

# Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat

## Newsletter 19, September 2025

### Foreword

Welcome to the 19th issue of the newsletter about the current joint programme of work coordinated by Montserrat National Trust and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, in conjunction with the Government of Montserrat and others. The Darwin Plus funding (DPLUS155) for *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* has ended but we hope and plan that the project continues under the leadership of the *Adopters of Wildlife Homes* supported as far as possible by Montserrat National Trust and UKOTCF. The continuing Darwin-funded project DPLUS192, *Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development* (or *Biodiversity Toolkit*) is now about 6 months from its end of funding. Previous articles on this project appeared in *Newsletters 11-18* (November 2021 to early 2025).

Much of this issue is devoted to a series of articles from a multi-disciplinary team organised by UKOTCF to work with colleagues in Montserrat in June-July 2025 (*top right below*) as part of the DPLUS192-supported project. Amongst other included articles are also: on a new publication on common grasses (page 4); Earth Day gardening at the Hospital



Male Montserrat oriole, Montserrat's national bird on red heliconia, Montserrat's national plant. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

(*below left*; page 7); Montserrat Volcano Observatory (page 8); MNT's youth work (*mid right*; page 9); a research station on Montserrat (page 10); and a Thanksgiving Service in London on the 30th Anniversary of the Soufrière Hills Volcano (*bottom right*; pages 13-14).

We are very grateful for the many kind and encouraging comments from people welcoming *Newsletters* so far. We hope that you enjoy this extra large one too. Comments are always welcome.

Please feel free to show or forward these newsletters to others. If anyone sees these and would like to be added to the circulation list, please send your email address to [jpeyton@ukotcf.org](mailto:jpeyton@ukotcf.org).

Earlier issues can be accessed at: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/>. For more information on the project, the main contacts are:

Dr Jodey Peyton of UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum: [jpeyton@ukotcf.org](mailto:jpeyton@ukotcf.org) See also [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk). Mrs Sarita Francis, Montserrat National Trust: [mnt@montserratnationaltrust.ms](mailto:mnt@montserratnationaltrust.ms). See also <https://montserratnationaltrust.ms/>





## Toolkit progress in Montserrat – Update on DPLUS192

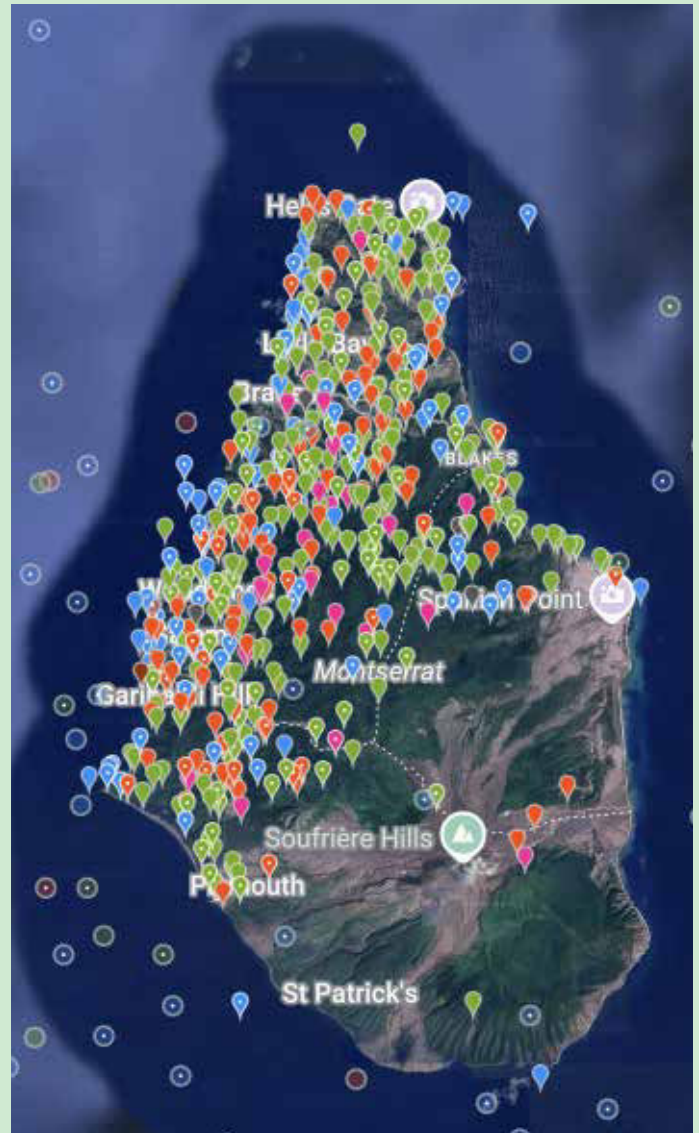
Jodey Peyton (UKOTCF), Alan Gray (UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology) and Wolfgang Rabitsch (volunteer) were very lucky to re-visit Montserrat 28 June to 10 July 2025, to continue work on DPLUS192 for the final year of the project.

The team had several ambitions for the 13-day visit and were excited to get started. The first activities for the team were to scout sites for additional field-surveys for the trip. As the iNaturalist map (right) shows, there is a good coverage for records of plants (green), fungi (pink), vertebrate (blue) and invertebrate (red) animals across the inhabited parts of the island, but there are some gaps. The project is keen to visit areas that are historically less well covered; this would increase both the knowledge of where common species are and also potentially find rarer species.

