarily to fuel their metabolism and aid buoyancy during their winter diapause (a form of hibernation used to survive low food-levels and avoid predation) at depths of (potentially) up to 2500 m. This deep diapause acts to transport carbon from the atmosphere to the deep ocean, but this transport had hitherto never been quantified despite the vast biomass that copepods represent.*

(right): The copepod Calanis propinquis*.*

(bottom left): Antarctic Krill (right) and mysid ship (left). The krill in particular forms a vital component of Antarctic food webs, providing a food source to seals, penguins, whales and other predators.

4. Conclusion

Each one of the locations or projects discussed above would warrant its own article, given the sheer diversity and abundance of wildlife and fascinating social history. However, it is hoped this article has given some indication of the tasking of the *SDA* and *HMS Protector*, as well as provide details of the key locations and wildlife encountered.

Joining *HMS Protector* as First Lieutenant, the author will hopefully enjoy a further two seasons down in the Antarctic, with further reports to follow.

From top: Emperor Penguins Aptenodytes forsteri *seen from onboard the* SDA *during the early hours of the morning 11 December 2023. Away from the main colonies, it is surmised the individuals and small groups were non-breeding males.*

The variety and abundance of seabirds in the Weddell was extraordinary, with four species of petrel seen in this one photo. Clockwise from far-left: Wilson's Storm-petrel Oceanites oceanicus*, Snow Petrel* Pagodroma nivea*, Wilson's Storm-petrel, Antarctic Petrel* Thalassoica antarctica*, Cape Petrel* Daption capense*.*

A pair of Wilson's Storm-petrels Oceanites oceanicus*. With a circumpolar distribution, the petrel is thought to be one of the most abundant bird species on earth.*

Historic building at Whalers Bay successfully restored after graffiti incident

On 6 February 2025, Oceanwide Expeditions announced that, in partnership with the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust (UKAHT), it had successfully restored a historic aircraft hangar at Whalers Bay on Deception Island – just one month after an incident of graffiti. This effort was made possible with the support of independent experts specialising in the removal of graffiti from historic structures.

Oceanwide Expeditions played a key role in making this restoration possible, providing full logistical support, a dedicated removal team, and a field guide to oversee safety, assist with the removal, and ensure all work met the standards agreed upon with UKAHT.

UKAHT CEO Camilla Nichol praised the swift collaboration that made the restoration possible, highlighting Oceanwide Expeditions' essential contribution:

"We are grateful to our partners in Antarctica who have helped to respond rapidly to this incident, particularly the external experts and Oceanwide Expeditions who made this essential work possible. We also extend gratitude to the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators and its members, the British Antarctic Survey and the Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office, for their support."

Oceanwide Expeditions commented "Camilla Nichol's acknowledgment underscores our vital role in enabling the team to reach and restore the site, demonstrating our ongoing commitment to the preservation of Antarctica's historic landmarks."

Ms Nichols also emphasised the gravity of the incident, underscoring why a rapid response was so crucial: "We were all deeply shocked and saddened by this senseless and irresponsible vandalism; an act showing great disregard for both the historical significance of the site and the Antarctic environment."

As a protected Historic Site and Monument (No. 71), Whalers Bay is a site of great historical significance; both as the location of a Norwegian whaling station in the early 20th century and for the remains from the period of British scientific and mapping activity (1944-1969).

Part of the British Base B, the aircraft hangar, is the largest building on Deception Island and was built in the 1960s to house single otter aircraft. It holds high significance for its historic and archaeological values, which contribute to our understanding of the development of science in Antarctica and the history of Antarctic flight.

UKAHT's role is to conserve British Antarctic heritage on the Antarctic Peninsula, protecting the human history of the continent for future generations. As the UK's statutory advisors on Antarctic Heritage, UKAHT was asked to work with experts in the removal of graffiti from historic buildings to devise a methodology for the safe removal of the paint, with the aim of reinstating the building to its previous condition.

Careful consideration was taken to identify the most effective and appropriate methodology, applying rigorous conservation standards to care for the building and the environment in which it stands.

The successful restoration serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving Antarctica's heritage and the responsibility that comes with visiting such a fragile and remote region. "We continue to encourage all visitors to Antarctica to leave no trace, so we can carefully protect this precious wilderness and its remarkable history for generations to come", Camilla Nichols stressed.

Anyone wishing to help protect and share the wonder of Antarctica and its heritage can support the UK Antarctic Heritage Trust by becoming a member or making a donation. Please visit https://www.ukaht.org/support-us/ for more information.

Some of the team and the vandalism, before restoration. Photo: Oceanwide Expeditions

Coral Conservation in the UK Overseas Territories (C-COT) Working Group

First noted in Florida in 2014, the devastating Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTL) was first reported in a UKOT in March 2019 in the Turks & Caicos Islands by the NGO Turks & Caicos Reef Fund (TCRF). At the request of UKOTCF's Wider Caribbean Working Group, in October 2020, its Honorary Secretary, Ann Pienkowski, reviewed the early information in a special edition of WCWG's eBulletin (https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/WCWG-eBulletin-SCTLD-28.pdf). Florida and US Federal scientists had been researching SCTLD for some years, with TCRF personnel joining them soon after the discovery. An effective treatment was found to be divers painting the antibiotic amoxicillin in a specially developed paste (to prevent wider spread of the antibiotic). A technical expert workshop in August 2019 included representatives of US bodies, TCI Government and TCRF, and agreed to proceed with the use of the amoxicillin paste as the only proven way of stopping the rapid spread of this hugely destructive disease. In view of the urgency, several bodies including TCRF, UKOTCF and the Marine Conservation Society pressed for urgent support from UK Government for this action. However, this was not forthcoming. The pressure did result in significant funding, which was deployed by UK Government agency, JNCC, to set up another working group on this topic. Here, in an extract from that group's newsletter, its convenor, ***Kalli de Meyer****, outlines its progress.*

C-COT Newsletter: Milestones in Coral Conservation

A special edition of C-COT's newsletter celebrates two major milestones for the Coral Conservation in the UK Overseas Territories (C-COT) Working Group in 2024: the 4th anniversary and its 50th group meeting. These achievements reflect the collective efforts and progress made across the Caribbean and Western Atlantic UKOTs. C-COT members extend their gratitude to the UK Government, JNCC, and the Darwin Plus Advisory Group for their invaluable support in establishing C-COT and fostering cross-UKOT collaboration.

Three Years in Review

The C-COT working group, composed of government and non-governmental organisation (NGO) representatives, was established to address the urgent threat of Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) in the Caribbean. Since its first meeting in December 2020, C-COT has evolved into a regional platform, promoting collaboration, enhancing communication among territories, and offering support to UKOT governments and NGOs in their coral conservation efforts.

Key achievements include:

- Development of coral action plans;
- SCTLD preparedness, monitoring and treatment;
- Peer-to-peer learning exchanges;
- Partnership-building with leading academics like Dr Blake Ushijima and Dr Andrew Baker.

C-COT Looking Forwards

Over nearly two years, members developed a roadmap as a living document to guide future efforts. In 2024, C-COT members participated in Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network and Reef Futures meetings and gathered in London in conjunction with Reef Conservation UK, to reinforce their goals and strengthen collaborations with UK academics and institutions. C-COT is driven by the needs of the UK Overseas Territories. Although Darwin project funding for C-COT ended in early 2024, the platform continues to offer a valuable network of regional experts, knowledge sharing, and project resources, which have supported many of the UKOT initiatives highlighted below.

C-COT Outputs

C-COT is proud to announce the release of three key contributions to coral reef conservation in the Caribbean, now available on the JNCC website:

- C-COT's Adaptive Management Plan
- C-COT's SCTLD Treatment Strategy
- C-COT Roadmap.

Originally developed through a Darwin Plus project for UK Overseas Territories, these publications offer valuable insights for the entire Caribbean region.

UKOT Highlights

The C-COT platform enables group members to share updates on ongoing coral conservation activities. Here is a snapshot of recent efforts in each UKOT:

Anguilla

In Anguilla, the Fisheries and Marine Resources Unit (FMRU) continues its marine ecosystem management, completing its 16th annual Marine Monitoring Programme, which includes assessments of coral-reefs and seagrass. FMRU has expanded educational outreach through a summer camp and plans to enhance fieldwork with a new vessel. By the end of 2024, FMRU aimed, by the end of 2024, to update the Marine Parks and Fisheries Protection Acts to strengthen conservation. In partnership with Cefas and the Blue Belt Programme, staff have advanced skills in drone-imagery and 2.5D modelling for broader applications beyond beach monitoring.

Bermuda

In 2019, the Government of Bermuda committed to protecting 20% of its waters, and launched the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme in partnership with the Waitt Institute and the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences. The initiative aims to safeguard marine ecosystems, including coral-reefs, by developing a Marine Spatial Plan for resource management, marine protected areas, and a Blue Economy Strategy for sustainable growth.

In April 2024, after four years of consultations, the final draft

New vessel in Anguilla

was released. An independent review panel was evaluating public feedback, with recommendations expected by mid-October and Cabinet approval by the end of 2024.

C-COT has recently welcomed Bermuda's Living Reef Foundation as a member, contributing expertise in reef restoration, focusing on boulder and branching coral species, with an emphasis on research and education.

British Virgin Islands (BVI)

The Ministry of Environment, Natural Resources, and Climate Change, in partnership with H. Lavity Stoutt Community College and local NGO Beyond the Reef (BTR), is advancing marine habitat restoration efforts to meet 2025 goals. This includes participation in regional coral restoration workshops and ecosystem-based restoration training. By September 2024, the Ministry completed water quality monitoring training with CEREMES, enhancing local capacity to assess and restore BVI's reef systems.

BTR has also been actively addressing SCTLD, with over 100 treatment dives conducted in 2024.

The Cayman Islands

The Cayman Islands Department of Environment has completed its annual coral-reef monitoring, including bleaching and disease-surveys across all three islands. In response to recent storm damage, coral reattachment is being considered to enhance reef -stability. Efforts to manage SCTLD remain a priority, particularly in key tourism and biodiversity zones. The Department is also collaborating with Dr Andrew Baker on coral genetics and advancing work in their coral-spawning lab to reproduce and settle potentially resilient coral species.

The Central Caribbean Marine Institute has been actively monitoring Little Cayman's reefs, studying coral-bleaching resilience from 2023 to 2024. While 2023 saw 95% bleaching and 50% mortality, 2024 showed improvement. CCMI is researching coral genotypes with higher thermal tolerance and recently conducted biodiversity expeditions to offshore seamounts. Their work aims to enhance coral-reef resilience, test deep-sea refugia theories, and explore blue-carbon offsets, while their education programmes inspire future ocean stewards.

The Turks and Caicos Islands (TCI)

The Turks & Caicos Islands Department of Environment & Coastal Resources is leveraging drone and GIS technology to map elkhorn corals on barrier- and fringe-reefs, aiming to identify priority sites for effective restoration and enhance ecosystem services such as coastal protection.

In collaboration with the government, the Turks and Caicos Reef Fund (TCRF) leads efforts to treat and monitor SCTLD and has established the first coral biobank in the UK Overseas Territories, housing 11 stony-coral species for future reproduction and reef repopulation. The biobank also serves as an educational centre, regularly hosting local school groups. TCRF recently sent DNA samples for sequencing to ensure genetic diversity within the biobank and led an AGRRA-funded coral workshop in Antigua.

The School for Field Studies, part of the South Caicos Coral Reef Consortium, has developed four *in situ* coral nurseries and a land-based coral lab with a capacity of 3,775 litres. They are focused on restoring elkhorn and staghorn coral populations after the 2023 mass-bleaching event and are beginning to incorporate boulder and brain corals into their nurseries.

Montserrat

The Ministry of Agriculture, Lands, Housing and Environment recently participated in a C-COT-facilitated learning exchange with the Cayman Islands, where a representative shadowed the Department of Environment. This exchange has already informed marine management plans in Montserrat and demonstrated value for other UK Overseas Territories.

Island Solutions, in partnership with the Ushijima Lab in North Carolina, is advancing a Darwin Local-funded coral probiotics study. After identifying beneficial probiotic cultures and building an outdoor lab for testing on SCTLD-infected corals, the team is now preparing for *in situ* trials and recently presented their progress to the C-COT group.

The C-COT group is chaired by Kalli De Meyer of Nature2, with JNCC serving as group secretariat. If you would like to get in touch, contact bryony.meakins@jncc.gov.uk, sabrina.weber@jncc.gov.uk, or kallidemeyer@gmail.com.

This infographic, created by Deviate Design for the C-COT group, highlights key local pressures on reefs in the Caribbean and Western Atlantic UK Overseas Territories. Though not exhaustive, it underscores the need to tackle local challenges to enhance reef resilience and better equip reefs to face global threats like climate-change.

Mapping *Phytophthora kelmanii*, a plant pathogen threatening endemic trees in St Helena

Norbert Maczey, Rebecca Cairns-Wicks, Elizabeth Clingham, Rob Reeder

St Helena's iconic endemic trees are under threat from a recently discovered plant pathogen, identified as *Phytophthora kelmanii*. As part of a Darwin Initiative project (DPLUS157), also supported by Defra (C25062), intensive soil sampling took place in 2024 to map the current spread of the pathogen. The work was carried out by a joint team from CABI (Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International), ENRP (Environment, Natural Resources & Planning) and SHRI (Saint Helena Research Institute) and sampling focused on the Peaks National Park and other areas in St Helena important for the conservation of endemic trees and the restoration of habitats, rich in biodiversity and endemism. To establish the host range of *P. kelmanii* among St Helena plants, this research was complemented by pathogenicity testing conducted at the research facilities of ENRP in St Helena.

Phytophthora species belong to a group of mostly soil borne plant pathogens called oomycetes or water moulds, and one well-established method to detect these from soil is through leaf-baiting. In a first step, soil-samples are flooded with water and then pieces of plant leaves are floated on top of the water surface. This approach allows the leaves to separate from most of other microbes present inside the soil at the bottom of the flooded sample, whilst agile so-called zoospores produced by oomycetes can actively bridge the water layer to infect the leaves floating on the surface. After leaving this for a few days until lesions on the leaves indicate infection by oomycetes, molecular assessment of the bait using a so-called LAMP system can then detect the presence of a specific pathogen or group of pathogens, in this case *Phytophthora* clade 8a a group of species, to which *P. kelmanii* belongs to. Prior to the large-scale survey, many plants present on St Helena had to be tested for their capability to reliably bait *P. kelmanii*. Generally, leaves from known hosts of the pathogen are deemed suitable as baits. However, because *P. kelmanii* was only recently described as a new species only a few plants have been confirmed as hosts, and apart from the rare endemic Whitewood *Petrobium arboretum* none of these are available in St Helena. In the end, two plant species proved to be highly susceptible as bait, one being a widespread and invasive weed locally called Whiteweed *Austroeupatorium inulifolium*, the other garden sage *Salvia officinalis* which can be easily grown at the testing facilities from seeds.

Samples containing leaf baits at the ENRP lab in Scotland, St Helena

More than 400 soil-samples were collected, baited and then processed. Sampling-sites were tagged with durable metal tags and parameters such as the exact location, soil-condition and the health of the trees at the sampling-site were recorded.

Pathogenicity testing to establish whether *P. kelmanii* is the causal agent behind the dieback of several of the endemic tree-species started in early 2024 and is still underway. Other endemic plants, but also some introduced weeds, were tested also. Results so far have confirmed that *P. kelmanii* is a killer of Whitewood and there are indications that Dogwood *Nesohedyotis arborea* is also susceptible to this pathogen, at least under certain conditions. Tests for other suspected hosts, such as the endemic cabbage trees, are still underway.

Results from the soil survey are still being assessed but a broader picture of the presence of spread of *P. kelmanii* is beginning to emerge. Overall, the pathogen seems to be more widespread than initially anticipated with 49 (12.1%) of the 406 processed samples testing positive for *Phytophthora* clade 8a. So far, all species-

Tagging a dying Whitewood tree in the Peaks National Park.

Setup of a pathogenicity test in the shade-house at Scotland, St Helena

specific identifications from these positive samples turned out to be *P. kelmanii*. Most positive samples (57.1%) came from wet and waterlogged soils, only 6.1% from dry soil, confirming the role of soil-moisture for the presence and spread of this pathogen. *Phytophthora* clade 8a was detected from several sites inside the Peaks National Park. Outside the Park it was found in the grounds of the nursery at Scotland and, more worryingly, at some of the living gene-banks established for endemic plants during previous restoration projects. Positive samples were most commonly associated with Whitewood (a known host), and She Cabbage *Lachanodes arborea* and Black Cabbage *Melanodendron integrifolium* trees. This indicates that *P. kelmanii* also attacks these species, but further pathogenicity testing to confirm the pathogen as a causal agent behind the observed dieback is still required.

Sometimes, *Phytophthora* clade 8a has been detected away from any diseased or dying trees, indicating that other hosts, which do not display any obvious symptoms of disease, may play an important role in the spread of the disease among more susceptible hosts. This is something which lacks research and needs urgent attention to inform sustainable restoration strategies. Because *P. kelmanii* is more widespread than initially feared, it has become harder to identify so-called 'clean' sites for the restoration of cloud-forest habitats, and therefore research is required also to assess possibilities to restore already contaminated sites. For example, this can include replanting with endemics not susceptible to *P. kelmanii*, a method which is thought to supress levels of *Phytophthora* pathogens in soil. More research is needed also looking into the conditions required for newly planted trees to maximise resilience against the pathogen where it is already present. This includes looking for ways to increase genetic diversity of endemic trees to allow for the selection of trees with higher levels of resistance.

Judicial review on dismissal of members of Cayman Nature Conservation Council

On February 5, 2025, the Grand Court of the Cayman Islands delivered its judgment in the case of The King (otao The National Conservation Council) v The Central Planning Authority and Bon Crepe Ltd. This Judicial Review case, presided over by The Honourable Justice Jalil Asif KC, addressed critical issues concerning the unlawful grant of planning permission to Bon Crepe Ltd and the powers of the Central Planning Authority (CPA) under the Development and Planning Act (D&P Act).

Following the release of the judgement from the Grand Court, National Conservation Council (NCC) Chairperson Mr Stuart Mailer, said: "The National Conservation Council is pleased to receive the final ruling of the Judicial Review which confirms that the Central Planning Authority (CPA) were indeed acting unlawfully when it adjourned, and then subsequently reactivated and amended, the After-The-Fact permission it had improperly granted for a private road. The NCC's success in this case, and the previous case brought against the CPA by the NCC, validates how critical it is that the NCC retain the ability to challenge questionable decisions made in contravention of the NCA in a Court of Law."

A few days later, the Cayman Islands Government dismissed several members of the NCC, including its Chairman.

On 14 February 2025, the Cayman News Service reported:

The recently fired chair of the National Conservation Council, Stuart Mailer, his colleague Patricia Bradley and the very first NCC chairperson, Christine Rose-Smyth, have sent a letter to Cabinet asking it to revoke what they argue was the unlawful decision to fire six NCC members. The letter is a precursor to seeking a judicial review.

The three local environmental experts said that firing the members on Wednesday was the "latest in a series of efforts by the current Cabinet to weaken the NCC's ability to perform its statutory function of promoting conservation in the Cayman Islands".

They are being represented by Nelsons Legal, in particular, Kate McClymont, who is proving to be one of the most successful local advocates for the environment. In the letter, the lawyers, on their clients' behalf, set out the checkered history of the current Cabinet's attitude toward the NCC.