On Monday 30 June, the visiting members of the team met with the local project partners, Montserrat National Trust (MNT) and Montserrat Department of Environment (DoE) to finalise the plans for the visit. The majority of the trip was focussed on knowledge-sharing across the teams. Alan gave several talks to share with colleagues the uses of open data for conservation and red-listing. These talks brought together several topics raised during the last 2.5 years, around data, data-storage and how data can be used to help conservation (e.g. red-listing). The audience of these talks included interns from the DoE, DoE staff, MNT personnel and the Montserrat GIS team. Alan gave a talk also on his work on St Helena. Several discussions over the course of the trip took place around the similarities between St Helena and Montserrat and ways to look for synergies between the island organisations and possible future cross-UKOT collaboration.

Another task of the visiting team was to mount more herbarium specimens, plants collected from previous expeditions that were dried and ready to be documented for the National Herbarium of Montserrat (held at the MNT). The team mounted around 30 more specimens, which are now ready to be documented in the Montserrat Herbarium database hosted by Plut-F. Pluto-F data can also be published to GBIF.

A highlight of the trip for Jodey, Alan and Wolfgang was being invited to take part in Monty's Ambassadors' planning session. This was a wonderful event, where the Ambassadors shared their ambitions and proposals for events to help connect with the young people on island. The team discussed future projects, tips for grant-writing and how to build networks. The UK visitors were extremely impressed with the vision the Ambassadors have with regard to connecting with young Montserratians.



Alongside talks, workshops and herbarium sessions, the MNT and DoE led several key meetings with other stakeholders on island, including the Montserrat Volcano Observatory, the Governor's Office and the Montserrat Planning Department, both to update on the Biodiversity and Well-being Toolkit and to discuss new project ideas.

On the middle weekend of the trip, the visiting team took advantage of time away from computers to undertake two hikes.



*Expedition team*



*Herbarium specimens*





*Above left: Katy Hill; above right: Surveying on Katy Hill; below: Views to Silver Hills from Katy Hill.*



*View up on Katy Hill*

*Snail found during survey*

*Walk from Silver Hills to Margarita Bay*

One was a beautiful hike from Silver Hills to Margarita Bay. The second was a stunning trip up Katy Hill under the fabulous guidance of Calvin Fenton and Llotese Martin. This trip enabled the team to visit the beautiful elfin forest, a very rare habitat globally. Whilst on this trip, the team, led by Barry Mahabir from the DoE, collected plant and animal species for identification by FERA Science Limited.

In terms of surveys, Jodey and Alan undertook nine FIT (Flower Insect Timed) count surveys (see page 5) and the team collectively made more than 250 records of over 160 species on

iNaturalist – see the records for Montserrat here: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/biodiversity-of-montserrat-d74f33fd-6145-4b47-aa12-ac6870d80113?tab=observations>.

The visiting team were, as always, well looked after by the Montserrat team and are very grateful for such a lovely trip. Please contact Jodey Peyton ([jpeyton@ukotcf.org](mailto:jpeyton@ukotcf.org)) if you are interested in learning more about any of the information in this article.



## New Publication Highlights 10 Common Grasses of Montserrat

A beautifully illustrated new sheet is shedding light on some of Montserrat's most familiar, yet often overlooked, plants –grasses. The fact-sheet brings together botanical knowledge, traditional uses, and detailed illustrations to help locals and visitors alike appreciate better these important species as part of the Biodiversity and Well-being Toolkit project (DPLUS192).

Grasses are everywhere on the island, along roadsides, in open fields, near coastal areas, and even around backyard-gardens. While they may not attract as much attention as flowering trees or colourful birds, grasses play a critical role in Montserrat's ecosystems and daily life. They help prevent soil-erosion, provide forage for livestock, support biodiversity, and some have even been used for traditional crafts and medicine.

This new fact-sheet, produced through a collaboration between the Montserrat National Trust (MNT), the Department of Environment (DoE), and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), showcases some of the most common grasses found on the island as well as a QR code to all those recorded on island. It features carefully researched descriptions, information on local uses, and high-quality botanical illustrations by acclaimed UK artist Lizzie Harper, who visited Montserrat in February 2025, and whose detailed and accurate work brings these humble plants to life.

Each grass is presented with:

- Scientific and local names
- Distinctive features for easy identification
- Typical habitats where it can be found
- Traditional or practical uses, e.g. livestock-fodder, or soil-stabilisation
- Cultural and ecological importance

Some of the species included in the booklet are: Guinea Grass *Megathyrsus maximus*, widely used for grazing; Sour Grass *Digitaria insularis*, often seen growing along trails and hillsides; and Lemongrass *Cymbopogon citratus*, known for its medicinal properties. Many of these grasses are hardy, resilient species that have adapted to Montserrat's changing climate and landscape, including areas affected by volcanic activity.

The botanical illustrations by Lizzie Harper add an exceptional dimension to the booklet. Known for her precise, scientifically informed artwork, Lizzie's illustrations make plant-identification easier and more engaging, especially for students, gardeners, and amateur naturalists. Each grass is shown in careful detail, highlighting what to look for in the field.