The letter pointed out that the six members were fired without notice partway through their tenure with no opportunity to make representations. "The Cabinet did not provide any reasons for its decision," nor did Cabinet "explain whether or on what basis it considered the replacement members to have any relevant scientific or technical expertise."

The lawyers noted that the government had done nothing to establish the credentials of the new appointees and that it should have considered their interests to establish that no conflict exists, which is quite significant in the case of one of the appointees, who has publicly declared his opposition to the concept of conservation.

"Clearly there were issues to consider, for example, the Official Hansard Report records that on 12 December 2013, Arden McLean said 'Let me begin by laying my cards on the table, like I have done many times publicly before, and that is that I am not a conservationist. I am no tree hugger'," the lawyers state in the letter.

With parliament set to be prorogued on 1 March ahead of the General Election, the three former NCC members said that the timing of the decision indicates that it has replaced the six members as "a penalty for promoting conservation… in accordance with the National Conservation Act and for the purpose of weakening the NCC's performance of its statutory mandate to promote conservation in the Cayman Islands".

The lawyers listed a catalogue of reasons why the sudden sacking of the six members was unlawful, including the important point that Cabinet is "not permitted to use its powers of appointment as a system of patronage or to further its political aims" or to "frustrate the purpose" of the conservation act. The Public Authorities Law also states that the Cabinet has a constitutional duty to give written reasons for removing a person from the NCC.

However, the government has not given any written reasons other than a comment by the Sustainability Minister Dwayne Seymour in a brief press release issued Thursday. Seymour said the partnership of the National Conservation Council is vital to the successful management of the Cayman Islands' natural resources.

"The work done over the past two years by our outgoing NCC has not gone unnoticed, and I am grateful to each member for their time and efforts," he said but added that the changes would "establish a better balance for the community" and be seen to be fair for all.

"It should be noted that the re-appointment of some members ensures continuity. The members bring a vast array of experience and expertise, as well as the vigour and passion necessary to serve the Cayman Islands in this capacity."

However, the law states that Cabinet should not remove more than

two-thirds of any board at one time. On Wednesday, it fired six out of the seven appointed members, leaving only one alongside the National Trust representative, which the Cabinet has no control over, and the government's own technical members from the Departments of Environment and Planning.

The three plaintiffs are seeking a judicial review and asking the government to reconsider the decision to fire them and their colleagues, largely as a result of the procedural unfairness and the lack of a lawful basis for their removal, which is set out in great detail by their attorneys, alongside the lack of any lawful basis for the new appointments.

They are asking the government for a quick response, given the requirement that judicial reviews move through the courts quickly. Should the application to the courts be successful, the plaintiffs have said that they will be seeking a stay of the removal of all six members and the appointment of the proposed new members.

The next meeting of the council is set for 26 February, and if, as they argue is the case, this new council is unlawful, any decisions made by it later this month would be null and void.

Appeal Against Proposed Amendments to Cayman's Nature Conservation Act

On 27 January 2025, the Sustainable Cayman organisation issued the following statement.

Sustainable Cayman remains dedicated to protecting the Cayman Islands' natural heritage for the collective wellbeing of present and future generations. Having thoroughly reviewed the proposed amendments to the National Conservation Act (NCA) and informed by The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)'s independent analysis of the proposed amendments vis a vis standards of good environmental governance and practices of developed nations, we must express our significant concerns regarding the proposed legislative changes.

Key Points of Concern:

- ***Weakening of Scientific Oversight:*** The amendments propose a restructuring of the National Conservation Council that would severely dilute the scientific rigor required for robust environmental governance. This includes stripping key environmental and scientific positions of their voting rights and replacing members with scientific and technical expertise with administrators, critically undermining the council's capacity to provide well-informed analysis, increasing the risk of poor decisions for the future of our islands.
- ***Erosion of Environmental Assessments and Reduced Public Participation:*** The proposed changes aim to reduce the scope and necessity of Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs), integral for evaluating the long-term impacts of development projects. This could result in irreversible damage to our critical natural capital. For instance, a lack of comprehensive EIAs for the East-West Arterial Road project could lead to inadequate flood mitigation or unintended adverse impacts on surrounding freshwater lenses. EIAs also allow the public to be informed and to participate in important decisions about large scale developments. The proposed amendments therefore are a reduction in the participation rights of citizens and their access to information.
- ***Reduction in Transparency and Accountability:*** By diminishing the role of environmental experts in decision-making and curtailing required consultations, the amendments threaten the transparency and accountability of our environmental policies. This shift could lead to expedited developments at the expense of natural resources integral to our collective future wellbeing.
- ***Potential for Irreversible Environmental Impact:*** Granting the Cabinet the power to override environmental expert recommendations and proceed without thorough scientific scrutiny represents a significant regression in our environmental policy. This could lead to decisions that favour short-term gains over long-term sustainability.
- ***Undermining International and Community Trust:*** These amendments could impede our ability to fulfill international environmental obligations and damage the global reputation of the Cayman Islands as a conservation leader.

Community Engagement:

Over 475 community members have joined Sustainable Cayman in writing letters to share their concerns about the proposed amendments to the National Conservation Act, emphasising the widespread lack of support for the proposed amendments.

Recommendations:

We advocate for a comprehensive public consultation process that includes all stakeholders, ensuring that any amendments to the NCA reinforce, rather than undermine, our environmental governance framework. We invite you to engage with us and other concerned organisations to discuss these findings in depth and explore ways to strengthen, not weaken, the legislative protections for our environment.

A Call to Action:

Imagine our islands stripped of their beautiful beaches, unique landscapes, and vibrant coral reefs. The proposed changes risk enabling unchecked development that could irreparably damage these treasures. We need robust laws to preserve our island's natural beauty and ability to support community wellbeing for future generations. Your support is crucial in safeguarding the Cayman Islands.

Sustainable Cayman opens Pirate Cove Shoreline Park

In a vibrant celebration of community and conservation, over 50 distinguished guests and community members gathered in South Sound on 17 December 17th for the official opening of Pirate Cove Shoreline Park. The event marked the culmination of a significant environmental restoration effort, blending local tradition with innovative conservation techniques to create a new coastal haven.

Hosted against a backdrop of serene sea views, the celebration featured the presence of esteemed guests including Her Excellency Governor Jane Owen, MP Roy McTaggart, MP Andre Ebanks, and Miss Supranational Cayman Islands 2024, Tracey Campbell. The event underscored the community's commitment to nature and responsible stewardship.

"We are thrilled to open Pirate Cove Shoreline Park, a testament to what we can achieve when community, government, and conservationists work together," said Melanie Carmichael, a spokesperson for the project. "This park is not just a space for recreation; it's a beacon of our dedication to preserving our beautiful shoreline and fostering community wellness."

The park's design and construction involved numerous local experts and organizations. Joanne Mercille of Caribbean Blooms, the landscape consultant, played a crucial role in transforming the initial vision into reality, supported by the Department of Environment, the Public Lands Commission, and the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency. The project also benefited from the generous support of the Pirate Cove Residents' Association Ltd, which allowed the restoration of crucial beach access.

The project was funded through the Darwin Plus Local grants scheme, which supported both the shoreline mangrove initiative and the native plant installation, showcasing the UK government's commitment to supporting local conservation efforts.

The event also welcomed new Executive Committee Member, Roshini Seeram, whose expertise in corporate regulation and passion for sustainable development is set to enhance the organisation's future projects.

The celebration featured insights from Sustainable Cayman Ambassadors Rickeem Lashley, Soleil Parkinson and Al Ebanks, who shared their experiences and the project's achievements with the audience. Additionally, long-time youth ambassador Steff McDermott introduced her exciting new pilot project, "Roots of Resilience," a Mangrove VR experience supported by Sustainable Cayman, highlighting innovative approaches to environmental education.

"Our ambassadors, like the mangrove seedlings we've nurtured, represent the future of conservation," added Melanie. "Their dedication is crucial as we continue to advance our goals of enhancing shoreline resiliency and employing nature-based solutions."

Pirate Cove Shoreline Park is now open to the public, offering a sustainable space that protects the coast and enriches community life, embodying the spirit of resilience and cooperation that defines the Cayman Islands.

Jersey Marine Conservation – new UKOTCF Associate organisation

***Kevin McIlwee**, Chairman, outlines the work of Jersey Marine Conservation.*

Jersey Marine Conservation (JMC) is a government approved, independent, nonprofit organisation, dedicated to protecting and preserving the marine environment around Jersey, in the Channel Islands. Established in 2011, JMC addressed public criticism of the Government of Jersey over protracted delays in the development of a strategy required to fulfill Jersey's treaty obligations and international conservation commitments.

The organisation was promulgated by the Société Jersiaise, Marine Biology Section's initiative to address the situation. Assisted by the Association of Jersey Charities (AJC) and supported by the UK Marine Conservation Seasearch section, Jersey Seasearch was formed and officially registered through the Jersey Financial Services. The group set out to provide a training programme, a supervisory framework for volunteers, and a system to process and audit the reports on species and habitats.

Run completely by volunteers, the organisation has maintained an independent, non-political role, raising awareness and promoting conservation efforts to safeguard what has emerged as rich, unique and diverse marine ecosystems.

Following AJC advice, the organisation was rebadged to become Jersey Marine Conservation, receiving the accolade of their 50-year AJC award and the annual UK National Biodiversity Network 2020 award for JMC's contribution to the UK database.

By 2024, JMC volunteers had gathered over 20,000 records that are used extensively in research work. This annually updated, publicly accessible database includes also surveys in all parts of the Channel Islands, listing vital habitats, such as seagrass-meadows, maerl, kelp-forests, submerged reefs and archaeologically important wreck-sites, all of which are often home to endemic and endangered species.

Through the help of the Association of Jersey Charities and Community Foundation, JMC has grown into a highly respected organisation, committed to ensuring the island strives to maintain the long-term health and sustainability of these marine environments.

On that basis, the primary mission of JMC is to identify and raise awareness about the importance of Jersey's marine ecosystems and to encourage the local community to take an active role in their protection.

The organisation has two main goals:

First, to maintain an ongoing research and monitoring programme that identifies the range of marine species, highlighting those that are vulnerable or under threat

This research has provided essential evidence under pinning policy decisions and formulating strategies for conservation and protection. Additionally, JMC advocates the establishment of an effective but acceptable Marine Protection Areas (MPAs) and the enhancement of Ramsar Sites around Jersey. Through our non-government status, we are seeking pathways that ensure human activities, such as fishing, recreation, the leisure industry

Some of Jersey Marine Conservation's activities

and coastal development, are managed in a way that safeguards sensitive habitats and species group range.

Though not sufficiently formally recognised, our forward vision has played a key role in restricting the use of mobile gear, the creation of the Jersey Marine Spatial Plan, updates to Jersey Wildlife Law and the fulfilment of maintaining Jersey's Ramsar Sites' status through the Jersey Ramsar Advisory Group.

Second, Education and Community Awareness

Educating the public about the value of Jersey's marine environment is an essential complementary role.

JMC runs educational programmes at all academic levels through outreach activities and awareness campaigns for schools, youth groups, community associations, residents and visitors. These include: workshops; corporate and social responsibility; science, technology, engineering and maths; talks and presentations about marine species, providing insights into the importance of protecting marine habitats; and guidelines on how we can play a part in reducing the impacts of biodiversity decline, pollution and climate-change in both an island's terrestrial and surrounding marine environment.

Our organisation has expanded considerably through community support to include remote-location coastal cleanups, an estimation of the seal breeding population and the reduction of seabed damage. Working with the Jersey International Centre for Advanced Studies and Ports of Jersey, in 2021, we instigated an Environmentally Friendly Mooring Buoy systems test programme and, since 2023, have been pioneering low-budget non-intrusive marine population monitoring, using thermal drones and baited remote videos (BRUVs).

JMC encourages participation by volunteers from wide-ranging backgrounds, promoting and fostering a sense of community involvement in conservation efforts.

We provide formal training and assessment in the Seasearch survey methodology and support many university students, locally and internationally, including MSc studies on seagrass, mangrove swamps and tropical reefs. Data collected from these numerous publications are helping inform conservation strategies and policy decisions.

Collaboration with other organisations

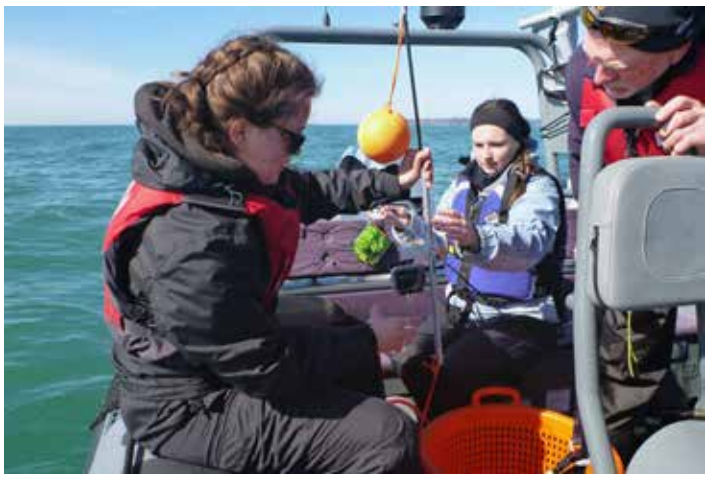
JMC works closely with academic centres and numerous environmental organisations, both locally and internationally, sharing conservation initiatives. These include collaborating with government bodies, JICAS, University of Exeter, the Blue Marine Foundation, the Jersey Biodiversity Centre, Jersey National Park, Jersey Geopark, Jersey Sea Cadets and Alderney Wildlife Trust.

The work continues!

www.jerseymarineconservation.org

jerseymarineconservation@gmail.com

Jersey Charities Commissioner Approval 303



Guernsey Nature Commission – new UKOTCF Associate organisation

The Guernsey Nature Commission is a charity in Guernsey, dedicated to promoting and protecting the island's natural environment. The Commission plays a key role in ensuring that the island's ecosystems, wildlife, and natural habitats are preserved for future generations. This includes promoting sustainable practices among local communities and businesses, conducting research, and raising public awareness about the importance of conservation. As part of Guernsey's broader environmental strategy, the Nature Commission works to direct progress against the States of Guernsey Strategy for Nature.

The primary mission of the Guernsey Nature Commission is to enhance the natural environment of Guernsey and Herm within a generation.

The Commission's main objectives are:

1. Encourage our island community to connect with nature
2. Increase awareness, knowledge, and support for nature, including through education and effective information-sharing
3. Care for nature and reduce pressures on our natural environment
4. Help build the evidence-base for effective management of the environment by all
5. Support the sustainability agenda that is gathering momentum both globally and locally
6. Aid in the identification of our Natural Capital.

The Guernsey Nature Commission is involved in a wide range of projects and initiatives that aim to protect and restore the island's natural environment. Some of the key areas of focus include:

1. **State of Nature reporting**: Production of a 5-yearly state-of-nature report for Guernsey and Herm, the first of which was released last year: *State of Nature 2024 | Nature Commission Guernsey.*
2. **Public Engagement and Education**: Raising awareness about the importance of conservation is central to the Guernsey Nature Commission's work. The Commission organises educational talks and works with schools, businesses and communities to inspire people to take action in preserving Guernsey's natural environment.
3. **Data collection**: including through citizen-science, surveying, and other means, to build the evidence-base for management of the natural environment.
4. **Managing the Guernsey Biological Records Centre**: this is the centralised storage location for biological records for Guernsey and Herm (and associated territorial waters), providing a fundamental resource for informed decision-making as well as a source of educational and scientific data. The mission of the GBRC is to collate, manage, and share information about all aspects of Guernsey's and Herm's wildlife, ecology, and natural environment.

Identifying egg-cases

Ninth UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council Meeting, 12th March 2025

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 and the next.

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, Heritage, Transport and Technical Services, Gibraltar (with, not shown:* **Dr Liesl Mesillo**, *Principle Secretary, Ministry of Education, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate, Heritage, Transport and Technical Services;* ***Stephen Warr**, Chief Executive, Department of the Environment;* ***Dr Keith Bensusan**, Consultant to Government)*

***Mary Creagh MP**, Minister for Nature, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra), UK*

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

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

***Hon. Clare Barber MHK**, Minister of Environment, Food and Agriculture, Isle of Man*

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

***Conseiller Dr Carol Cragoe**, Chief Pleas and La Société Sercquaise, Sark*

***MLA Pete Biggs**, Lead Councillor on Environment, Falkland Islands*

***Mr James Robinson**, Head of Operations &* ***Mr Glyn Mason**, Waste and Recycling Officer, States of Alderney*

***Ms Melissa Meade**, Principal Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Sustainability, Innovation and the Environment, Anguilla*

***Ms Tiffany Simpson**, Director of Conservation, Ascension Island Government Conservation and Fisheries Directorate*

***Ms Lisa Hurlston-McKenzie**, Senior Policy Advisor for Climate Resiliency, Ministry of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency, Cayman Islands*

***Ms Debbie Horton**, Environmental Policy Officer, Falkland Islands*

***Mr Guy Dumas**, Gibraltar UK Representative*

***Mr Jim Robinson**, Director Natural Environment, States of Guernsey*

***Mr Peter Barnes**, Head of Energy & Climate Change, States of Guernsey*

***Ms Rachel Lowe**, Contracts & Compliance Manager of the States Trading Supervisory Board which has responsibility for Guernsey Waste*

***Mr Willie Peggie**, Group Director of Natural Environment, States of Jersey*

***Dr Ken Milne**, Director of Environment, and* ***Dr Richard Selman**, Head of Ecosystems, Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture, Isle of Man*

***Ms Kelly Taylor**, Climate Change Partner - Land, Sea & Nature, Isle of Man*

***Mrs Elizabeth Clingham**, Head of Nature Conservation, St Helena (with, not shown,* ***Miss Isabel Peters**, Chief Environment Officer)*