This publication is designed to be a practical field-guide for anyone interested in Montserrat's natural heritage – from school-groups and farmers to conservationists and tourists. Maybe it will encourage you to learn more about grasses?

It is part of a wider effort to raise awareness about native and naturalised plants on the island and encourage appreciation for their roles in both the environment and local culture.

The sheet will be available at the Montserrat National Trust and shared with schools, environmental groups, and other stakeholders. It contributes also to a growing collection of accessible resources aimed at documenting Montserrat's biodiversity and promoting sustainable use of its natural resources.

By focusing on the plants that surround us every day, this work reminds us that even the most ordinary elements of the landscape can have deep value and meaning, if we only take the time to look more closely.



Above: 3. Lemongrass *Cymbopogon citratus*  
Below: 10. Guinea grass *Megathyrsus maximus*



# Flower Insect Timed (FIT) Counts come to Montserrat

Flower Insect Timed (FIT) Counts are short surveys that anyone can do to survey abundance of pollinating insects. When undertaken regularly, they are a very useful mechanism to detect important host plants for pollinators and changes in their numbers. They are also a really nice way to engage people with nature.

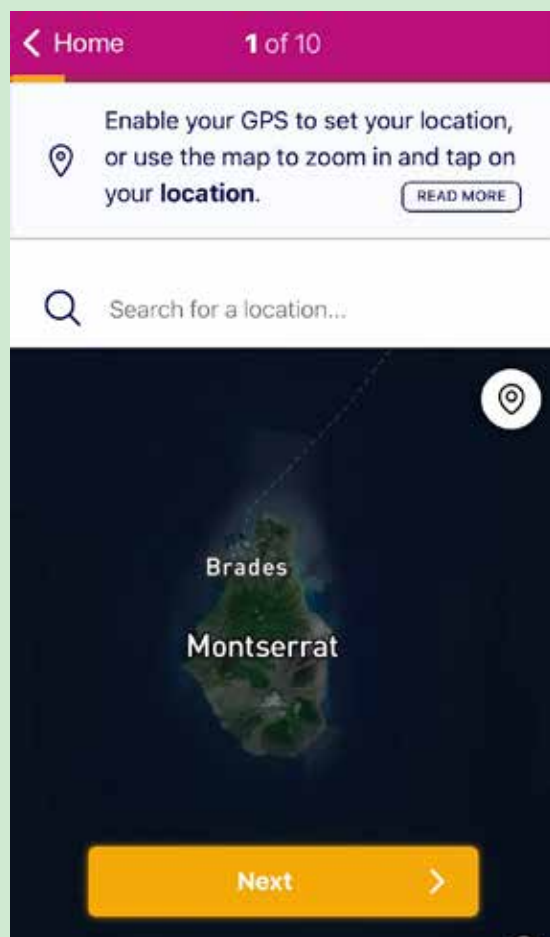
These surveys follow a standardised survey methodology to collect information on pollinators. They are carried out for a fixed period of time in a fixed area. This means the methods are replicable, and that means the results can be used to help conservation in Montserrat. For example, if the results show that numbers of pollinators is decreasing, this can help decision-makers decide to investigate why. Another very useful method of collecting information on plants and animals is through *ad hoc* recording methods, such as using the iNaturalist website. We have set up a project that collates records from Montserrat: <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/biodiversity-of-montserrat-d74f33fd-6145-4b47-aa12-ac6870d80113?tab=observations>. You may have already heard of this as we have been promoting its use on Montserrat as part of our Defra Darwin Funded project, DPLUS192 *Developing a Biodiversity and Human Well-being Toolkit*. You can learn more about our project here: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/biodiversity-and-wellbeing-toolkit>.

What is exciting about this app is that Montserrat is one of twelve countries around the world where one can use this method. By completing your own surveys, you – along with participants from other countries – are helping pollinators be better understood.