***Mrs Kedell Worboys**, St Helena UK Representative*

***Mr Chris Carnegy**, Tristan da Cunha UK Representative*

***Ms Tracy Knight**, Representative & Head of Turks & Caicos Islands Government London Office*

***Mr Peter Candler**, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, UK*

***Ms Ness Latham**, Devolution Team, Defra*

***Ms Gabrielle Edwards**, Defra*

***Mr Edward Beaves**, Defra*

***Ms Jordan Newman**, Biodiversity in the OTs team, Defra*

***Mr Yegor Ryazanov**, Devolution team, Defra*

***Mr James Butterworth**, Defra*

***Ms Claire Donse**, DLA Piper*

***Ms Marie Kingston**, DLA Piper*

***Professor Paul Anderson**, University of Birmingham and Faraday Institution's SafeBatt project*

***Professor Paul Shearing**, University of Oxford and Faraday Institution's SafeBatt project*

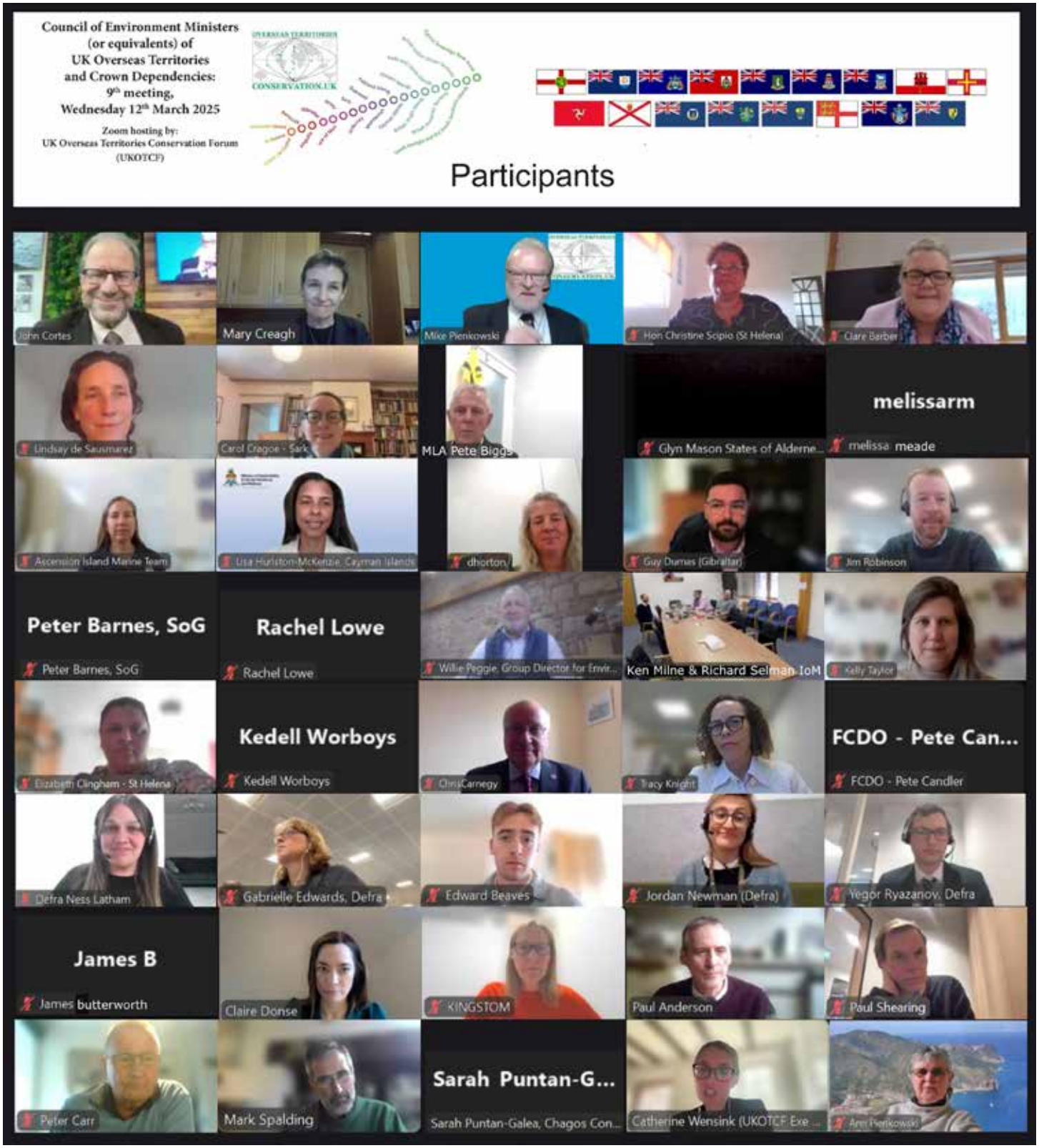
***Dr Pete Carr**, Chagos Conservation Trust*

***Dr Mark Spalding**, Chief Scientific Advisor to BIOT Administration*

***Ms Sarah Puntan-Galea**, Director, Chagos Conservation Trust*

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

***Mrs Ann Pienkowski**, Hon. Secretary, Wider Caribbean Working Group, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (Secretariat)*



Ninth UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council Meeting, 12 March 2025 (by Zoom) – Statement

Summary

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

We welcomed the participation of UK Defra Minister for Nature Mary Creagh MP with her officials, and her wish for greater engagement with our territories in matters relating to the Convention on Biological Diversity. We stressed that UK's performance in these international fora relied heavily on UK's financial contributions to the work of our personnel and NGOs in this area and welcomed Minister Creagh's commitment to strive to ensure such funding.

We heard from Professor Paul Anderson of the Faraday Institution's ReLiB project and Professor Paul Shearing of the Faraday Institution's SafeBatt project about safe disposal of Li-ion batteries. We noted the challenges to small islands in that new batteries may be imported but shippers decline to carry used ones. We noted that an alternative of manual dismantling could generate much higher value material than industrial methods, provided that safety measures are adequate. We noted also the concept of "second life" whereby batteries no longer suitable for e.g. use in vehicles might still be appropriate for use in storing wind- or solar-generated electricity.

We welcomed a presentation from global lawyers DLA Piper on their pro bono work, and its potential relating to international conventions, implementation plans, nature finance, training resources for civil servants and identification of gaps in legislation was also noted with interest. We intend to follow this up.

We welcomed a positive update from Sark which had taken up the invitation in our earlier meetings from the IUCN-UK Protected Area Working Group and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum to extend the analysis of the UK's contribution to the Global Biodiversity Framework target of protecting 30% of land and sea by 2030, known as 30-by-30, to an example UKOT or CD.

We welcomed presentations on the environmental importance and conservation needs of the Chagos Archipelago (British Indian Ocean Territory) from Dr Pete Carr (of the NGO Chagos Conservation Trust) and Dr Mark Spalding (Scientific Advisor to the BIOT Administration). We were impressed with the immense biological importance of the area and the international economic value of maintaining its ecology. We noted that the whole of the Exclusive Economic Zone has been a protected area since 2010 and remains one of the healthiest coral-reefs in the world. "Spill-over" of marine life to beyond the boundary makes adjoining seas so rich that its boundary can be seen just by remote mapping of fishing vessels. We commended the BIOT Administration and the Chagos Conservation Trust on their outstanding conservation work, and hope that the current proposal to Darwin Plus to extend work to eradicate human-introduced invasive rats to make the eastern Penos Banhos the largest rat-free chain of islands in the Indian Ocean will be successful. Whatever the future of the Chagos Archipelago we, as fellow overseas territories, consider it essential to maintain the work to conserve the ecology of the area. This is not just for nature conservation reasons, but also because of its economic importance to surrounding nations, as outlined above.

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, and thanked UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum for continuing to organise these meetings; we asked them to organise the next, by remote communications, probably in autumn 2025, on a date to be decided later once other constraints become clearer.

Main Text

1. We, the portfolio holders for the environment in our respective territories or dependencies, held our ninth Environment Ministers' Council meeting by Zoom on Wednesday 12th March 2025. 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, carbon-capture). 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 94% 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 recognise 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 welcomed the participation in one session by UK Defra Minister for Nature Mary Creagh MP with her officials. Minister Creagh thanked the Council for the invitation and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum for organising this series of meetings, to which she looked forward to contributing. We welcomed Minister Creagh's indication that UK's new Biodiversity Strategy for UK Overseas Territories would be published this spring and will strive to supply our final comments within this month. We welcomed Minister Creagh's wish for greater engagement with our territories in matters relating to the Convention on Biological Diversity. We noted that interaction and flow of information between territory and UK delegates to that Convention had increased recently and welcomed further progress in this regard. We expressed the hope that interactions and flow of information in respect of the Framework Convention on Climate Change improve at least to similar levels. Noting that 94% of the global biodiversity for which UK is responsible being dependent on UK Overseas Territories, we stressed that UK's performance in these international fora relied heavily on UK's financial contributions to the work of our personnel and NGOs in this area. We welcomed Minister Creagh's commitment to strive to ensure such funding, e.g. through Darwin Plus and the Blue Belt programme and, once finances reach a more satisfactory level, to explore an equivalent of Blue Belt for terrestrial areas, on which most of our unique species depend. We welcomed the encouragement to engage with Baroness (Jennifer) Chapman of Darlington, Minister of State, on FCDO aspects.

7. In the context of Minister Creagh's commending Tristan da Cunha's pioneering Marine Protection Zone, we joined with Tristan da Cunha in thanking Minister Creagh for her support in events raising the profile, especially with the many new MPs, of the importance of territory biodiversity and UK's shared responsibility. We welcomed the encouragement from Minister Creagh to identify other routes to link to MPs, such as via diaspora concentrations in constituencies or historical links.

8. We welcomed the presence of Professor Paul Anderson (University of Birmingham) of the Faraday Institution's ReLiB project and Professor Paul Shearing (University of Oxford) of the Faraday Institution's SafeBatt project. Professor Anderson gave a presentation about safe disposal of Li-ion batteries, following Professor Shearing's presentation on safe use to our previous meeting. We noted the importance of considering disposal issues before embarking too heavily on use, and the challenges to small islands in that new batteries may be imported but shippers decline to carry used ones. The session noted that recycling methods generally used are highly inefficient, generating a low-value mulch of fragments of all components. An alternative of manual dismantling could generate much higher value material, provided that safety measures are adequate, and some of our members expressed interest in exploring this further. We noted also the concept of "second life" whereby batteries no longer suitable for e.g. use in vehicles might still be appropriate for use in storing wind- or solar-generated electricity. In thanking the professors, we warned that we might turn to them again for advice. We noted that several territories are developing electrification and wider energy strategies, and considered that we should hold a session on this at a future meeting.

9. We welcomed a presentation by Claire Donse and Marie Kingston of global lawyers DLA Piper on their pro bono work, particularly the aspects in support of environmental conservation for small island states and its potential value to our territories. We were impressed both by the volume and quality of their pro bono work, and noted particularly the aspects relating to international conventions, implementation plans, training of civil servants, and to nature finance and its potential. In respect of the last, DLA Piper's legal drafting help in setting up the community trust fund enabling Tristan da Cunha's Marine Protection Zone was noted with gratitude. We noted with approval also the litigation progress including establishing the right of environmental NGOs to represent nature and receive reimbursement for it via additional fines. The work on identification of gaps in legislation was also noted with interest. We welcomed that contacts with DLA Piper will be passed on by the Secretariat, so that direct communication can be established by territories with an interest.

10. We welcomed an update from Sark which had taken up the invitation in our earlier meetings from the IUCN-UK Protected Area Working Group and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum to extend the analysis of UN Convention on Biological Diversity's Global Biodiversity Framework target, known as 30-by-30, from UK to an example UKOT or CD. Sark has challenges in restoring grazing on steep marginal slopes where it is no longer economic but important for wildlife, and a lack of nature legislation but a rather involved process for new laws, so that the possibility for deployment of existing laws as well as developing an island plan are being explored, with optimism for progress. We noted that any other territory which wished to explore help from the IUCN-UK Protected Area Working Group and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum in assessing how their protection measures match 30-by-30 requirements should contact the Secretariat in the first instance.

11. We welcomed presentations on the environmental importance and conservation needs of the Chagos Archipelago (British Indian Ocean Territory) from Dr Pete Carr (of the NGO Chagos Conservation Trust) and Dr Mark Spalding (Scientific Advisor to the BIOT Administration). We were impressed with the immense biological importance of the area and the international economic value of maintaining its ecology. The complex has 5 atolls with islands, including the largest atoll in the world, and 4 drowned atolls, as well as some 80 seamounts, with a larger area of coral-reefs than all other UKOTs combined and, with these, making UK the 12th coral-reef nation, ahead of the Bahamas. On land, it has the highest density of Robber (or Coconut) Crabs in the world, and huge sea-bird colonies, totalling more than a million birds, whose cycling of nutrients from sea to land and back again have been shown to be crucial to the huge marine productivity. The whole of the Exclusive Economic Zone has been a protected area since 2010 and remains one of the healthiest coral-reefs in the world. "Spill-over" of marine life to beyond the boundary makes adjoining seas so rich that its boundary can be seen just by remote mapping of fishing vessels.

12. We commended the BIOT Administration and the Chagos Conservation Trust on their outstanding conservation work, and hope that the current proposal to Darwin Plus to extend work to eradicate human-introduced invasive rats to make the eastern Peros Banhos the largest rat-free chain of islands in the Indian Ocean is successful. We do not wish to enter into the political aspects of the future of the Chagos Archipelago. However, whatever the future of the Chagos Archipelago, we, as fellow overseas territories, consider it essential to maintain the work to conserve the ecology of the area. This is not just for nature conservation reasons, but also because of its economic importance to surrounding nations, as outlined above. If the Archipelago remains as BIOT, we expect UK Government to maintain this. If it is transferred to Mauritius, we urge UK and Mauritius governments to agree a gradual transition in respect of conservation. This is because, Mauritius may be limited in resources, is over 2000km from Chagos (about the same distance as from London to Agadir in south Morocco) with no existing transport link, and without experience of management of the area – so that a progressive hand-over period would be of obvious benefit to all.

13. We share the view expressed by Sark that this Council is inspirational in informing each other on what others are doing so that we can benefit, and thank UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum for organising it. These meetings 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 appreciate greatly our joint working, both with UKOTA and UKOTCF. We welcome those representatives new to the Council by virtue of elections or other changes in territories, and express thanks and best wishes to the two delegation leaders who are participating in their last meeting. We ask UKOTCF to organise the next meeting, probably in the autumn after considering avoiding clashes with other relevant events.

Appendix: List of Ministers and other lead representatives participating

Alderney: Mr James Robinson, Head of Operations (on behalf of States Member Iain McFarlane, States of Alderney)

Anguilla: Ms Melissa Meade, Principal Assistant Secretary, Ministry of Sustainability, Innovation and the Environment (on behalf of Hon. Kyle Hodge, Minister of Sustainability, Innovation

and the Environment)

Bermuda: Apologies from Hon. Jache Adams. JP, MP, Minister of Public Works and Environment

[British] Virgin Islands: Apologies from Hon. Julian Fraser, RA, Deputy Premier and Minister with responsibility for the environment

Cayman Islands: Ms Lisa Hurlston-McKenzie, Senior Policy Advisor for Climate Resiliency, Ministry of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency (on behalf of Hon Dwayne S Seymour, Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency)

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

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

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

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

Jersey: Mr Willie Peggie, Group Director of Natural Environment (on behalf offor Deputy Steve Luce, Minister for the Environment)

Montserrat: Apologies from Hon. John P. Osborne, Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing, Environment, Youth Affairs & Sports

Pitcairn: Apologies from Mr Simon Young, Mayor of Pitcairn

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

Sark: Conseiller Dr Carol Cragoe, (Agriculture, Environment and Sea Fisheries Committee of the Chief Pleas of Sark)

Tristan da Cunha: Mr Chris Carnegy, UK representative (on behalf of Cllr Ian Lavarello, Chief Islander)

Turks and Caicos Islands: Ms Tracy Knight, Representative & Head of London Office (on behalf of Hon. Zhavargo Jolly, Minister of Tourism, Environment, Heritage, Maritime & Gaming)

Building Horticulture Capacity in Montserrat

*Here, **Leigh Morris** (CEO of Manx Wildlife Trust and UKOTCF Council Member) reports on the horticultural upskilling carried out in Montserrat during July & August 2024 to support the UKOTCF delivery of Darwin Plus Projects 155 (supporting project* Adopt a Home for Wildlife*) & 192 (project* Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development*). This was the second visit by Leigh, following the first in May 2023.*

Summary

This report covers my second visit to Montserrat, which took place from 18 July to 5 August 2024, to help build horticultural skills on the island and support the UKOTCF delivery of two Darwin projects DPLUS 155 (ending in 2024) and DPLUS192. This trip I focused on pest and disease control, plant-pruning and reinforcing the plant-propagation approaches in the Montserrat National Trust (MNT) nursery. My key audience was the MNT team and the Adopters (members of the community developing and managing their land within the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* part-funded by DPLUS155).

My first week was spent visiting Adopter sites (Wildlife Home) and farms, to develop the topics for the training workshops in week two. I visited 11 of the Adopter sites, including small private gardens, school grounds and more expansive natural landscape areas. I can see that much has been achieved during the project, and I believe that with several of the Adopters this will sustain, providing an opportunity to develop the nursery plant growing and wildlife enhancing aspects even more. I made a series a farm-visits accompanied by Chris Sealys (MNT) and Elvis Gerald (Montserrat Govt. Farm Extension Officer, and *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project officer), having useful conversations with Montserratian and ex-pat farmers. They ranged from part-time farmers growing field crops, to one farmer who was full-time producing lettuce more intensively.

In my second week I delivered three horticulture training workshops on Plant Pruning, Pest and disease control, and a refresher for MNT team on plant-propagation. The horticultural workshops were well received, with high levels of enthusiasm and interaction on both workshops, with, I believe, genuine learning achieved, and there is a clear need and desire for more training from the participants, including from some interested gardeners and landscapers. Following the training, a presentation event was held at MNT, with all those who had attended horticulture training in 2023 and 2024 being invited to receive a certificate of attendance.

Due to capacity and other priorities, there had been some drift from the standards we had jointly set for propagation during my visit in

2023, but it was good to see the endemic Pribby we propagated last year looking healthy. The refresher training I delivered to the MNT team has reinforced the key horticultural points. Paramount now is to set and sustain nursery systems and ways of working, and to that aim I still see a great long-term benefit to MNT by writing and adopting of a Living Collections Policy and Plant Production List.

Looking at agriculture was not an aim of my visit, but food production in Montserrat has major impact on the environment of the island. There is clearly work to do in Montserrat on how to use pesticides safely and effectively to control pests and diseases and benefit food production, while at the same time minimising the risks to wildlife and people. I regard this as a crux issue for the island and needs to be tackled in several ways. My overall belief is that much more local food could be produced in a more regenerative and nature-positive way, and a clear strategy is required to achieve this.

Wider engagement on my visit included meeting people from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), and David Clements, an entomologist, who accompanied me on several visits (see SOSNoM 17 for a report on David's work). I participated in an excellent session with Monty's Ambassadors (the MNT youth group), and on my weekends I dived with Scuba Montserrat and assisted with their coral-reef conservation work, alongside two marine biologists from Australia. I spent several late evenings observing green-turtle nesting, visited the Mountain Chicken enclosure and a wonderful private garden owned by two MNT supporters. It was great to witness the developments in the MNT nursery, with new buildings for the team, and to visit the new MNT Pipers Nature Trail and, soon to be re-opened interpretation centre in an old sugar mill at Richmond Hill (the pre-eruption home of the National Museum).

Overall, my two visits to Montserrat have helped build horticultural capacity and have facilitated more joint working and collaboration across the island. The key upskilling has been with the MNT team, who I hope and believe will continue to showcase and champion the good horticultural practices we covered in my training. My own personal knowledge and understanding of Montserrat's environmental issues has expanded greatly, which I believe enhances my usefulness in wider UKOT discussions within the UKOTCF Council.

The full costs of my trip were met by UKOTCF through the Darwin Plus Project funding. My employer, Manx Wildlife Trust, granted my additional time away to carry out the visit.

My broad aim was to continue my work from 2023 and continue to build horticultural skills in the island to benefit conservation, environment and local food production. Specific objectives being:

- Continue to build up horticultural skills at the MNT botanic garden.
- Work with Adopters (members of the community developing and managing their land for wildlife within the A*dopt a Home for Wildlife* project) to support them.
- Look at legacy of Adopters in so far as using all information learned to feed into the creation of a toolkit where Adopters of the toolkit will build on earlier work.
- Develop and deliver a certificated horticulture training course.
- Involve gardeners/landscapers, farmers and the Montserrat Government (Department of the Environment) in the training whenever possible.
- Liaise with MNT to prepare for the visit of the Manx Wildlife Trust Education Officer (Beth Penhallurick) to support DPLUS192 and the School twinning programme in November 2024 (see article in this issue).
- Sign up to iNaturalist and input biological records while in Montserrat www.inaturalist.com

Adopt a Home for Wildlife site-visits

The *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project was part-funded by Darwin Plus grant 155 until September 2024. It is managed by UKOTCF and MNT (see UKOTCF website for project details: www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/adoptahomeforwildlife/, as well as previous issues of SOSNoM: https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/project-newsletter-1/. The project funding ended in 2024, but the Adopters, MNT and UKOTCF intend that the work continues. One of the aims of my trip was to engage with the individual Adopters, to provide knowledge and training, and imbed the legacy of the project.