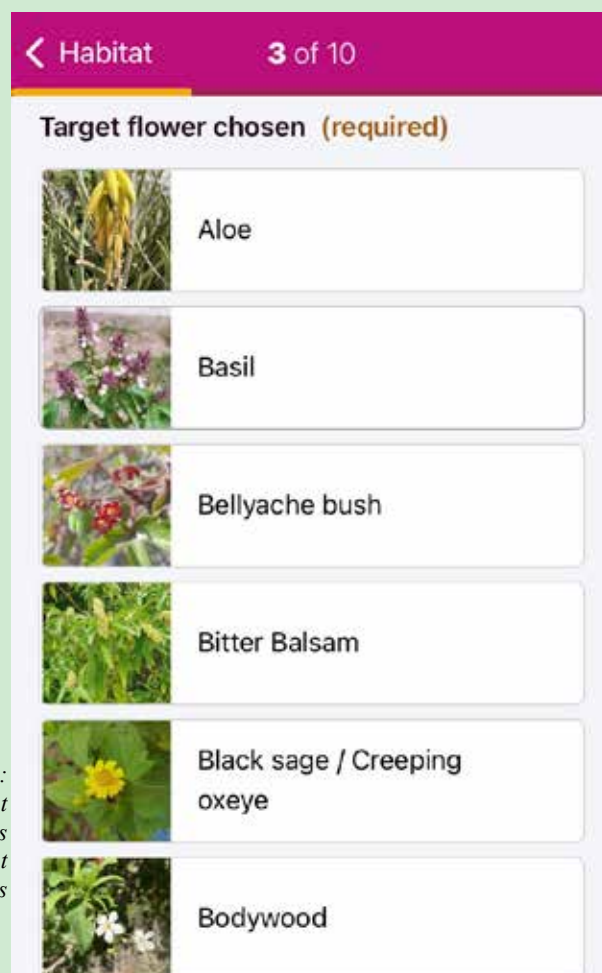
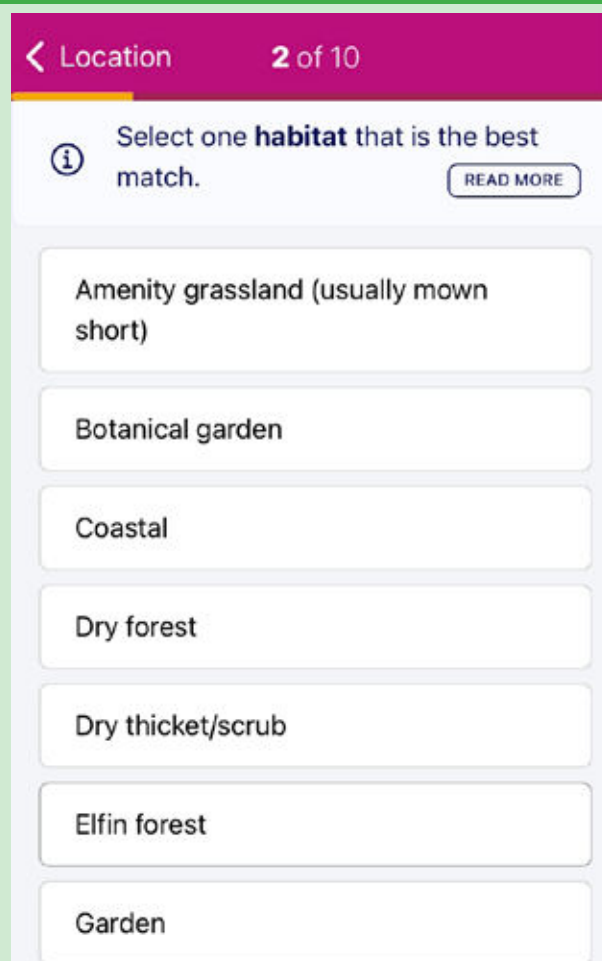
We have adapted the survey for Montserrat by choosing common local plant and animal species and habitat types for survey. We hope you enjoy seeing species you recognise!

## How you can get involved

Please contact the Montserrat National Trust if you want to learn more about these FIT Counts and taking part. You can download the app from the Apple and Android app stores: <https://fitcount.ceh.ac.uk/home>.



Montserrat FIT Count app



Right:  
Above: Montserrat  
habitat types  
Below: Montserrat  
species

# Building Montserrat's Biodiversity Data Portal: A New Chapter in Caribbean Conservation

A new data-portal is being developed to support biodiversity research and conservation in Montserrat, one of the UK's Overseas Territories in the Caribbean. This initiative forms part of a growing regional effort to make biodiversity-data more accessible, visible, and usable, not just for scientists and policymakers, but for educators, conservationists, and the wider public.

The Montserrat portal is based on a template created by the Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF), based in Denmark, and is being tailored specifically to meet the island's needs. GBIF is an international network and data-infrastructure that provides open access to biodiversity-data from around the world. Having a localised GBIF data-portal will enable Montserrat better to manage and showcase its rich natural heritage, from endemic plants to rare species of birds, bats, and marine life.

The project was initiated through a successful application to GBIF, with technical support from Meise Botanic Garden in Belgium, a partner in the DPLUS192 project, and one of Europe's leading institutions for biodiversity-informatics. In Montserrat, the work is being led collaboratively by the Montserrat National Trust (MNT), the Department of Environment (DoE), and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), with valuable input from the Government's GIS Unit.

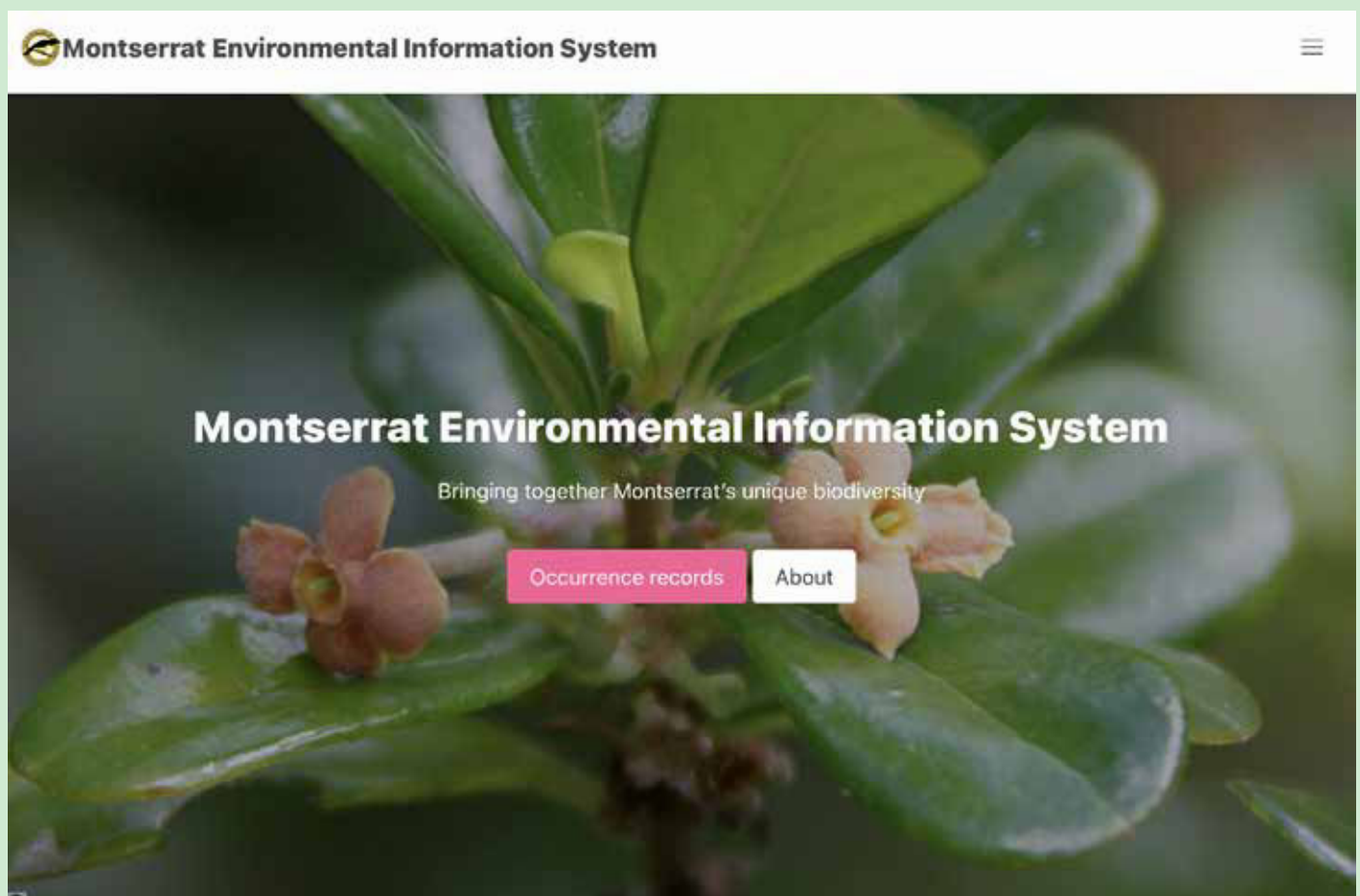
Over several years, representatives from these organisations met to begin discussions on the need for a portal, how to develop and populate the portal. Meetings have focused on identifying key data-sets, ensuring accurate geospatial referencing, and deciding

how best to structure and present the information. Existing biodiversity-data held by local partners, such as species-records from monitoring work, habitat-surveys, and citizen-science initiatives (such as iNaturalist), will form the core of the portal's content.

The inclusion of the GIS Unit has been particularly valuable in making sure that their expertise and local knowledge is incorporated into the development of the platform. The portal will not just be a database, but a powerful tool for visualising biodiversity across the island.

Once completed, the portal will be accessible to the public and updated over time as new data become available. It will serve as a resource for conservation-planning, education, and scientific research, as well as helping Montserrat contribute more fully to regional and global biodiversity-knowledge. It also supports the island's commitments under ambitions to be part of the Convention on Biological Diversity and other international agreements.

This collaborative effort is a step forward in strengthening the role of biodiversity-data in small-island territories, where information is often scattered or underused. By centralising and sharing knowledge through a publicly accessible platform, Montserrat is taking an important stride toward evidence-based environmental management and setting an example for other Caribbean islands looking to do the same.





## Celebrating World Earth Day in Action

In recognition of World Earth Day, the Montserrat National Trust team joined hands with the dedicated staff of Glendon Hospital to make a meaningful impact on our local environment and community well-being. Together we planted:

30 medicinal 'tea-bush' plants – including Aloe, Catmint, Basil, Lemongrass, Peppermint, Rosemary and Ram Goat Bush – adjacent to the hospital's kitchen, promoting natural remedies and preserving traditional knowledge. 60 assorted ornamental plants, such as Yellow Allamanda, Blue Daze, Plumbago, and Marigold were planted in front of the newly operational building (formerly the Margetson Memorial Home), enhancing the space with beauty and biodiversity.

This green initiative was made possible through the generous support of Defra Darwin-funded project, DPLUS192 and the UKOT Conservation Forum.

A heartfelt thank you to everyone involved! Your efforts show that small collective actions can lead to a greener, healthier Montserrat!

*Chris Sealys*





# Montserrat Volcano Observatory: Safeguarding Lives, Landscapes, and Legacy

## Montserrat's Volcano

Montserrat's landscape is dominated by four volcanic centres. The Silver Hills, Centre Hills and South Soufrière Hills are now extinct but the Soufrière Hills is still active. Between 1995 and 2010 the Soufrière Hills underwent episodic eruptive activity, changing the landscape and lives of the people of Montserrat.

## Monitoring the Volcano

The last major eruptive activity was in 2010 and MVO's scientists continue to use a range of instruments to track volcanic activity. Their data help to monitor the volcano's behaviour and provide critical guidance to local authorities and the public.

## Community Engagement

MVO's outreach programmes are designed to raise awareness and keep people safe. Amongst many other things, MVO share its knowledge through:

- A Weekly Volcanic Activity Report
- Volcano Vibes Radio Programme airs monthly on ZJB Radio, sharing updates and expert insights.
- Creative Writing Competitions and Science Week exhibitions encourage artistic and scientific expression. One can find out more through our work with partners in the UK:
- Curating Crises and other public awareness and community projects, including Mountain Aglow and the Montserrat Community murals here: <https://www.mvo.ms/education-and-outreach/public-awareness/>
- School visits, field-trips, and workshops empower students and educators with knowledge about volcanic hazards.
- Social media channels provide real-time updates and educational content to residents and stakeholders. Social media links at the end of the article.

## Working with Conservation Partners

In partnership with the Montserrat National Trust, MVO contributes to preserving the island's volcanic heritage. A recent collaboration resulted in the launch of the Montserrat Volcanic Crisis Archive: <https://dloc.com/collections/imnt>, a digital collection of photographs, oral histories and reports documenting the eruption's impact. This archive is freely accessible and serves as a resource for researchers, students, and the public.

## Outputs and Publications

MVO produces a wide range of materials to support knowledge sharing for a range of audiences on and off island such as:

- Biannual scientific reports detailing volcanic activity and hazard assessments
- Educational materials for e.g. schools and tourists
- Collaborative research with institutions such as the University of the West Indies and other International Institutions.
- Digital archives and public exhibits that preserve and share Montserrat's volcanic story.



*Above: at the time of explosions; below: more peaceful times since*



## Get Involved

Whether you're a resident, visitor or conservationist, MVO invites you to engage with its work. Visit [www.mvo.ms](http://www.mvo.ms) to learn about their work, explore resources, and arrange a visit. Follow MVO on social media to stay informed and inspired.

<https://www.facebook.com/mvoms/>

[https://www.instagram.com/montserratvolcanoobservatory\\_/?hl=en](https://www.instagram.com/montserratvolcanoobservatory_/?hl=en)

<https://www.youtube.com/user/montserratvolcanoobs>

<https://twitter.com/mvoms?lang=en>



## From the Classroom to the Community: A Journey of Service

With over 10 years of experience in education and currently pursuing a degree in Psychology and Counselling, Pamecia Ollivierre (photo right) began her journey as a dedicated teacher in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. In 2022, she relocated to Montserrat – the Emerald Isle – to continue her work in education. What was meant to be a two-year teaching experience soon evolved into something more. After completing her time in the classroom, she began assisting at the Montserrat National Trust, initially intending to stay for only a short period. However, her commitment and dedication to each task did not go unnoticed and given her educational background she was later invited to assist in the area of Youth & Outreach.

As the Youth & Outreach Officer, Pamecia's role includes promoting public awareness and engagement with Montserrat's natural and cultural heritage. She works closely with the Director, Conservation Officer, and project teams to support, design and implement outreach programmes, connect children and young people to the environment in fun and meaningful ways, and strengthen youth involvement through the Trust's Monty's Ambassadors and Monty's Messengers initiatives. Her work is also a key part of a major biodiversity and community well-being project led locally by the Montserrat National Trust with the support of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum and partners, which aims to involve the community in shaping sustainable development on island. Pamecia's contributions also include supporting the organisation of major events such as BioBlitz's, educational workshops, training sessions, and the Annual Higher Education Event as well as facilitating community use of the biodiversity and well-being

toolkit. Beyond outreach, Pamecia has expanded her skills in herbarium data-management, learning to digitise and organise carefully plant-specimen records – an area that has deepened her appreciation for Montserrat's unique biodiversity. She supports also operational duties such as reception, gift-shop inventory, and event-coordination, ensuring the smooth running of Trust activities.

One of her most memorable initiative thus far is the education of the YUNGA Operation, where she facilitated an interactive session with children aged 5–8 during their first week of summer-camp. Through a hands-on garden-visit, they learned about environmental care and discovered how their actions could earn them the Biodiversity Badge – a symbol of their commitment to protecting nature.

Although much of what she is learning about the environment is new, Pamecia embraces each challenge as part of the ever-evolving journey of service. Whether welcoming visitors, engaging with youth, or preserving biodiversity, she remains passionate about inspiring others to appreciate, protect, and preserve Montserrat's natural and cultural treasures.

*Below: Monty's Messengers engaged in YUNGA-badge activities. The Youth and United Nations Global Alliance developed its Challenge Badges scheme to raise awareness, educate and motivate to change behaviour to become active agents of change in local communities.*





## Research Station on Montserrat

The Simon's Rock Field Station in Montserrat is an environmental science and research facility designed to support both educational programmes and research in Montserrat. Current programmes are focused on studying the wide variety of ecological systems present in Montserrat, from the coral reefs to the savannah and dry forests of the north, to the elfin forest at the top of Katy Hill.

Since our inaugural programme in 2014 we have had over 80 students attend our tropical ecology and sustainability programme through Bard College in Montserrat. While the programme has always been a challenging one, students have reported back as having had an exceptional experience, with several students returning a second or third time to continue research, with 10 students conducting their senior theses research in Montserrat, or presenting their research at national conferences. In addition, faculty have published several research papers on Montserrat and several are in the process of working on long-term research projects. We are working with other local and international teams – in February 2025 we had a presentation on Open Data by Sofie Meeus and Quentin Groom from Meise Botanic Gardens, Belgium. This was a great opportunity to learn more about how researchers can make the most of their data.

While the programme has been very successful to date, it has always been very challenging logistically and financially. Even under the best of circumstances, equipment, transportation, housing and food have been significant challenges. These challenges are why we established a permanent field-station beginning with a property-purchase in August 2023, and a build up until December 2024 when we welcomed our first outside school-group, Indian Mountain School (IMS) from Connecticut. Establishing the field-station allows us to offer the facility to other groups such as IMS, but also allows us to run our full semester university programme, short programmes over intersession and the summer, and collaborate with other NGOs and researchers.

The plan to develop the field-station is multifaceted, taking place over several years. The first stage, which is now completed, provides housing for 15-18 students, dining-hall space, classroom-space, and some limited lab-space. Stage two will be to explore the development of additional housing for faculty and administrative staff on site, along with additional classrooms and research facilities. Stage three will be dependent on programme-growth and the need for greater student-housing. Ideally the programme will grow to house 30 students.

Over the next 12 months we have several programmes booked, starting in December through to early May, including a full semester university programme which is open to any student enrolled in university who is a rising sophomore or higher. Anyone interested in this programme can contact Tom Coote, the programme director. Those interested in utilizing the field station for research or educational programmes should also contact Tom to learn about availability or pricing.

*Dr Tom Coote (Director of the Berkshire Environmental Research Center and the Simon's Rock Field Station in Montserrat)*



*Above: Dr Graham Ryan, Director of the Montserrat Volcano Observatory, teaching*



*Above & below: Sofie on data-science*





# Island Solutions and its role in conserving Montserrat's marine environment to support people and well-being

*An interview with Island Solutions co-founder, Emmy Aston*

## **How did you first hear about Montserrat and what brought you to this wonderful island?**

Andrew Myers and I were working in the Bahamas when our friends asked us to come to Montserrat to help look after their dive-shop, Sea Wolf Diving School. Our friends moved on but we stayed and set up Scuba Montserrat Dive Shop and eventually set up our non-profit, Island Solutions.

## **What got you working in marine conservation?**

I was born in the UK and grew up in the US. I spent a lot of time travelling between UK and US and also time in Central and South America as a child, and this gave me the chance to spend a lot of time in the water. At university, I studied art education and psychology. During my studies, I did a college programme called "Semester at Sea" where all the courses were on a boat and all the course work we did was based on the country we were in. We travelled around the world from Vancouver to Florida. This made me realise that I wanted to be in the water and so looked for ways to get back. I started my course-work as a dive-instructor in Florida and then got a job in the Bahamas, and then on to Montserrat. I loved swimming and I knew I wanted to travel, snorkel and work with animals, as I used to volunteer for humane societies in US. All my loves are combined in my job here.

## **You have obviously travelled a huge amount around the world. What makes Montserrat special?**

Part of what makes Montserrat so special is that it is home for us. There aren't tourist numbers like the Bahamas or other islands. Montserrat is off the beaten path and we can look at reefs that other people haven't seen before. Add in amazing mountains, an active volcano and wonderful people and it is an amazing spot! It truly is the way the Caribbean used to be.

## **What are the most special things you have seen diving in Montserrat?**

There are lots of things. One memorable time, we were doing a dive up north and had nine eagle rays swimming above us. That was enchanting! Another amazing thing that happened is we were swimming in the water and heard whales. We came up from the dive and then went to see them and saw the humpbacks



swimming past us and breaching!

## **What are the main challenges for the marine environment in Montserrat and the wider Caribbean?**

We are in an era where marine environments worldwide are seeing rapid dramatic changes. This creates lots of challenges for our marine environment themselves but also for how we choose to live and move forward with these issues.

In Montserrat specifically, more hands on water education is important. It would be wonderful to get everyone in the sea and learning what is in our deeper waters. Everyone is around the sea all the time here but they don't necessarily go in it. We have been doing a lot of activities around engagement with the marine environment, whether through swimming or video analysis of transects, or benthic studies in deeper reefs. We really want people to experience the amazing marine life that surrounds us. If you don't know what is there, you don't necessarily realise its value. We work with all age groups, not just young people, to get people feeling water confident and snorkeling.

There is also a lack of capacity in a lot of different ways as there is not the same capacity here as other islands. Alongside JNCC, we have been trying to build more dive-capacity with our various projects and creating government-drivers but it is hard to pull people away from their current jobs.

The environment is also challenging (but this is similar for other areas). We are teaching students from Bard College at Simon's Rock, at the moment, about different survey methods. We are trying to show them the similarities and differences with







terrestrial surveys. There are different challenges with doing marine surveys and these skills take time to acquire and often take longer time to complete.

In the broader Caribbean, there is still a lack of communications and knowledge-sharing between island-neighbours, partially because of the language-barriers. I think there is a lot of information that could be shared. Some of the differences may be because the French Overseas Territories are directly linked to French Government, compared with the UKOTs with their local governments so sharing information is done in different ways. Then there are a lot of independent islands as well. JNCC has a great Coral Conservation Group in the Overseas Territories which is doing an excellent job of linking up the UKOTs. Finding those links are important for small nations and our environments.

There are, of course, the issues related to climate-change, extreme weather events, ocean heating etc.

**Do you think Montserrat's marine life is more resilient than other islands where there is more tourism?**

I would have said we were more resilient before Stony Coral Tissue Loss Disease (SCTLD) and coral-bleaching (due to sea-warming). However, by not having mass tourism, unlike many other Caribbean islands, the marine world here is more protected. SCTLD hit Montserrat in Jan 2021 and we did lots of roving surveys around the island to see our affected numbers and set up long-term monitoring transects to do treatment testing. We worked with Dr Greta Abby to look at alternatives to using the antibiotic treatment that was used in e.g. the Cayman Islands. We trialled a few methods to try to protect the corals, such as chlorine and sudocrem treatments with clay bandages at lesion sites. We were trying to use things that we already had on island (due to the costs of importing and due to Covid times). We then started working with Dr Blake Ushijima and his lab at the University of North Carolina Wilmington, to trial probiotics. We did a lot of testing for SCTLD using coral scrapings that were sent for analysis to try and see what probiotic strains might support resistance to this disease. We set up a wet lab and had good success and then wanted to test it in-situ. However this work has been delayed as there was a lot of bleaching and the corals are struggling, which means there is less SCTLD.

**What would be your dream for the connection between people and marine world in Montserrat?**

I would say there is value in exploring your backyard and respecting that. As Montserrat moves with its development, it is important to keep it beautiful for the people of Montserrat,

while supporting the economy. The risk is that the development on Montserrat might damage what is already here, such as our beautiful reefs and caves and mountains.

**How can young people on Montserrat get to know more about the marine environment?**

I recommend that people expose themselves to the water as much as they can! Go with a swim buddy – be as comfortable as you can with the water whether that be swimming, snorkelling, sailing, kite-surfing etc. I go also to schools to talk about our work, and am involved in summer camps and Girl Guides. We run swimming lessons from March through to December if people want to come and get to know the water. Diving-wise, we also have Discover Dives that people can trial to see if they like it before doing full open water course.

**Thank you very much Emmy! It was a pleasure to talk with you and learn about your fantastic work! Do you have a final message you would like to share with the younger readers who are wondering what to do in their careers?**

I would say, pick what you enjoy and then go in that direction, whether it is on land or in the sea! I would also say it is definitely OK to change direction – you don't have to know what you want to do. There are lots of jobs out there to learn about; we don't know what we don't know! Take the opportunities where you can and see where they take you!

If readers would like to know more about the amazing and incredibly inspiring work of Emmy Aston and Andrew Myers at Island Solutions, please visit their website: <https://www.islandsolutions.org> or check out their social media at FB/Insta @Islandsolutions\_org





## Thanksgiving Service: 30th Anniversary, Soufrière Hills Volcano, Montserrat

The 30th Anniversary of the start of the eruption of the Soufrière Volcano on Montserrat was commemorated at Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, London, on 29th June 2025.

The event was attended by many Montserratians, including relatives of persons killed as a result of the volcanic activity, and many other friends of Montserrat.

Outstanding performances were made by musicians, both instrumental and vocal, intermingled with readings, prayers, and greetings from diaspora communities, the community on Montserrat, and many other organisations of friends. These made the event both a memorial and joyously celebrational.

*Photos by Ann Pienkowski*



*Above: solo vocalists Semele Meade, Khian West, Elaie Downey and Twishika Daley*



*Above: Territorial Song Motherland led by The Montserrat Anniversary Community Choir (Directed by Leandro Kelly) and accompanied by the Westminster Methodist Central Hall Organist, Mr Gerard Brooks.*

*Below: Liturgical dance presentation by God's Anointed Ministries, New Life Assembly Church, Hackney Branch*



*(continued on next page)*





Above: Musical tribute to Windrush Generation by The London Community Gospel Choir



H.E. Harriet Cross, Governor of Montserrat, delivers remarks on behalf of His Majesty The King.



Above & below: Instrumentalists round off the music – Roger Downey (keys); Delroy Joseph Jr (keys); Courtney Larmond (guitar); Josiah Persaud (steelpan); Jonathan Rowland (saxophone); Gregory Greaves (bass); & Ke'nielle Roach (drums & musical director)



Above: Vote of Thanks by host, Ms Kei-Retta Farrell, Head of the Montserrat Government UK Office.



Below: After the service, the Governor discusses with UKOTCF Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski

The recent phase of *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* project (DPLUS155 *Securing Montserrat's threatened endemic species and natural capital through community-action*) and the current project *Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development* (DPLUS192) are resourced by the following organisations:



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