There were 15 Adopter Sites designated in the project (11 in Phase 1 and four more in Phase 2). During this trip I visited eleven of these in the order below, accompanied by Chris Sealys (MNT Conservation Officer).

Tim Orton, Garibaldi Hill (WH01): This was the first Adopter site and part of the genesis of the whole project with UKOTCF. Tim has a large garden bordering tropical dry forest, which he is trying to regenerate. Non-native Acacias have been cleared, and Neem seedlings frequently removed. Some planting and some natural regeneration have taken place. The site has challenges with the soil, as the top 18" (45cm) is volcanic ash (pH 8.7), with then just 2-4" (5-10cm) of soil underneath before the bed rock. The volcanic ash killed most of the understory plants in the forest, and the bare soil/ash heats up massively, so any planting is challenging.

Above: Formal lawn/garden with tropical dry forest behind.
Below: Inside the tropical dry forest

Tim believes he has benefited greatly from knowledge from MNT staff, Scriber, etc. and he intends to carry on after the project funding ends.

Norman Cassells, Hibiscus Drive (WH13): Norman has been developing his garden for 30+ years. In the last 5-10 years his ideas have developed greatly, and his vision now is to create a large water-garden with ponds, waterfalls, aquaponics with tilapia (fish), and overhanging palm trees (apparently the ones trained to grow horizontal are worth much more money), which becomes a garden people pay to visit and enjoy. Norman recently delivered a talk on his garden at the MNT evening celebrating the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* programme, which covered how he intends to monetise his garden with paying visitors, plant rental for events, selling crops including cut flowers.

Baseline surveys carried out three years ago of invertebrates and flora were repeated every year. In the annual survey, Chris looks at species and abundance of invertebrates on different surfaces, including on flowers, which are photographed and sent to Catherine at UKOTCF.

Norman faces challenges in this space. This site is impacted by volcanic ash with a layer of ca 2 feet (60cm) covering the site. This causes fruit-trees to die in dry spells. Agouti and Iguanas are significant pests and, for example, ate all the sugar-cane. The pandemic has held up the development of the water-gardens. Norman plans to plant a Pribby hedge, with plants supplied by MNT, but MNT have a limit, so this may not be possible. There is an opportunity to make this a future MNT nursery plant production target. Norman has a Variegated Bougainvillea that Chris is keen to propagate, and this could also be added to a nursery production list. Fatpoke is used by Norman for fire prevention.

Above: Norman explaining his garden to the author.
Below: Garden view

This is an excellent space and at the time of the visit, was deemed to be a potential venue for the workshop the following week, with Norman assisting with the training.

Kathryn and Mark Couch, Hibiscus Drive, Olveston (WH08): A short visit, as the owners were currently off the island, but permission to visit was obtained. Some small plots have been added/planted around the house, along with a new lawn, more flowering plants and planters by the pool.

View of the rear garden including part of the lawn area.

Carol Osborne, Cassava Ghaut (WH12): Carol (who was not there on the visit), with assistance from the project, has cut down invasive trees in mature secondary forest and replaced them with papaya and banana orchard, grass lawn and seats to create a more useable area for recreation and food production, also allowing more space for the native species and re-creating a forest clearing, important for invertebrates and birds.

Forest-clearing area in the foreground, with remaining trees behind.

Veta Nicholas, Lawyers Mountain 2 (WH10): Veta organised the construction of her house built in 2021 on a sloping hillside on Lawyers Mountain, where the cutting into the hillside was steeper than she had wanted. Veta is concerned about erosion damaging her house "I need to build supporting walls". The access road is officially below the property but had not been opened; the road adjacent to the house that we arrived by is on private property.

Veta by her own admission has not done much in the garden, apart from adding a few edible plants. There was evidence of goat damage on a young palm, and I advised Veta to put a small fence

Above: Highlighting the slope on which the house is constructed. Below: Chatting next to some of her pot plants she is keen to plant out.

around it while it establishes. This is an example of secondary vegetation being cleared to create a food-garden. MNT, through the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project, has provided Veta with some advice and some growing medium. She has been promised plants. Veta also noted that some Adopters can afford to employ a gardener, but she is one of those who cannot afford to do that.

Veta is very positive about the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project, which she feels is "really brilliant for Montserrat". Veta enjoys attending the presentations at MNT and working with others in the Adopters group. Veta had an interesting image of a stripy flat-worm she had taken, which I encouraged her to put on iNaturalist. Veta used to use iNaturalist but admitted that she needs to set it up again. I had an enjoyable conversation with Veta, who is housing officer for Montserrat government. She informed me that there are no homeless people in Montserrat, but there are issues of domestic conflict and overcrowding. The challenge for young people is the money to pay a mortgage. Veta subsequently attended the workshops and presentation event at MNT and is very keen and engaged.

Cherise Aymer, Lawyers Mountain 1 (WH07): I had previously visited this site in 2023. This is an example of a person wanting more help from MNT, with ornamental garden and food plants, than MNT had the capacity to deliver. Highlights the local demand and need for the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* programme.

Look Out Primary School (WH06): I had previously visited this site in 2023. Sea-grapes have been planted inside and around the fence surrounding the sports-pitch, to provide a badly needed wind-break, both to benefit the pupils and to allow other plantings.

View of the lawn around the front/base of Cherise's property, with the native and fruit bushes on the slope beyond..

The Education Department gardeners had cut them all down in error, but most (c.20) are still alive, although quite small at present. They look now to have established and should start to grow away. Fat Poke is being grown at MNT ready for planting here. In chatting with Chris, there appeared to be the opportunity to better connect individual Adopter project plant requirements, with the MNT nursery production plan.

Above: Exposed Lookout School playing field. Below: example of the small but recovering Sea-Grapes.

Merle Galloway, Tropical Mansion (WH14): This is a most recent addition to the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* programme (around December 2023). This is one of the biggest hotels/guest -houses in Montserrat currently (16 rooms and 16+ acres) and Merle is the owner; she has a strong background in health and well-being and has studied in several places. The property was built 25 years ago after the volcano, which had put larger hotels further south out of action. The site has been surveyed and

Above: Reception area and car-park at Tropical Mansions.
Below: Chris Sealys, MNT and Merle in the more formal garden area.

Merle is awaiting the results from MNT. There is some formal garden, an old small nursery in need of some renovation, and a more expansive green space around the site. Merle's ambition is to develop an ornamental and food (fruit and vegetables) garden primarily, with a new nursery and a community garden. Merle is keen to get plants and labour from MNT. Chris said there will still need to be support from MNT after the DPLUS155 grant ends and he invited Merle to visit MNT and see the plants available. Merle has recently applied for a Darwin Local Grant.

Deidre Allien, Cassava Ghaut 2 (WH15): Deidre wasn't there when we made a brief visit to her garden site. This is a small private garden and another new site. Chris carried out the site survey in March 2024. Deidre is Montserratian and is an environmental officer for Government. Deidre is keen for gardening advice from MNT on ornamental plants and fruit-trees, and is another Adopter who is keen for more help from MNT in developing their garden.

Dwayne Hixon, Belham River Mouth (WH02): Dwayne was one of the first Adopters. The ca 29-acre site is the lowland flat plain at the mouth of the Belham River, leading to the beach. All the low land is post-volcano and made of volcanic ash/debris. The site contains a wetland that is now the Island's most important remaining coastal wetland site for birds. The existing pond has changed a lot in a recent storm (certainly looks a smaller wetland than the one I saw in 2023) and the site regularly changes (see *SOSNoM* 17).

Dwayne has dug a ditch around the site to manage rainwater flow and is considering creating a river channel to take water straight to the sea. I believe Dwayne needs hydrology advice and more planning, and I suggested a compromise between flood protection

Back garden view of Cassava Ghaut 2

and flood allowance for birds. More planning is needed. This is a good/interesting site for wildlife and species observed (and recorded on iNaturalist) included Centris Bee, Beach Cabbage, Small Plover, Tiger Moth and the invasive bullrush.

Dwayne has a plan of the site, and he is looking to develop it for events and started building a beach bar c.5 years ago. In terms of future planting development, Dwayne is keen to plant Flamboyant Trees (Fabaceae) in orange, gold and yellow, which apparently coppice easily, and he has also tried to air layer Flamboyant Trees, which have a historical significance and value for the site, and other plants (using silver foil not plastic) – although management is necessary to prevent their becoming invasive. He aims to create a boulevard of palms in the approach road to the beach bar. Dwayne clearly has some plant propagation knowledge and tries to grow plants by seed, layering, etc. 'Silver Leaf' Ficus has been planted as a hedge along the roadside, but this is non-native and

Above: Chris and Dwayne on the beach bar construction site.
Below: Cattle Egrets in flight over the lowland area that changes in topography regularly with storms and water flow across the site.

Chris on the existing river channel approaching the sea in the background.

carries a disease. Dwayne believes that many people want palms and there is an opportunity for MNT to grow and supply the right palm species.

Dwayne has received some plants from MNT and would like more. I encouraged that the MNT could see that and then agree/grow the plants accordingly. There was a need to agree the commitment before the grant ends in September. There is a great opportunity for MNT to produce plants for this site, but it needs lead-time and a nursery that delivers what is jointly agreed is required. This is another example of an Adopter site keen to get plants from MNT and there was perhaps an opportunity to have put Dwayne's plant requirements into a consolidated Plant Production List for the MNT nursery.

Horticulture Training Workshops

Following my visits during week one and my discussions with the MNT team and others, it was agreed that (supported by Chris) I would deliver three specific horticulture training workshops at MNT in my second full week on Montserrat:

- Plant pruning.
- Pest and disease control and use of pesticides.
- Propagation by cuttings.

Training in plant-pruning had been requested specifically by MNT and UKOTCF for the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project. They believed that providing the Adopters with a broader understanding on how, why and when to prune would be useful now and also as a longer-term legacy for the project. Pest- and disease-control was selected as a result of several discussions and my own observations during the visits in 2023 and the first week of this visit in 2024. There are clear issues with pest- and disease-control and particularly pesticide-use in Montserrat, and there is also enthusiasm to learn more amongst the farmers (who are key users). The third workshop was to target the MNT team, to refresh and embed more firmly the propagation skills I had delivered through my training in 2023. Inevitably, much of the short-term progress made in the MNT nursery in 2023 had regressed, and Chris Sealys was keen that the MNT staff team were refreshed and reinforced.

The three workshops were attended by MNT staff, *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* gardeners, farmers and private landscape gardeners.

Introduction to Plant Pruning (Monday 29 July):

A half-day workshop, with the option for attendees to stay on for longer to have more pruning practice supervised by Chris Sealys and myself. In advance of the workshop Chris and I purchased additional hand-saws and secateurs, to go with the range of tools MNT already owned. The workshop was an opportunity for the participants to:

- Learn the principles on how to prune plants.
- See a range of pruning tools and techniques being demonstrated in the MNT Garden (and 'have a go' at the different techniques if you would like to).
- Understand the reasons for pruning plants and why good pruning is beneficial for your garden.

Top: Delivering the opening interactive talk. Above: Attendees participating in demonstrations and practical work. Below: the whole group

Pest & Disease Control, and Safe Use of Pesticides (Wednesday 31 July):

There had been notable interest from a mix of stakeholders in the island including farmers, and so, to enable as many as possible to attend, the workshop was delivered twice at MNT, in the morning (10am to 1pm) and then repeated in the afternoon (3pm to 6pm). Lunch and refreshments were provided for all participants between the two sessions.

Top: Delivering interactive lecture and demonstration session, including Integrated Pest Management and the use of a CP3 knapsack sprayer. Above and below: Each of the morning and afternoon sessions included two breakout groups, during which the attendees discussed, made notes, and fed back to the whole class, interrogating and making notes on a range of pesticide labels.

The workshop aimed to provide the attendees an opportunity to:

- Discuss current pest and disease problems in Montserrat farms and gardens.
- Gain an understanding of different approaches to controlling plant pests and diseases.
- Learn how to use pesticides better, to improve their effectiveness, save money, reduce impact on the environment, and reduce health risks to the farmers and community.

Each session included interactive lectures, demonstrations including the internal workings of a CP3 knapsack sprayer (the sprayer of choice used in Montserrat and supplied by the Government and Farmers Association to growers), and two breakout sessions, where the course split into two groups to discuss and make notes on two topics:

- What they believe are the main Montserrat pests & diseases on crops and garden plants.
- The health and safety and application rates information on the labels from example pesticides available in the Farmers Association (with both low and high health risk examples included).

The notes from both groups in the morning and afternoon sessions were presented to the class by spokespersons from every group, and their sheets were photographed. All attendees completed a feedback sheet.

Propagation by Cuttings – Refresher Training (Thursday 1 August):

This was a specific practical training day for the MNT team; to refresh and reinforce the propagation skills taught in the workshops I delivered in May 2023. I focused on re-demonstrating good practice for the collection, preparation, insertion and aftercare of cuttings for plant propagation.

At the commencement of the session, I led the group around the MNT garden looking at various plants and selecting and allocating different plants to individuals for collection. We discussed all the plants as a whole group and how we would propagate them, before splitting up into smaller groups of two or three to collect cutting material. We returned to the propagation house where I re-demonstrated the mixing of the rooting medium, and how to fill

Above and next page: The process of collecting the cuttings, mixing the rooting media, filling trays, preparing and inserting cuttings, and the full trays on the mist bench being watered.

and water a cell tray prior to cuttings to be inserted.

The group then prepared and inserted cuttings of a range of plant species, and the trays were placed onto the mist propagation bench (after it had been cleared and power washed). The polythene cover was then re-instated over the bench to ensure higher humidity.

Presentation of Training Certificates

A presentation event was held at MNT on 2 August (below), with all those who had attended horticulture training in 2023 and 2024 being invited to receive a certificate of attendance.

In advance of the presentation of the certificates I delivered a short talk and PowerPoint presentation, on the work I had carried out on this trip. I was particularly pleased that some of the farmers and landscapers attended, along with the MNT staff team.

Congratulations to Leigh

After over 5 years of dedicated leadership, Leigh Morris will step down as Chief Executive Officer of Manx Wildlife Trust at the end of May 2025 – to take on a new role as the Director of International at The Wildlife Trusts (TWT), a position designed to bridge the gap between local conservation efforts and global environmental challenges.

Leigh joined MWT in September 2019 after 2 years on St Helena. Reflecting on their time at MWT, Leigh said: "The last five years have been a wonderful chapter of my life. I am extremely proud of everything the MWT team has achieved for nature in the Isle of Man."

Leigh will remain closely connected to MWT's work, including involvement in the Inter Island Environment Meeting to be hosted in the Isle of Man in September 2025. He will also remain on UKOTCF's Council, to build on initiatives already started and to increase the linkages between the Wildlife Trusts in the British Isles and the UKOTCF network of conservation bodies.

All the recipients of certificates at the awards

Awards under Darwin Plus Local projects

Just before the end of the grant period covered, the Darwin Plus Local programme has at last announced the grants made in late 2024. Announcement of the outcome of Darwin Plus Main grant applications is running several months late, as is a confirmation of new grant call.

UKOT	Code	Title	Dates	Value
Ascension	DPL00097	Protecting cloud forest expansion on Ascension - Ascension Island Government - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00097	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£9,600
Ascension	DPL00100	Enhancing fisheries management through otolith analysis on Ascension Island - Ascension Island Government - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00100	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£12,938
Ascension	DPL00101	Driving community conservation on Ascension Island - Ascension Island Government - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00101	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£50,000
Ascension	DPL00102	Robots and photogrammetry: monitoring the deep in Ascension Island MPA - Ascension Island Government - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00102	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£35,160
Ascension	DPL00105	Mountain Merch - Ascension Island Government - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00105	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£27,000
Ascension	DPL00106	Weathering the storm – creating new habitat for Ascension's seabirds - Ascension Island Government - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00106	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£49,930
Ascension	DPL00123	The Road to Recovery: removing historical pollution from nature reserves - Ascension Island Government https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00123	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£34,536
Bermuda	DPL00096	Building sustainable coral propagation capacity in Bermuda - Living Reefs Foundation - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00096	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£49,922
Bermuda	DPL00122	The Ripple Effect: A youth-led environmental action campaign - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00122	02/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£49,994
British Indian Ocean Territory	DPL00118	Investigating mesophotic coral bleaching during the 2023/2024 El Nino Event - University of Plymouth - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00118	01/10/2024 - 31/05/2025	£49,408
British Virgin Islands	DPL00107	Building the BVI's capacity to use photogrammetry for marine conservation - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00107	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£42,315
British Virgin Islands	DPL00108	Feasibility assessment of pond restoration and stormwater management in BVI - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00108	01/10/2024 - 01/02/2025	£49,881
British Virgin Islands	DPL00116	Investigation into the presence of microplastics in coastal Sargassum strandings - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00116	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£17,321
British Virgin Islands	DPL00121	Creating the first birdwatching facilities at Tortola's best birding pond - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00121	02/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£26,887
Cayman Islands	DPL00103	Increasing reef resilience through climate-smart restoration in a changing ocean - Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI) - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00103	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£49,955
Cayman Islands	DPL00119	Extending Cayman youth environmental awareness through immersive education - Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI) - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00119	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£46,208
Falkland Islands	DPL00098	Survey of near-pristine, publicly owned tussac islands to support conservation - SAERI - South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00098	01/11/2024 - 31/03/2025	£43,300
Falkland Islands	DPL00104	Piloting new solutions: UAV LiDAR and photogrammetry in the Falklands - SAERI - South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00104	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£20,075
Falkland Islands	DPL00115	Goblin's Head restoration - Falkland Islands - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00115	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£19,145
Gibraltar	DPL00109	Gibraltar biodiversity gateway - University of Gibraltar - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00109	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£36,145
Montserrat	DPL00111	Community kitchen and medicinal garden for education and tourism - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00111	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£49,950
Montserrat	DPL00113	Managing invasive fire ant populations on Montserrat - Government of Montserrat – DoE - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00113	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£50,000
Montserrat	DPL00114	A sustainable sheltered horticulture production system for endemics and natives - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00114	02/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£19,919
South Georgia & South Sandwich Islands	DPL00099	An innovative method to trap invasive ladybirds on South Georgia - SAERI - South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00099	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£49,724

St Helena	DPL00112	Understanding life history of St Helena's endemic reef fish - Environment and Natural Resources Directorate - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00112	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£13,250
Turks and Caicos Islands	DPL00110	Containers for Coral: self-sustaining restoration for South Caicos - School for Field Studies - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00110	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£50,000
Turks and Caicos Islands	DPL00120	Nature's Palette: art celebrating biodiversity - Department of Environment and Coastal Resources – TCIG - https://darwinplus.org.uk/project/DPL00120	01/10/2024 - 31/03/2025	£45,000

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 (but now lost to UKOTs because of Brexit). 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 few years ago. We were shocked when *Arkive* closed down due to lack of funding. This had 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 some very generous donations from certain Council members and others which helped hugely in recent years.

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/.

Some of the species that UKOTCF's joint projects with partners in Montserrat have assisted: left: 3 island endemics (Montserrat oriole with large caught insect, Montserrat galliwasp lizard, pribby bush); right: 3 regional endemics (purple-throated Carib and Antillean crested hummingbirds and Critically Endangered mountain chicken frog. Photos (galliwasp) Beano; (others) Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF.