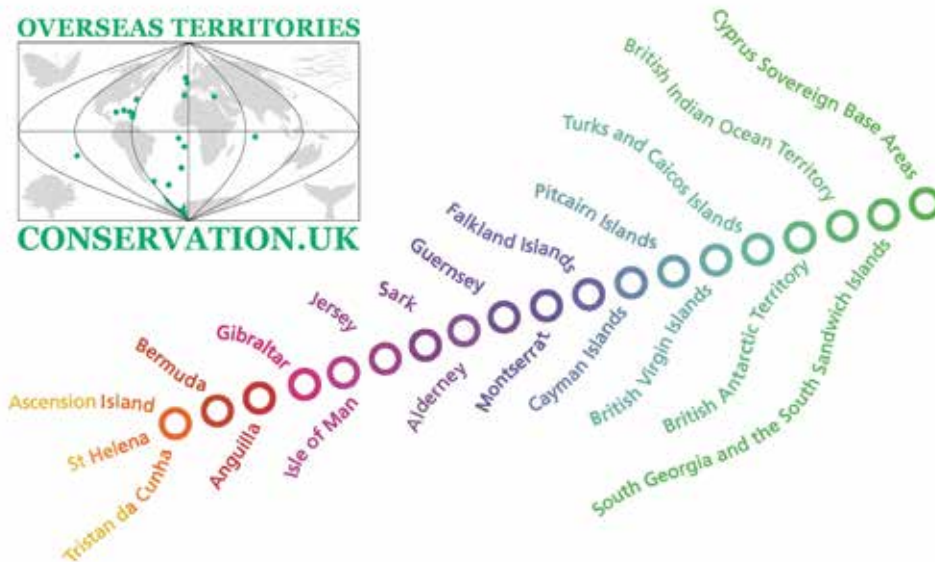


# UKOTCF's 7th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island states, 13th to 16th October 2025, by Zoom



## Proceedings

Edited by Dr Mike Pienkowski, Catherine Wensink,  
Ann Pienkowski, Dr Keith Bensusan,  
Dr Jodey Peyton & Bryan Naqqi Manco  
and published by  
UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum  
2025



*A tiny proportion of the images from UKOTCF's forthcoming book wildlife and conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. For captions and explanation, see page 2.*

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### Captions and explanation of illustrations on page 1

A tiny proportion of the images from UKOTCF's forthcoming book on *wildlife and its conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies* (see also page 23):

#### *top row (l-r):*

Cloud forest, with tree-ferns, at the Peaks; St Helena, with a view to the nearby desert in the distance

Caicos Barking Gecko – endemic to Turks & Caicos Islands, and rediscovered during UKOTCF-led project after thought extinct

Montserrat Pribby, endemic and benefitting from UKOTCF conservation project facilitating local persons to lead on conservation

St Helena Spiky Yellow Woodlouse (© Vicky Wilkins)

#### *bottom row (l-r):*

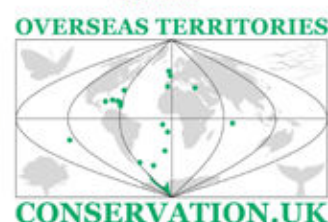
Gentoo Penguins porpoising from feeding grounds to colony, British Antarctic Territory

Flightless Henderson Rail, one of five endemic bird species of Henderson Island, in the Pitcairn group.

Garden Pond, rich seasonal pond, Turks & Caicos Islands

Photos: © Dr Mike Pienkowski, except as indicated.

*We are pleased to acknowledge financial support for this conference  
from anonymous donors and these following organisations:*



# Introduction and Opening of the Conference

**CONFERENCE ORGANISING TEAM: UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum:**  
Dr Keith Bensusan, Dr Jodey Peyton, Ann Pienkowski, Dr Mike Pienkowski and Catherine Wensink

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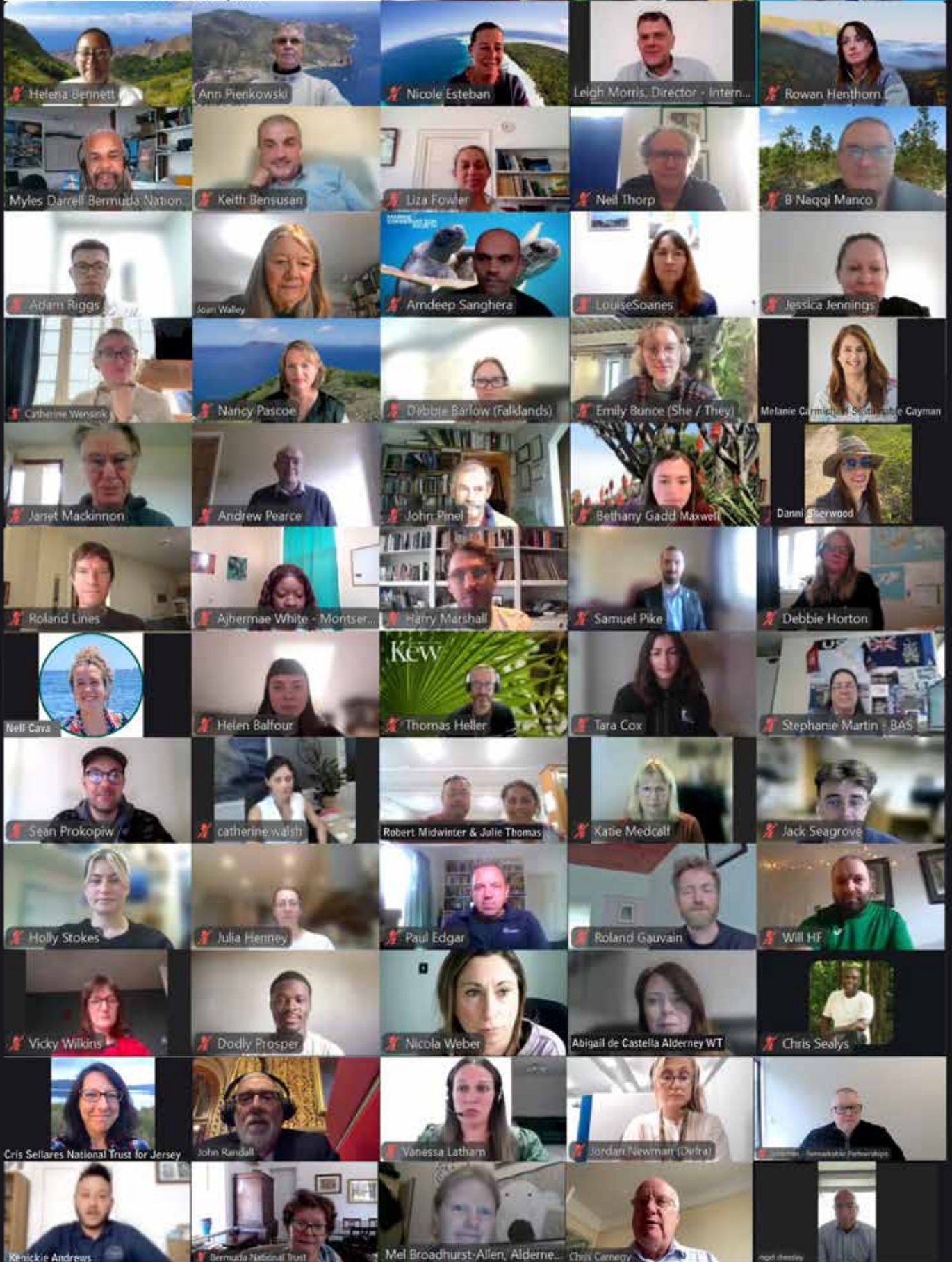
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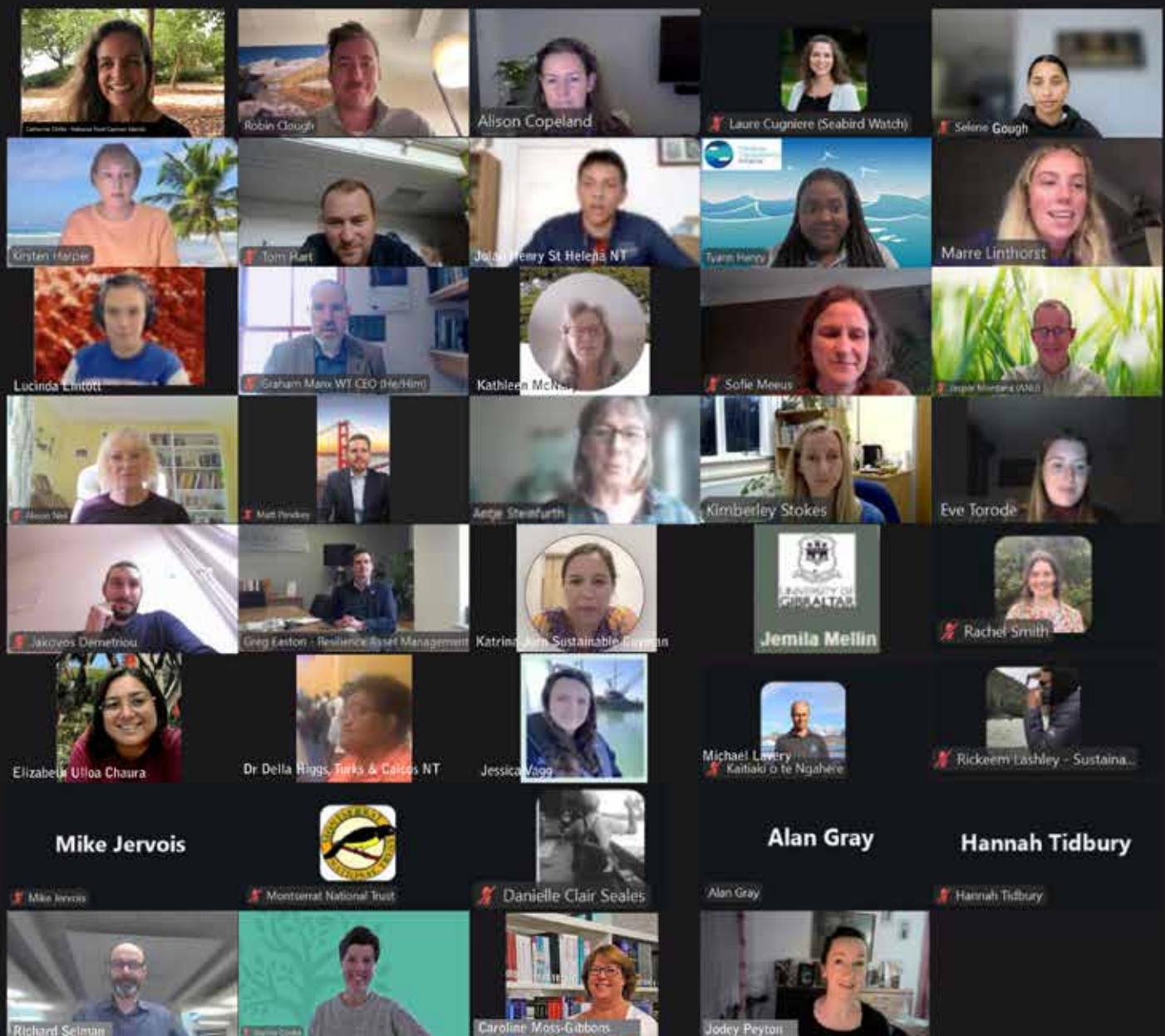


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13th to 16th October 2025

### Some Participants







Not shown are those who were not present or showing when the images were taken, and did not supply their own image, and some who registered to view the recordings.

*We are pleased to acknowledge financial support for this conference from anonymous donors and these following organisations:*



**Manx Wildlife Trust**  
Treisht Bea-Feie Vannin

**amphibian and reptile conservation**



# Editors' Introduction

In these proceedings, we try to capture as much as possible of the valuable information brought together at the conference, both as an *aide memoire* for those present and to make it available to those who were not.

In this first section, we include, immediately after this Introduction, the opening session and the ministerial segment, including remarks and answers to questions by:

- Hon. Mary Creagh, UK Minister for Nature, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs; and
- Hon. Prof. John Cortés, Gibraltar Minister for Education, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change, Heritage, Technical Services and Transport; and Chair of the Council of Environment Ministers (or equivalents) of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies,

We continue with the recommendations resulting from the conference. These were drafted initially several months in advance by a team bringing together personnel from across almost all the territories, taking account of the information in the abstracts and other ideas from talk and poster authors, the conclusions of earlier conferences, and discussions in UKOTCF regional working groups and elsewhere. As explained in that section, successive drafts were circulated widely during the four months prior to the conference to those registered by the time of each circulation, for comment. By the draft prior to the conference, no further comments were received, and the conference sessions confirmed that final draft.

This approach was modelled on that used successfully at the 2015 Gibraltar conference and the 2021 online conference. (In Appendix 4, the recommendations are presented in an alternative form, divided between the target audiences.) Of course, the recommendations do not commit anyone to anything. They are simply well-informed conclusions by a widely drawn group of experienced specialists working on these subjects. Those from previous conferences have been found useful by a wide range of bodies, and the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers' Council welcomed these at their meeting in the month after the conference, and incorporated aspects of many of them into their own Statement.

This time, we have added a separate set of less formal key take-aways from conference discussions, and these follow the recommendations.

We then pick up some items from the closing session, notably an outline of UKOTCF's forthcoming book on

wildlife and conservation in the UKOTs and CDs, and then the thanks for those making the conference happen.

The following sections then address each topic of the conference, combining in one place any sessions split in time. Generally, the sequence of topics follows the sequence of the programme, except as noted above and that we start with the 3rd Sir Richard and Lady Dace Ground Lecture, by Myles Darrell from Bermuda National Trust.

Posters are included in the section to which they were allocated, but we do note briefly Topic 4 where authors of posters had the opportunity to make brief presentations and answer questions. The posters remained available throughout the conference, and voting on them stayed open to the morning of the final day of the conference.

For those posters for which the authors supplied also a conventional publication text and illustrations as requested, we included their material in these proceedings.

Where authors of talks have supplied the requested text and illustrations for their talk (either, as required, before the conference or even a few days after), we have published these. In some other cases, we have constructed the published version from the notes and illustrations from the presentation Powerpoints or other material. Occasionally, we have resorted to working from the video recordings of the session but, for some presentations, this proved impracticable.

Because we wanted to give the maximum number of presenters a chance to contribute, we had to limit talks to 15 minutes, followed by 5 minutes of questions (which time speakers were advised they could not commandeer). However, authors were advised that the proceedings were a chance to include more material if they wished. Lead authors were allowed to revise their conference text for a short period after the conference.

For each paper (whether based on a talk or a poster) for which the information was available, we have included an abstract and a main text, supported by illustrations where appropriate and available. In a few cases, lack of availability prevented inclusion of some items. For some items, explanatory notes not in the authors' words needed to be added; the distinction is made clear.

Where we have an image of the presenting author (usually, in the case of talks, a screen-grab), we have included this. We have included photos of co-authors where these were available.

In reporting the question-and-answer sessions and general discussions, we combined overlapping material from the video recordings, the chat-box and other notes (and thank one question-master who managed not only to keep the discussion going but also made a full note of questions and answers). In some cases, we have adjusted the

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UKOTCF 2025. Editors' Introduction. pp 10-11 in *UKOTCF's 7th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island states, 13th-16th October 2025 Proceedings* (ed. by M. Pienkowski, C. Wensink, A. Pienkowski, K. Bensusan, J. Peyton & B.N. Manco) UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)

sequence of these to put related material together, so as to aid clarity. Some texts have been sub-edited for clarity, especially given the difficulty in representing in text the information implied in the spoken word and visual impression.

In some cases, questions on individual talks continued in the general discussion. In some cases, these have been transferred to the Q&A periods after the relevant individual talks.

A large part of each session was deliberately devoted to discussions, to facilitate taking issues forward in an integrated way.

Authors were supplied with proof copies of their proceedings items for checking. Most responded, and we thank them. The editors have proof-checked the proceedings several times. To allow prompt publication, we stopped after these several checks. Some errors will remain; they always do. We apologise for these.

The Proceedings end with several Appendices, which include the final published programme, including a list of interval music kindly made available, the list of participants, the feedback received from participants, and the alternative forms of the extracted Recommendations noted earlier.

Many people have helped in producing these proceedings. We will not repeat the thanks to all those involved in making the conference happen – but we, of course, stress those. In the editing of the proceedings, we thank additionally all the authors of papers and posters and others supplying additional material. Our thanks for this are not reduced by the fact that we have to say that not all of these followed the instructions for submission of written versions and supporting illustrations! And we confess that we may perhaps not always have been totally content with the several who delivered material many weeks after the original deadlines, but we are nonetheless grateful for these eventual receipts. We did our best to include items also from those who did not supply the agreed material.

These proceedings are presented in several forms, to aid downloading or viewing. If the whole proceedings are downloaded as one file, the links in the Contents list to individual items will work. If, however, they are downloaded in the small units, corresponding for example to individual topic sessions, the links in the main Contents list will work only in that first section, even if the separate files are recombined. To help overcome this, we have added separate Contents lists at the start of each topic session.

The conference outputs do not stop with the conference, as these proceedings and many other things show. In this context, we want to thank participants for letting us know about subsequent press articles and broadcast items. It is valuable to know about these, not least when trying to resource future conferences. Therefore, please keep us

informed of further outputs or other consequences.

Although these conferences require a very great deal of work to be successful, we are cheered by the very positive response from participants (see Appendix 3) and we hope to find the resources to continue this series of conferences, both online and physically.

*The Editors*



# Opening of the conference

## Welcome and conference arrangements, by Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF Chairman



*UKOTCF's Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski, welcomed all to the conference, noting UKOTCF's role as a federation of bodies, from across the territories and beyond, involved with conservation in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, and indeed an even wider network of experienced and committed individual supporters:*

Good morning/afternoon/evening everyone and welcome to UKOTCF's seventh conference – or possibly 8th if one includes the 1999 London conference which FCO asked UKOTCF to step in to run. The others were 2000 in Gibraltar, 2003 in Bermuda, 2006 in Jersey, 2009 in Cayman, 2015 in Gibraltar again and 2021 online.

I am pleased to say that we have 147 [167 by the end of the conference] people registered, and that includes representation in one form or another of all territories. By “territories”, I include both UKOTs and CDs. It is not a competition but, if it were, in a last-minute surge, St Helena would just have beaten Gibraltar by one. By my calculations, all territories but two are represented in presentations – and I suspect that those two are included too, but I do not know the full content of all presentations. Again, if we imagine a competition, this time Gibraltar would get its revenge by just beating St Helena – but this is not an exact study!

I will have lots of people to thank later in the conference, but now I would like to acknowledge the financial support from JNCC, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the University of Gibraltar, UKOTCF itself and its member and associate bodies Amphibian & Reptile Conservation, Bermuda National Trust, Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society, Manx Wildlife Trust, the National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, and St Helena National Trust.

I return to a few practical points. Most presentations have been pre-recorded, but a few will be given live. As questions occur to you during a talk, please type them into the Chat-box. Each session will have a Question-master who will select and put the question for you and, if present, the speaker or their colleague will offer an answer. If there is no representative, we will note the question and try to get it answered in the proceedings.

The speakers and session officers will be on the “panel” in Zoom terms. That means that they can switch on their cameras and microphones. Please switch on your cameras during live-presentations, Q&A sessions and general discussions. Especially if you are speaking, please ensure that your camera is on; otherwise, the recording has a rather off-putting blank screen. Please also make sure that your name is amended, if necessary, to show your preferred first name and your surname (or organisation if in a group) – otherwise the job of session officers and organisers is very difficult. Please be aware that (when your camera and mic are on) all participants (not just those on the panel) can see and hear you.

This session is divided by a ministerial segment. During that, Topic 1 panel members please keep your cameras on, but mics off, so that the ministers can see something of the audience.

More technical stuff later when we need it, but now I have pleasure in handing over to the officers for the first session

*Later, in the ministerial segment, Dr Pienkowski expressed his pleasure and honour to introduce Hon. Mary Creagh, UK Minister for Nature, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, and Hon. Prof. John Cortés, Gibraltar Minister for Education, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change, Heritage, Technical Services and Transport; and Chair of the Council of Environment Ministers (or equivalents) of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.*

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Pienkowski, M. 2025. Welcome and conference arrangements. p 12 in *UKOTCF's 7th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island states, 13th-16th October 2025 Proceedings* (ed. by M. Pienkowski, C. Wensink, A. Pienkowski, K. Bensusan, J. Peyton & B.N. Manco) UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)



# Remarks by Hon. Mary Creagh, UK Minister for Nature, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs; and Hon. Prof. John Cortés, Gibraltar Minister for Education, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change, Heritage, Technical Services and Transport; and Chair of the Council of Environment Ministers (or equivalents) of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies

**Dr Mike Pienkowski:**

Great to have you all here. We're delighted to be joined in this session by Minister for Nature, Mary Creagh MP, and also Minister John Cortés, Environment Minister for Gibraltar.

We are in touch with Minister Mary Creagh's officials, and they are just getting things sorted. Thank you to them. In this session I am going to do my best to chair and our Executive Director, Catherine Wensink, is going to be the Question Master. And our Council Member Keith Bensusan is the Rapporteur. So welcome Minister John Cortés as a regular to these meetings and thank you for flying about to get here in time to be able to do this.

So I am just checking the messages as we go along. So what we are going to do shortly is the UK Minister for Nature, Mary Creagh, is going to make a few remarks and then I expect that Minister John Cortés, from Gibraltar and the Chair of the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers Council, will be making a few brief comments too, and then we have questions to the UK Minister for Nature and then we might get some more remarks from Minister Cortés, and questions to him. I think that is what is going to happen – predicting is always a dangerous game.

So I am just checking to get a list of the people joining. Ah, I think we have the Minister for Nature. Ah yes, I think sound is coming on.

Welcome Minister. The technology gets us there in the end. Thank you very much indeed for finding time to join us. As you will see, we have Minister Cortés from Gibraltar with us as well. I think people are busy thinking up questions for you but, in the meanwhile, could I invite you to make any initial comments you would like.

## Minister Mary Creagh MP



Thanks Mike. It's good to join you.

Well, first of all it's brilliant to join you on the opening day of this really important conference. The UK Government stands firmly behind our British Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.

Thank you, Mike, for inviting me to speak and to share the stage with Professor John Cortés, my friend for many years now.

As the Minister for Nature, I never tire of telling people that Nature is a monopoly provider of everything that we need to live. And everybody's environment starts at their very own front door, so I am thrilled to be here and be amongst so many people who are passionate about conservation and about tackling climate-change.

At home here in England, we have taken steps to protect our natural heritage. We have licensed the first wild beaver release since they were hunted to extinction around 400 years ago. We have announced the creation of a new national forest, the Western Forest, which will stretch across the West Country from the Forest of Dean in the Cotswolds right down to the Mendip Hills in Somerset. We have banned bee-killing pesticides to protect pollinators and we have launched landscape-scale recovery projects to connect and protect habitat across the country. These are not just policies; these are our promises to future generations.

And as far as overseas is concerned I am delighted to announce that the Convention on Biological Diversity, which 196 countries are party to, has recently been extended to Guernsey. This milestone was only made possible through collaboration between officials from the States of Guernsey and the UK Government. Under the CBD, we have committed to play our part as a Nation in halting and reversing biodiversity loss by 2030. It is a bold ambition and it will take all of us, and we have agreed to achieve all 23 targets of that framework at

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Craig, M. 2025. Statement by Hon. Mary Creagh MP, UK Minister for Nature, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. pp 13-17 in *UKOTCF's 7th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island states, 13th-16th October 2025 Proceedings* (ed. by M. Pienkowski, C. Wensink, A. Pienkowski, K. Bensusan, J. Peyton & B.N. Manco) UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)

home. This is hugely ambitious. In February this year, the UK published our National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan – the beautifully titled NBAP which sets out our commitments and path to meeting each target. It was developed in collaboration with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and I am very pleased to say that the plan includes contributions from our OTs and Crown Dependencies.

This collaboration is continuing as we prepare our 7th national report which will feed into a global review of progress to be adopted at COP17 on Biodiversity next year in Armenia. Together, the UK, our Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies are making important contributions to our global progress and we look forward to continuing that with you.

As you will all be aware, DEFRA's Darwin Plus programme previously awarded funding to more than 340 biodiversity and conservation projects of benefit to the UK's Overseas Territories, and I am delighted that we have been able to add to this figure, just announced last Thursday, by funding more than 40 new projects with total lifetime-costs of over £7million. They range from restoring rich seabird habitats in the Falklands, to educating and training the next generation of conservationists and climate-advocates in Montserrat. And, of course, St Helena is benefitting from funding that we are putting into the Cloud Forest, which will protect the fresh-water supply for the people who live on that island, something that I discussed with the Minister there at the Biological Diversity COP in Cali, Columbia, last year. So we announced that, with His Majesty the King and the Prince of Wales, last week at the Natural History Museum. So that was a really important moment.

We've also got a forthcoming Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy which was shaped through Territory stakeholders inputting into extensive consultations. I know that it has been a long time coming; some of that is to do with the push and pull of the democratic process taking place. I am grateful for your collaboration, really pleased to confirm all Territories have now cleared that strategy and we are making every effort to publish it as soon as possible.

On plastic pollution, one of the greatest environmental threats of our time, we are committed to an ambitious global treaty. For too long plastic has littered our ocean and threatened our wildlife, and it has been found everywhere in our oceans from plankton through to Polar Bears at the North Pole. The UK was a founding member of the highly ambitious coalition to end plastic pollution. We were disappointed that we were unable to reach agreement at the latest international intergovernmental negotiating committee in August. But we are committed, as a government, to reaching an ambitious, effective treaty to end plastic pollution and to turn back the plastic tide. I will be working on that; I have had meetings on it when I was in New York in the United Nations General Assembly. I will be travelling to Belem, Brazil, for the Climate COP,

and I will be travelling to Nairobi in Kenya in December for the United Nations Environment Ministers Meeting. We are going to have this as top of our agenda going forward this autumn. I want to thank you all for your engagement on this topic and all the work that you have done to date.

Finally, next month we are looking forward to hosting environment ministers and leaders from the Overseas Territories for the annual Joint Ministerial Council. I missed it last year – very sorry to miss it because of my travels to Columbia, but I am looking forward to attending it this year, to attending the Environment and Climate Plenary on the Wednesday, and I am also attending Thursday night's evening reception, to meet many of you there.

So let me finish by saying this: you are custodians of over 90% of the UK's biodiversity, whether that is on land or at sea, and we are acutely conscious that you are our pioneers, and you are on the front line of the climate and nature crisis, and we stand ready as a government to help you, even in these difficult financial times, to make sure that the beautiful and incredible natural heritage to which you are custodians is treasured and cherished for years to come. Thank you.

**Dr Mike Pienkowski:** Thank you very much Minister Creagh. Minister Cortés do you want to make a few remarks at this point?

## Minister John Cortés (Gibraltar)



Mike, first of all to thank you not just for your invitation today but for the work you have been doing for decades now in promoting this collaboration on environmental issues in the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. It is an honour and a pleasure for me to follow my friend the Minister for Nature. As the Minister has said, we have

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Cortés, J. 2025. Statement by Hon. Prof. John Cortés, Gibraltar Minister for Education, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change, Heritage, Technical Services and Transport; and Chair of the Council of Environment Ministers (or equivalents) of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. pp 14-18 in *UKOTCF's 7th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island states, 13th-16th October 2025 Proceedings* (ed. by M. Pienkowski, C. Wensink, A. Pienkowski, K. Bensusan, J. Peyton & B.N. Manco) UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)

been friends for many years and we have had several meetings and discussions since she came into Government last year, and I think that the support and the interest and the encouragement that she brings to this post are palpable from her contribution today, and I for one am very grateful for the friendship and the support. I am sure we are all looking forward to continuing to work with the Minister.

The Minister has given me a cue to continue on the theme of our Territories having over 90% of the UK's biodiversity and we feel it is important from our angle, and we know that it is important for the United Kingdom. Indeed, Mike, when we started these meetings, several decades ago, we would have been extremely excited to have a Minister with us for the amount of time that the Minister is going to be with us. Now we are almost – but not quite – taking it for granted that the interest has increased tremendously through the decades. And I think it is through the hard work of everybody involved in UKOTCF, UKOTA and, indeed, the Environment Ministers' Council.

I don't have to say to people here today how we acknowledge our shared environmental challenges, climate-change, invasive species, limited resources, including limited resources in space which are challenges for us. So the challenges of small-island ecosystems are great, but there are opportunities – opportunities to help us with our economy, for example in tourism – but challenges in dealing with our energy requirements, waste-disposal and water are things that we share. There are similarities and differences, but I always say that our Territories are enriched by our diversity.

I think that we must remember that conservation is both ecological and political; it is tied to our identity and our resilience, and we must not forget either the importance of NGOs, academic institutions, and government in the Territories working together for our common aims. Protecting nature in the territories is not a side-issue; it is central to the UK family's global environmental responsibility which we all share. And that's it, for now. Thank you very much for the opportunity.

**Dr Mike Pienkowski:** Thank you both Ministers. I am now going to hand over to my colleague, our Executive Director Catherine Wensink, to be question-master for this session. So Catherine, please get the questions going.

**Catherine Wensink:** Hello, thank you, yes. So the first question we have is from **Melanie Carmichael** from Sustainable Cayman. She asks: "With the recent lifting of interim protections for the Blue Iguana's critical habitat in the Cayman Islands, the urgency of addressing the biodiversity crisis in the Overseas Territories (UKOTs) has never been more pressing for us. Will His Majesty's Government provide support and funding to the UKOTs to consider ratifying the Kunming-Montreal Agreement (or the 30-by-30 target) in the UKOTs, in time-frames

that would be realistic for the UKOTs? Such a step would help to plan and implement the global minimum standard for biodiversity-conservation, providing much-needed certainty for our communities, businesses and governments, by establishing a sustainable, climate-resilient framework for our UKOTs?"

**Minister Creagh:** Thank you for that. As a party to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity, the UK is already committed to the goals and targets of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity framework, so our National Biodiversity Plan, which I mentioned in my speech and which we published in February, includes commitments to each part of the UK including those Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies which have had the CBD extended to them on their request. Now I don't have the details as to whether Cayman has had the Convention extended to them but we can certainly get back to you [It has – Eds]. I have officials with me in the room on that. Of course, all activities that support nature do contribute to one of those 23 targets in there. And we are working with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee to ensure a co-ordinated approach to implementing our NBAP which is our kind of Biological Diversity Action Plan and to report accurately on the activities underway in each part of the UK, of the Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies. And, of course, we will have to report back to the Secretariat as part of our turning up in Armenia next year. We can't just turn up and say we have done great things; we have to show, not tell. So there will be a big collection of what we are doing and the gathering of evidence to submit as part of our participation in Armenia next year.

**Catherine Wensink:** Thank you. The second question is related to that, target 19 which was about mobilising resources. And again from **Melanie Carmichael** of Sustainable Cayman, but this is also echoed by **Nicole Esteban** from the University of Swansea. "Will the Minister commit to maintaining Darwin Plus funding at a minimum of £12.8m per year, indexed to inflation, under a multi-year settlement, to give UKOT projects the certainty they need?"

**Minister Creagh:** I do understand how hard it is for stakeholders in OTs, but also across the country to have clarity in future years. We do have the benefit of having a 3-year financial settlement but that settlement has to go through business-planning processes. We have a new Secretary of State, as you will have seen in the reshuffle, who has been in post 3 weeks. And, of course, we were able to announce some of the funding for Darwin Plus as part of our road-to-COP launch last week at the Natural History Museum. But we are just going to have to wait to give you more detail on the future funding round.

**Catherine Wensink:** Thank you.

**Minister Creagh:** Can I just say one other thing about that? We are not going to be able to provide all of the finance that

nature needs through public funding. And I think we are looking, with Foreign Office officials, thinking creatively to try to identify any potential new approaches that we could take. For example, crowd-funding and philanthropic funding or private-sector funding – which is something that we are starting to see in the UK. So we have got large companies like Aviva, for example, committing a million pounds to restoration of temperate Atlantic rain-forest over the next ten years: one hundred thousand pounds per year. So these types of approaches that are quite innovative, new financing coming in. But we also know that the FCDO Blue Belt Programme provides advice and assistance on sustainable finance to territories, OTs, by identifying potential funding sources and sustainable-business opportunities. So we are hoping to share an update on the OTs' requests for specific climate-funding at that JMC meeting in about 5 weeks' time.

**Catherine Wensink:** Thank you, and that actually answers a question from **Samuel Pike** from Environment Systems: “Minister, what innovative approaches can the UK Government explore (or is exploring), beyond traditional financing tools such as DPLUS, to help the Overseas Territories deliver Nature-based Solutions that strengthen resilience and safeguard biodiversity?”

**Minister Creagh:** This was a hot topic at New York climate-week. I was sitting there with businesses and they were asking “What shall we do? We don't want to do something and then it is the wrong thing.” And I think that the task-force for nature-related financial disclosure, getting companies to look down their supply-chains, work out what needs changing and try to rectify, either avoid the damage or bake into their supply-chains the sort of mitigation is really important. In the same way that we have seen from climate-change related discussions in making companies much more aware of their impact on the climate, and of the climate's impact on them. I think that is one area. But the two areas that I said to companies related to zero-regret investment. The two zero-regret investments are in forests and in marine. These are the two mega-ecosystems that are too big to fail, so crowding funding into those areas is where I think businesses are going to start thinking much more creatively.

**Catherine Wensink:** Thank you. A question from **Joan Walley:** “As a former chair of the Environmental Audit Select Committee, we undertook an inquiry into the need for government to have far greater regard to the biodiversity of UKOTs. How can this conference best support you to secure UK government priority so urgently needed for this priceless biodiversity?”

**Minister Creagh:** Well I think it is important that we take the OTs out of the OT niche if you like. So, for example, Cayman did a film which was shown at Speaker's House and I know that the Speaker of the House of Commons is very interested in supporting the Overseas Territories, and I know Minister Doughty, who is the Minister for the Overseas Territories at the Foreign Office, is extremely

keen that we have joined-up strategy across government. There's lots of people who fund this, education etc., and trying to make the funding more than the sum of its parts is quite important, and I think that work is underway at the Foreign Office. But I think the best way is to show, again, and a picture says a thousand words. It is important to talk to MPs who can be your amplifiers, and work out who has got connections with you, and who visited, and then to build on those visits and connections.

Over half of the Parliament is new. And that makes it incredibly challenging for me, even though I am one of the newbies. They have recycled me. I did 16 years before that, until my enforced sabbatical in 2019, when I lost my seat. So there's a lot of new people to educate and initiate into Overseas Territories, and I think that it is really important that you are not seen as a niche but people's understanding of what you are and how important you are to us is spread across all parties at every level.

**Catherine Wensink:** Thank you. And I think that answers a question from **Andy Pearce:** “The rare and beautiful wildlife and plants of the Overseas Territories are a tremendous asset and responsibility for the UK and the OTs. How does the Minister feel our collective awareness, pride and engagement can be increased?”

A question from **Brian Naqqi Manco.** He asks: “The small size of our territories and in some of our cases globally disproportionate land-values, it has been nearly impossible to purchase land for conservation purposes. Is this an aspect of funding that could be considered by UK Government in the future?”

And I think that speaks to your mention of the Aviva temperate rain forest project.

**Minister Creagh:** Well, this is an issue in the UK as well, where we are trying to get land to plant trees on. It is agricultural land, and it is in competition for housing, is in competition for trees. I think what you need to do is to purchase smart. Not every bit of land is as valuable as others, so you want to buy cheap and then tell a story about what you are doing. I don't have an answer. This is public money purchasing land for conservation and you are in competition with house-builders, second-home builders, hotel-chains etc. in some of our OTs. I am afraid I don't have any quick fixes there. We have very similar problems in England.

**Catherine Wensink:** Thank you. The next question we have is from **Janet Mackinnon:** “How will environmental governance be prioritised in the transfer of Chagos Archipelago sovereignty to Mauritius?”

**Minister Creagh:** We will collaborate with Mauritius on environmental protection and that will include establishment of a Mauritian Marine Protected Area, and we will work in partnership with them to ensure that this happens.



**Catherine Wensink:** Thank you for that. And there's quite a long question from **Roland Gauvain:** "The value of Darwin Plus to enabling the UKOTs to work towards the understanding, protection and restoration of their extraordinary diverse natural environment seems clear. Whilst the link between the UK and its Crown Dependencies is perhaps more complex, the support given by UK Government to Guernsey in helping the island adopt CBD clearly demonstrates the role the UK can play in supporting the Dependencies. Whilst the larger Dependencies have had a level of independence and resource to support them in taking their own actions towards commitments such as 30-by-30, would the Minister consider how UK Government might support the smaller CD's develop their own responses? We would not want to see this take away from the resources available through Darwin to the UKOTs."

**Minister Creagh:** We have worked closely with Governments of Guernsey officials to extend membership of the Convention on Biological Diversity to their territory. And we are working with Jersey and the Isle of Man to implement the UK's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. We will try to work with the Crown Dependencies on policy areas. I know that, on the Isle of Man, there are plans for big offshore wind-arrays, and to share best practices and lessons learnt if this would be useful. But the UK Government does not fund Crown Dependencies. They are Crown Dependencies because they are responsible for their own domestic affairs and do not receive money from the UK exchequer, I'm afraid. I am not sure that there will be any changes to that.

**Catherine Wensink:** OK, I think that comes to the end of the questions online.

**Dr Mike Pienkowski:** I think we are at the end of the time of the Minister's availability. Correct me if I am wrong, Minister or your officials. Thank you very much indeed for joining us and for taking the fire of a range of questions. Your answers are much appreciated.

**Minister Creagh:** Thank you very much indeed, I have been well briefed by my officials. Lovely to see you all and look forward to meeting many of you in person.

**Dr Mike Pienkowski:** We still have, though, Minister John Cortés and you may, John, want to make a few more remarks now.

**Minister John Cortés:**

OK, thank you Mike. Just a few, almost random thoughts that I have noted down. Just to share with this incredible full collective that we have here today. I much prefer meeting in person, but the range of participants that we can gather by doing it this way is much greater. And it really is wonderful looking at the list of contributors and the range of subjects covered.

If I may just go back over some of the points that I made earlier, I think there are a few things that I could spend a little bit more time talking about. And that's the challenges and opportunities of our small territories. I've been in the job as Minister for Environment for 14 years now, and consider how it is possible if you have the right agenda and the right intentions to combine economic progress and development with the protection of nature and the enhancement of the environment – of our urban environment as well as our natural environment.

There are clearly, and as I said we all recognise, challenges: challenges of space, and challenges in relation to energy. In Gibraltar, we are struggling too, with the transition to renewable energy, because of our lack of space but we feel committed to it. We have important targets in our climate-change strategy. We are about to publish our 25-year plan and we are often asked is it worth it because our contribution to global carbon is infinitesimal. And my answer is always 'Yes', because we have a responsibility to the global community, but also very often renewable energy has the side-effect of improving our air-quality, so these are issues that are debatable. Is it worth us wanting to arrive at net-zero in our small communities, and this I think is an important debate. I mentioned also the challenge of waste-disposal as one which is significant in island-communities.

Gibraltar is not geographically an island but in many ways, for a number of historical and political reasons, we have to act as if we were. And these are all challenges that we are wanting to overcome. And also, to share our experiences and opportunities, like the one given by this conference are to be seized. The Minister made a very interesting comment about having to come out of our Overseas Territories niche. I am not sure whether I captured exactly what she meant, but my interpretation is, actually, that I totally agree with that. We are a collective; we work together, more than we ever have done, and we exchange views and so on. But we are also territories and countries in our own right and we shouldn't feel in any way inhibited by the fact that we are small. And part of this collective, if anything, is that it should empower us further and promote our own ambitions and our own successes in our own right as well as a collective.

One other thing that I think I must comment on. Looking back almost to the precursor of the Forum and thinking back to Sara Oldfield's *Fragments of Paradise* back in 1987, is how we have come a long way since then. And one of the main aims, other than sharing experiences and expertise, was capacity-building in territories; looking at the contributors to this conference, to that extent, that is capacity-built. The amount of work being done in the territories by both UK-based, but increasingly by territory-based, researchers is impressive if you compare it to several decades ago when I started this journey.

One example I can give you in my home city of Gibraltar, is the University of Gibraltar's contribution to this

conference, and the work that it is doing, I am very proud as a Professor of that University to mention this. But I think that is a success and the University is very young, about 10 years old now, so this capacity-building I think is one way in which the Forum and the various collectives of the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies have managed to succeed.

I think that is really all I want to say at this point. Just, once again, to thank and congratulate the Forum for keeping at it. And to those of you here who are involved on the political side, and who are contributing as officials or politicians to the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministers' Council, just to encourage you to join us at the next Council meeting which Mike is co-ordinating. And if you are going to be at the Joint Ministerial Council in November, I hope to be there, and I look forward to seeing you. All I can say is keep up the good work. I think we have made tremendous progress: a lot more to do, a lot of challenges ahead, but always opportunities too. Thank you.

**Dr Mike Pienkowski:** Thank you very much John, and thank you for your leadership in many aspects of this work.

Minister Cortés has indicated that he too is prepared to answer any questions. He is hesitating now.

**Minister Cortés:** I just don't know what questions they may want to ask. But I am very happy to.

**Dr Mike Pienkowski:** Apart from your Gibraltar role you are the Chair of the Environment Ministers' Council of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies so you might have some. I don't know. They may all be questioned-out. Have you got any questions, question master.

**Catherine Wensink:** There are no questions coming through just yet.

**Minister Cortés:** Let me just say, in order to keep the conversation going, I think that the Minister mentioned that the Biodiversity Strategy had landed and, as those of us involved in it know, it has had involvement from all the different territories. I am sitting here with my CEO, Stephen Warr, who will be known to some of you, and he has contributed. And, as the Minister said, we are trying to find the right moment to publish it. But I think that should happen quite soon. And I think it is an important statement, precisely because it has got contributions from everyone.

There used to be a time, and Mike you will remember when, decades ago, there was a hesitation from the territories because most of these strategies were imposed from above and there was a lot of, I think justified, resistance. But I must say the relationship has changed completely and there has been a tremendous transformation, certainly within the aspect that we cover on environment and biodiversity in the relationship. A lot more to do, as usual, but I think we

can all pat ourselves on the back for having made a lot of progress over the years.

**Catherine Wensink:** We do have one question. From Janet Mackinnon: "What is the role of spatial planning in UKOTs for both nature conservation and sustainable development?"

**Minister Cortés:** I don't know whether that question really is for me. Perhaps it would have been better answered by Minister Creagh. In the sense that each territory will have its own autonomy in this sort of area. Certainly in the case of Gibraltar we are very conscious, first of all, of our limited space. So I can talk about Gibraltar, I can't really talk about the other territories. But I suspect it is similar.

We are at the moment, for example, in the middle of a revised town planning and development plan. And we have consultants on board, who are looking at the whole question of spatial planning – and the challenges of having positive planning in this respect in small territories, where there is a large demand for space, for housing for example, as well as wanting to protect our natural areas. There is a big role in Gibraltar. At the moment we are in the middle of developing our latest plan which is informed by our various environmental strategies, our climate-change strategy.

Our active travel-strategy is another very big aspect that we have not mentioned so far: active travel and reduction of the use of vehicles. And also informed by our 25-year plan, which is published as a draft and will soon be formally launched. And so I can speak about Gibraltar's involvement in this, and our own way ahead, but every territory will be different, and my Chairing the Environment Ministers Council does not mean that I have an overview, because we all have very different needs, requirements and strategies.

**Dr Mike Pienkowski:** Thank you very much.

# Recommendations

## Introduction

Throughout our series of conservation conferences for UKOT and CD practitioners, the UKOTCF network members have been keen to reach conclusions and recommendations to progress conservation, rather than just learn from an interesting series of talks, posters and discussions. At each UKOTCF conference (from 1999) participants have been encouraged to contribute towards conclusions and recommendations. Some of the uses of these include, but are not limited to:

- Advising on UK reports to CoPs of international conventions etc
- UK Parliamentary inquiries and spending reviews relating to the UKOTs and CDs
- UK calls for evidence on matters relating to UKOTs & CDs
- Provision of briefings on UKOT/CD matters including to UK MPs, Ministers, officials etc
- Funding bids requiring background and scene-setting
- Encouraging funding from other sources
- Communications material based on conference (e.g. newsletters, blogs, websites etc)
- Informing UKOTCF's own actions and those of other organisations/institutions

Starting from a blank page at the conference would not make the best use of time. Instead, the conference is used as an opportunity to share work, discuss ideas and provide a critical mass of persons coming together to highlight progress and opportunities while at the same time providing a clear summary of achievements, future needs etc. Over the past 20 years, our conferences have evolved to meet these and other needs.

Through its own work, including working groups, meetings, projects, preparing publications etc, UKOTCF maintains contact with those working on environmental matters in the UKOTs and CDs between conferences.

For our last couple of conferences, UKOTCF recruited voluntary teams, one for each topic, to draft conclusions for that topic. Copies of an evolving series of these drafts were widely circulated in the months before the conference and the comments used to refine the drafts. As a consequence, the final draft could be approved rapidly at the conference.

This year's topics were developed via consultations within the UKOTCF network over the last couple of years. The recommendations are grouped under the topics, in the order that we expect the topics to be addressed in the conference.

This year, we have streamlined further this process of developing recommendations, by having one team to develop recommendations across all topics. The drafting

team includes UKOTCF Council members and other senior officers, together with others invited to bring in a full range of territories and wider expertise. We invited persons from almost all territories, and acceptances meant that the final team included persons from Ascension, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Falkland Islands, Gibraltar, Isle of Man, Jersey, Montserrat, St Helena, Sark, Turks & Caicos Islands, as well as some who had worked in Alderney, Anguilla, British Antarctic Territory, Cayman Islands, Chagos Islands, Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas, Guernsey, Pitcairn Islands, South Georgia and Tristan da Cunha. These included personnel from government, NGOs and other conservation practitioners.

This year, we aimed to limit the total number of recommendations to about 20, and rather fewer addressed to any one category of organisations.

In June 2025, we circulated this draft to everyone registered for the conference since registrations had opened in April 2025, for comment. A second draft, taking account of all comments, was circulated for comment in early August to all by-then registered. A third draft, taking account of the few further comments affecting only small points in two draft recommendations, was circulated for comment in early September to all by then registered, and again in late September to all who had registered since the first circulation of this draft. The fourth draft, dealing with these comments, was circulated to all by-then registered in the conference booklet, in early October, over a week before the conference. No comments were received on this.

Confirmation of the acceptability of the recommendations was confirmed in the relevant sessions of the conference.

We thank the drafting team and all those who commented in any of the rounds of consultations.

The recommendations sought to draw consensus from the conference participants involved in conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, but it should be noted that not all points apply to all Territories, such is the diversity among the Territories and the unique challenges they face, in addition to those shared. In all cases, the recommendations are just that, from online discussions of experienced, informed and concerned persons and organisations. We try to indicate to whom each recommendation is directed, whether this be UK Government, territory governments, NGOs, funding bodies or others. Clearly, they are not binding on any of these bodies, even where the body concerned has personnel participating in the conference.

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UKOTCF 2025. Recommendations from the 2025 conference. pp 19-22 in *UKOTCF's 7th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island states, 13th-16th October 2025 Proceedings* (ed. by M. Pienkowski, C. Wensink, A. Pienkowski, K. Bensusan, J. Peyton & B.N. Manco) UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)

In this document, ‘UKOTs’ means UK Overseas Territories, ‘CDs’ means Crown Dependencies, and ‘territories’ means UKOTs & CDs. The main target-type of each recommendation is in bold italics.

## Recommendations

### Main topic 1: Sharing Experiences across territories

A. Territories are advised to learn lessons from each other in techniques for conservation, and to develop closer conservation-based relationships with neighbouring countries – to encourage shared learning and technical exchanges. [*Conservation workers and authorities in Territories*]

B. NGOs and their networks are important to UK Government because they help deliver its international commitments, through expert help with some issues that UK Government may lack the capacity to address alone. FCDO is advised to re-strengthen its relationship with NGOs and partners working with the UKOTs, including UKOTCF which, for example, it used to invite, alongside other territory and umbrella bodies, to brief Governors-designate and FCDO’s own personnel, and to networking events such as linked to the annual Joint Ministerial Council. [*UK Government*]

### Topic 3: Achieving Biodiversity & Sustainability targets

C. Conference asks UK Government: to ensure that it consults official and NGO bodies in the UKOTs and CDs at the start in planning conservation policies, rather than at the end when positions are already firm and time short; and to invite and support UKOT and CD representation as part of UK delegations to COPs. [*UK Government*]

D. Policy mechanisms that recognise formally, and incorporate, local expertise and community-generated data into environmental governance frameworks, ensuring that conservation actions are contextually appropriate and socially inclusive, should be supported. Biodiversity and sustainability targets should be clear, concise, meaningful, tailored to the situation, but be mindful of broader, international targets. When governments develop new policy, whether Multilateral Environmental Agreements or Local Biodiversity Action Plans, accurate targets can help to ensure that the policy delivers what it is intended to do, and fit-for-purpose monitoring protocols are needed also. Policy development should consider also the reporting requirements as most territories have little capacity for lengthy and time-consuming reporting. [*UK & Territory Governments*]

E. Any project should have a range of targets, including those which are specific to project outcomes, but which also prompt the organisation to ensure that delivery is being achieved, funding is sufficient, that policies are

appropriate and that senior management has a stake in the outcome. Targets should be ambitious, but achievable without overly relying on factors outside of the control of the practitioner. Where partnerships exist, targets should assign clear responsibility to the person(s) or organisation(s) who are responsible for delivery. Appropriate budgets (where applicable) should be set, over a multi-year time-scale (when long-term targets are set) to ensure delivery over an extended period of time. Funding for staff must be sufficient to ensure longevity and continuity of staff through the duration of the targets. This ensures that projects do not fail due to poor planning and resource-provision. [*Project-managers and their senior colleagues*]

F. Territories should ensure that they know which of their species and habitats need protecting and recovery/restoration and, ideally, all endemic species should be IUCN Red-listed. All at-risk species and habitats should at least be integrated fully into National Biodiversity Strategies or, ideally, have focused individual Action Plans/Strategies that are adequately resourced. To achieve this, Territories should have sufficient baseline-data, covering species of animals and plants, habitats and land-ownership. [*Territory Governments*]

G. UK and Territory governments should provide the financial resources and other support necessary to acquire good data and maintain good records of species, habitats, threats and applied conservation work in the Territories. [*UK and Territory governments*]

H. For Territory residents to be able to invest in alternative energy, green-energy equipment needs to be affordable; so Territory Governments need to incentivise this and reduce tax on these imported products. [*Territory Governments*]

I. Our Territories are so small that blue-carbon has been seen to be a better option than some others, but quantifying suitable areas through mapping projects is required first and then there is the need for ongoing monitoring to assure that these sites are still performing as suitable blue-carbon sites – so resources must be allocated to this. [*UK & Territory Governments*]

J. Island and ecosystem restoration programmes should be highlighted as currently one of the most important conservation measures. It should also be highlighted that effective restoration can be extremely complex and requires a long-term commitment of funding, staff-capacity, resources and monitoring. [*Conservation-managers, NGOs and governments*]

### Topic 5: Using technology and data to guide conservation

K. Conference notes some Territories’ success in using technology to overcome some challenges in conservation, including: remote sensing, satellite-imagery and drones, particularly with the addition of multispectral image-processing to help management of protected areas, including identification of land-clearance monitoring



and ecosystem-health (e.g. spread of invasive species or plant-disease); and DNA to identify unknown plant-species. Environmental DNA (eDNA) and bioacoustic surveys have the potential to be useful in conducting more routine biodiversity-monitoring or biosecurity-surveillance. *[Territory governments and NGO land-managers]*

L. Conference notes successes in the deployment of conservation detection dogs across the UKOTs, expanding on work started in South Georgia. Uses include avoiding arrival of invasive species, and finding nest-sites of critically endangered species, such as rock iguana and sea turtles (in Cayman) so that hatchlings can be placed in protected facilities until mature enough to resist predation. Thermal drones are also a new technology that can assist with tracking animals, particularly those that form colonies – but in hot countries there are challenges with the heat-signals and the ground temperature, so more work in this area is needed.

*[Conservation-managers]*

M. Use of combined approaches gets the most out of available data, showing the value of sharing data and technical expertise to add value to analyses and give long-term benefits. Technological advancements make more accessible novel approaches, such as genomic tools and spatial modelling. Care should be taken when introducing novel techniques as they may be complementary to traditional monitoring rather than a replacement methodology. Side-by-side validation can help determine whether new technology provides consistent results in long-term monitoring. *[Conservation-managers]*

## **Topic 6: Identifying and preparing for future challenges and opportunities**

N. Horizon-scanning for potential known and novel threats has been undertaken and may continue to be useful for governments and NGOs *[Territory governments and NGOs]*

O. Knowledge-sharing of current problems, future risks and support opportunities between governments and with NGOs and neighbouring countries is essential to learn from experience and best practice. *[Territory governments and NGOs]*

P. Emergency funding for active responses to critical threats, whether from invasive non-native species, natural disasters and or human or animal pathogens should be identified and provided ahead of any real-time issues or in the immediate aftermath. Known challenges, e.g. resilience to sea-level rise, and adaptation to extreme heat-events, such as the impacts of climate-change, must be addressed before they reach problematic levels. *[UK & territory governments]*

Q. Governments, including with corporate funds, should be forward-planning for opportunities to restore nature, including opportunities such as strategic land-purchases

for nature reserves, to linking existing sites through the development of habitat-corridors; they should ensure that new development does not compromise existing good practice, including by purchase of private land in Protected Areas to return this to public ownership, or preferably, to the inalienable ownership afforded in National Trust Ordinances where these apply. This idea can be expanded to incorporate networks of protected areas for terrestrial conservation as well as for linking Marine Protected Areas. *[Territory governments]*

R. Good climate-models are powerful tools when designing, managing and communicating the importance of protected areas. Their use can help maintain the biodiversity of the islands for the future. Sharing data and information across projects can increase greatly the robustness of the models. Modelling climate-change can be very helpful by looking at historical data and predictions within a very local scale – so real change can be seen across small islands and then identifying what ecosystem-services areas are providing, then using this as a justification for protection as national parks or for development restrictions. This can be cross-referenced with local weather-data and ground-truthed satellite-imagery. *[Territory governments]*

## **Topic 7: Resourcing Conservation**

S. As agreed in the Environment Charters, the UK Government must support the UKOTs in: joining UK's ratification of international environmental agreements protecting species and ecosystems; reaching international targets for biodiversity including the Global Biodiversity Framework Targets (GBF) and the Sustainable Development Goals in UKOTs and CDs; the designation and management of Ramsar Convention Wetlands of International Importance and World Heritage Sites; and in shared high ambitions in combating and adapting to climate-change. Attention is drawn to the inability of CDs to benefit from UK-sourced funding. *[UK Government]*

T. Conference asks that both the Darwin Plus and Blue Belt funding programmes be maintained (the latter with increased open access by non-government organisations that provide so much technical and practical support) as, without these, nature conservation in the UKOTs would be extremely restricted. Even with the maintenance of these schemes, sources of conservation funding for the UKOTs remain limited compared to the UK. Therefore, Conference also strongly recommends: the establishment of an equivalent “Green-Dot” funding scheme for the conservation of terrestrial wildlife (which includes most UKOT endemics); open access to Lottery funding for UKOT conservation projects; and exploring opportunities to support research through UK Research Institute (UKRI) funding. *[UK Government]*

U. UK Government is asked to reduce bureaucracy in the environmental project application process and make some criteria less rigid to take account of the very different situations of the UKOTs. UK Government is also asked to extend support for building on projects that are proving

successful, rather than requiring funded projects to be totally innovative. Also, territories have pointed out that the time-limit of one year, or less, of Darwin Local grants does not allow for the time-scales needed for decisions in UKOTs (many of which follow UK slow practices of former decades). A restoration is needed of support for umbrella and networking bodies of which UKOT and CD bodies are members/associates, e.g. by funding conferences organised by umbrella bodies as well as crucial networking (on par with EU COST actions and to which UKOTs now have limited access). **[UK Government]**

V. Corporate businesses and conservation NGOs are encouraged to use tools for example, EcoMatch, so that environmental, social, and governance (ESG) commitments can be met by effective conservation actions in support of the most internationally important biodiversity for which UK and its Territories are

responsible. **[Corporate businesses and conservation NGOs]**

W. Generating revenue from services has potential - park rentals for events, filming and photography, and a range of products and merchandise, including clothing, water-bags, stuffed toys etc. Branding items also market the organisation's image and unique species and habitats.

**[Territory NGOs]**

X. Conference advises all to remain alert to the pressures on ministers and officials in those several territories whose main source of government income is from taxes accruing from the built development of land; and that this can be a perverse incentive against implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and environmental conservation, despite the natural environment being a key asset supporting the economies. **[UK and Territory Governments and NGOs]**

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## Key Take-aways from conference discussions

In the closing session, discussions identified some key take-aways additional to the recommendations. These are noted below

1. Scaling Up Restoration – There was interest in scaling up restoration efforts in a number of UKOTs and resourcing these through innovative partnerships.
2. Corporate Volunteering – Corporate days and charging for these could be replicated in some UKOTs & CDs. This needs to be supported by staff-members to coordinate volunteer efforts potentially by corporate partners.
3. Remote-sensing Workshop – There was broad support for a follow up workshop to look at remote sensing and analysis across the UKOTs & CDs with at least 6 territories signed up. Others welcome to indicate interest (at [https://docs.google.com/document/d/1R6fwAFw19bQDjH8mRTIELLjWGX1\\_IJE7M4r3osc-zo/edit?tab=t.0](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1R6fwAFw19bQDjH8mRTIELLjWGX1_IJE7M4r3osc-zo/edit?tab=t.0)).
4. Community Engagement – Community-engagement (such as story-telling), including via the Community Voice Method, can build support for policy; this, and capacity-building, are key to long-lasting conservation. Projects support this type of work, as well as for environmental monitoring, should be long-term.
5. Power of Partnerships – Partnerships, including those with researchers, are key (as are advances, such as in conservation genetics, including analysis of genetic diversity and population structure). They can take time to build up, but ultimately can have long-lasting results (e.g NPTVI and Kew; St Helena and researchers)
6. Engaging Tools – Information sources, such as the National Trust for the Cayman Islands app, are important for engaging with communities and visitors alike. The NTCI app has been created in such a way that the template can be adapted to other UKOTs. The NCTI Heritage Heroes is a good example of blending arts, culture and environment.
7. Open Data for Equity – Open-sourced data (including earth-observation, both free and some paid for) are complimentary to herbaria and expert-surveys, and could help to fill data-gaps and lead to more equitable conservation. Global Biodiversity Information Facility GBIF (and hosted portals) should be an ultimate aim for hosting such data. Even where sensitive data from UKOTs & CDs that should not be shared, there are guidelines from GBIF on this.

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UKOTCF 2025. Key Take-aways from conference discussions. p 22 in *UKOTCF's 7th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island states, 13th-16th October 2025 Proceedings* (ed. by M. Pienkowski, C. Wensink, A. Pienkowski, K. Bensusan, J. Peyton & B.N. Manco) UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)

# Forthcoming UKOTCF book on UKOT & CD wildlife & conservation

*In the closing session, Dr Mike Pienkowski outlined a forthcoming major book.*

In 1987, Sara Oldfield's review of wildlife in the UKOTs and its conservation needs, *Fragments of Paradise* was published; this resulted in the formation of what became UKOTCF. 30 years on: the review in *Forum News* 46 (2017) ([ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/](http://ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/)) showed a lot of progress – but also lots left to do.

For more than 4 years, a team has been working on a new book. This consists of a well-referenced text (nearly complete) and very many high-quality photos (which will take up about half of the space); collation of these is over half complete. Publication is expected in 2026.

The expected title is: *The Nature of Britain's Fragments of Paradise: wildlife and its conservation in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies*, edited by Mike Pienkowski & Sara Oldfield, assisted by Catherine Wensink, Ann Pienkowski, Keith Bensusan, Adam Riggs & Jodey Peyton. The chapters and lead-authors are:

Foreword by Hon. Professor John Cortés, Gibraltar Minister for Education, the Environment, Sustainability, Climate Change, Heritage, Technical Services and Transport; and Chair of the Council of Environment Ministers (or equivalents) of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies

Chapter 1. Introduction, by Mike Pienkowski & Catherine Wensink

Chapter 2. Flora – diversity, endemism, rarity and threats, by Sara Oldfield

Chapter 3. Terrestrial invertebrate diversity and endemism, by Vicky Wilkins (Species Recovery Trust and IUCN Atlantic Islands Invertebrate Specialist Group) and Liza Fowler (St Helena National Trust), with 12 case-studies by territory authors

Chapter 4. Reptiles and Amphibians, by Paul Edgar, with sections by Frederic J Burton (Cayman) and Cerys Joshua (St Helena)

Chapter 5. Birds – flagships for global conservation, by Mike Pienkowski

Chapter 6. Marine Diversity, by Adam Riggs (St Helena) & Kathleen McNary (Turks & Caicos Is)

Chapter 7. Conservation arrangements and mechanisms, by Mike Pienkowski & Catherine Wensink

Chapter 8. Human Communities in the UKOTs: sustainable livelihoods, challenges and opportunities, by Catherine Wensink & John Pinel (Jersey)

Chapter 9. Tackling invasive non-native species & -----

UKOTCF 2025. Forthcoming UKOTCF book on UKOT & CD wildlife & conservation. p 23 in *UKOTCF's 7th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island states, 13th-16th October 2025 Proceedings* (ed. by M. Pienkowski, C. Wensink, A. Pienkowski, K. Bensusan, J. Peyton & B.N. Manco) UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)

restoring ecosystems, by Rebecca Cairns-Wicks (St Helena), Jodey Peyton & Alan Gray, with 8 territory case-studies, including by Alison Neil (South Georgia Heritage Trust), Bryan Naqqi Manco (Turks & Caicos Islands), Grant Munroe, Ben Taylor & Darnell Christie (Falklands) & Bermuda

Chapter 10. Managing Marine Resources, by Adam Riggs (St Helena) & Alizée Zimmermann (Turks & Caicos Reef Fund)

Chapter 11. Global Connectivity & Global Climate Change, by Sara Oldfield & Keith Bensusan (Gibraltar)

Chapter 12. Looking ahead, by Catherine Wensink, with contributions from school students in a UK Overseas Territory and a Crown Dependency

References (sorted and formatted by Keith Bensusan)

Glossary

Conservation bodies in UKOTs and CDs

Visiting the territories.

*Here are just a few of the several hundred photos which will illustrate the book, using just a few chapters as examples.*





# Acknowledgements

*In closing the conference, Dr Mike Pienkowski said:*

A conference is a team effort; I guess that I am echoing a key message of our Ground Lecturer here! I would like to credit some of this team – and apologies to any whom inadvertently omit.

I would like to start by acknowledging the financial support from JNCC, the Garfield Weston Foundation, the University of Gibraltar, UKOTCF itself and its member and associate bodies Amphibian & Reptile Conservation, Bermuda National Trust, Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society, Manx Wildlife Trust, the National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, and St Helena National Trust.

I would like to thank Myles Darrell for his inspirational Sir Richard and Lady Dace Ground Lecture. This was partnered by a great number of great talks and posters – and we thank all speakers and poster-presenters, and their colleagues who helped in preparation of these. Apologies to poster-presenters for a technical fault which I am told has now been overcome.

Many of the talks restored my hope that the knowledge of how to make slides is not yet dead. At the last couple of conferences of other organisations (which will remain nameless) that I attended, I wished that I had taken binoculars in with me, as the speakers seemed to have forgotten that slides are intended to convey information, rather than be so stuffed with material in micro-sized fonts that nothing can be read. I was so pleased that most of the speakers at this conference did not fall into that fault. So, the knowledge is merely widely Endangered, rather than Extinct.

Of course, I should remind those few speakers or poster-presenters who have not yet supplied the texts and illustrations of their presentations for the proceedings to do so this week. Any speaker or poster-presenter who wants to amend proceedings material already supplied should get the amended version to me by Monday.

The Session officers (chair-person, question-master & rapporteur) have thankless tasks, serving as the much-battered buffers between participants, speakers and organisers. It takes a lot of preparation time and, for rapporteur and some question-masters, follow-up. We thank them deeply.

We are very grateful also to the cross-territory panel who worked for months before the conference to draft the initial version of the recommendations and work on the revisions –and, of course, to all who commented during the consultations.

We thank all those who asked questions or made comments on the talks and, indeed, also in the lively poster session.

We thank in advance those who will help in disseminating the results, including the preparation of the proceedings.

Our lives have been enriched and our hearts lifted by the musicians and their organisations supplying their work and allowing it to be played in the breaks.

Making this happen takes a lot of preparation and frantic activity during and after. I am grateful to my colleagues on the organising team for dividing up these tasks. They are Catherine Wensink, Jodey Peyton, Keith Bensusan and Ann Pienkowski – and, for the Funding session today, Leigh Morris and Jonathan Andrews. The core team also usefully proved that I am not needed by keeping the show on the road for two hours on Monday when Vodafone knocked out my internet and all my communications.

And finally, and most importantly, all you participants (at least 167 registered, including some involved in all UKOTs and CDs) – there can be no conference without you.

Thank you all

*Dr Keith Bensusan added:*

Almost everyone has been thanked, but I would like to say that the name Mike Pienkowski is indivisible from the subject of conservation on the Overseas Territories; so thank you so much, not just for your organisational skills, but for all the support you have given and continue to give to all the territories.

*Mike Pienkowski:*

Thank you: you have a nice turn of phrase, Keith!

So, I think we are all conferenced-out – for a day or two at least. And now, we are going to close with some natural night-time sounds from Montserrat.

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UKOTCF 2025. Acknowledgements. p 24 in *UKOTCF's 7th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island states, 13th-16th October 2025 Proceedings* (ed. by M. Pienkowski, C. Wensink, A. Pienkowski, K. Bensusan, J. Peyton & B.N. Manco) UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)

# 3rd Sir Richard and Lady Ground Lecture on Nature Conservation in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies [Main Topic 2]

## Introduction to the Lecture series

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



UKOTCF is honoured to be hosting the third in its series of occasional high-level lectures on nature conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies named after the long-term supporters of such conservation and of UKOTCF, Sir Richard and Lady Dace Ground.

After working mainly in media law, Richard Ground left London in 1983 for the Cayman Islands where he served as Crown Counsel, and from 1987 as Attorney General. In 1986 Richard married Dace McCoy, whom he had met in the Cayman Islands. Richard and Dace continued to live in Caribbean UK Overseas Territories until 2012. Dace McCoy Ground is a Harvard-trained American lawyer, who worked for City governments in Los Angeles and Seattle. After a further degree in marine studies, she was hired in 1985 by the Cayman Islands Government as Marine Parks Coordinator, responsible for establishing a marine parks system for those islands, a pioneer for the region. She worked closely with Gina Ebanks-Petrie, who was our first Ground Lecturer at our 2021 conference. Dace then became founding Executive Director of the National Trust for the Cayman Islands.

Outside his legal and judicial work, Sir Richard was a keen and talented wildlife photographer and became passionate about the natural world. He published his first book of photographs in Cayman in 1989, *Creator's Glory*. As part of a productive partnership, Dace undertook the layout and publication of the book, and such combined and complementary efforts continued throughout. Sir Richard became Judge of the Supreme Court of Bermuda,

from 1992 to 1998. In Bermuda, Dace worked for the Bermuda National Trust as Director of Development.

In 1998, Sir Richard was appointed Chief Justice of the Turks and Caicos Islands. At the time of the Grounds' arrival, UKOTCF had recently started a major programme of work over several years to help the Turks & Caicos National Trust recover from an almost impossible position that it had been left in by a previous mentoring organisation. Dace's history brought them into contact with UKOTCF around this project, and much subsequent conservation progress has flowed from this coming together. The Richard and Dace publishing team



*Sir Richard and Lady (Dace) Ground at the Haulover Field-Road (nature trail), set up by UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum and Turks & Caicos National Trust. They are holding copies of the trail guides designed by Dace for UKOTCF and featuring Richard's bird photographs.*

*Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski*



leapt into action again, with the production in 2001 of the superb photographic *Birds of the Turks and Caicos Islands* – a book which still sells today, with proceeds donated to conservation.

During this period, in 1999, jointly with Turks & Caicos Islands colleagues, I first recruited Bryan Naqqi Manco for the position of Project Manager for the Darwin Initiative-funded project to develop a management plan for the area centred on the Ramsar Convention Wetland of International Importance of North, Middle and East Caicos. Naqqi was already a frequent visitor to TCI, where his mother lived and worked.

Dace worked with myself of UKOTCF and Michelle Fulford-Gardiner, TCI's Acting Director of Environment and Coastal Resources, to facilitate cross-sectoral workshops and related consultations and analyses to help local players produce TCI's strategy to implement the 2001 Environment Charter between UK and TCI. This served as the pilot for similar exercises in other UKOTs, until UK Government ended funding, only having to restart it in another guise some years later. Dace joined UKOTCF Council and, working with UKOTCF, also undertook the design and layout for FCO and DFID for their then new Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP), the then funding mechanism for the Environment Charters. Following their departure from TCI, Dace (with Richard making his excellent photographs available) continued support for TCI. This included layout of the pioneering trail guides and environmental information centre display-boards, developed and implemented by UKOTCF for the Turks & Caicos Island, led locally by Bryan Naqqi Manco, who was our second Ground Lecturer.

From 2004 until 2012, Richard was Chief Justice of Bermuda. While still maintaining her voluntary work for UKOTCF, back in Bermuda, Dace again became very active volunteering for Bermuda National Trust and other conservation bodies on the island. In 2011, the Bermuda National Trust awarded her its Silver Palmetto Award, the Trust's highest honour, to acknowledge her many years of exemplary service. Richard and Dace moved to live in Derbyshire, UK, an area they had come to know and love during many vacations spent trout fishing in the Derbyshire Wye, and not so far from Richard's original family home in Lincolnshire. Their support for UKOTCF continued, including participation at several high-level events. Richard was made a Knight Bachelor in the Birthday Honours list 2012 for his services to justice in Bermuda. Tragically, Richard died in February 2014 after an illness. By 2015, Dace felt able to take on the Chair of UKOTCF's Wider Caribbean Working Group, from which she has just retired after 10 years of service. She also resumed her Council duties, and continues in that role.

Dace herself proposed today's Lecturer, and was looking forward to introducing him. However, Dace has been taken ill and is receiving treatment. I am sure that we all wish her well for a speedy recovery.

Instead, to introduce our Lecturer, I am going to hand over to Ann Pienkowski, who has just stood down after 15 years as Wider Caribbean WG Secretary (a role that she took up on a temporary basis), including a decade working with Dace, but has agreed to chair WCWG jointly with Andy Pearce.

# Introduction to the third Ground Lecturer

Ann Pienkowski



He is widely respected, not just in Bermuda, for his expertise and enthusiasm. And he will share these with us, in his talk titled *Whose environment is it anyway? Essential roles of our stewards of today, the guardians of tomorrow, and how we can help them.*

Dace was delighted that Myles agreed to give the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sir Richard and Lady Ground Lecture, after she proposed him for this.

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, contextualized 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.

# The third Sir Richard and Lady Ground Lecture on Nature Conservation in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies: Whose environment is it anyway? Essential roles of our stewards of today, the guardians of tomorrow and how we can help them

Myles Darrell, Head of Natural Heritage, Bermuda National Trust



Darrell, M. 2025. The third Sir Richard and Lady Ground Lecture on Nature Conservation in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies: Whose environment is it anyway? Essential roles of our stewards of today, the guardians of tomorrow and how we can help them. pp 28-35 in *UKOTCF's 7th conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island states, 13th-16th October 2025 Proceedings* (ed. by M. Pienkowski, C. Wensink, A. Pienkowski, K. Bensusan, J. Peyton & B.N. Manco) UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, [www.ukotcf.org.uk](http://www.ukotcf.org.uk)

Young people are generally concerned about their environment – and they want to do something about it. Older people are also worried – but they feel guilty; they don't believe they can do anything about it.

This talk explores Myles Darrell's experiences and conclusions from working with volunteers across the demographic spectrum. His presentation explains the critical and growing role that students are playing in the management, preservation and future of Bermuda's open spaces. Based on his position as Head of Natural Heritage at the Bermuda National Trust (BNT), he provides insight into the work of the BNT and Buy Back Bermuda, a joint venture of two leading environmental organisation to acquire and protect the island's diminishing open spaces.

He has found that far from being passive observers, students have become active stewards of Bermuda's natural heritage — contributing time, energy, creativity and leadership to on-the-ground conservation efforts.

Drawing on real-life examples, this lecture highlights how student engagement has helped shape habitat-restoration projects, biodiversity monitoring, invasive-species management and public outreach. These on-the-ground experiences are not only contributing to the health of our ecosystems but are more importantly cultivating a new generation of environmental leaders.

In addition, Myles will provide insight into the broader mission of Buy Back Bermuda, and how student-driven projects and school-based fundraising initiatives are helping to support the acquisition and restoration of threatened open spaces. Attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how education, volunteerism and conservation-finance intersect to protect Bermuda's environment – and how empowering young people is essential to sustaining this work for the long term.

And yes, he talks about how those feelings of guilt among more mature members of the community can be turned into action!

*Myles Darrell, Head of Natural Heritage, Bermuda National Trust*







Young people today are energised, aware, and ready to act. They're not waiting for permission – they're showing up with purpose.

Meanwhile, older generations – my own included – often carry a deep sense of concern, even guilt. We look at the state of the planet, the pace of development, the loss of green space, and wonder if we've done enough.

Here's what I have come to understand: It doesn't have to be one or the other. Young people and older people aren't on opposite ends of this problem. They're both essential to the solution.

At the Bermuda National Trust, we manage about 300

Good day everyone.

I want to begin with a story — one that stuck with me, not because it was dramatic, but because it was honest.

A few months ago, I was at Spittal Pond for a native-tree planting-event. Dozens of volunteers had shown up – school kids, retirees, young professionals, conservation staff – all with shovels in hand, ready to dig. As I was helping unload some seedlings from the truck, I noticed a grandmother and her granddaughter arriving together, a bit unsure of where to start.

Neither of them had planted a tree before. The granddaughter, maybe around 11 or 12 years old, was buzzing with excitement – asking questions, grabbing tools, picking out the spot she thought was best. Her grandmother moved more slowly, more cautiously. But after they planted their first tree together – a young Bermuda cedar – the grandmother paused, looked around, and quietly said: "I didn't grow up doing anything like this... I wish we had. We just didn't know. But I'm glad she gets to be part of the solution."

That moment has stayed with me – because it captures something I think many of us feel when it comes to the environment.



acres of land across 20 nature reserves (*map above*), including those owned by Buy Back Bermuda. These reserves are living classrooms as much as they are sanctuaries. They provide the framework where our volunteers – and especially our young people – can connect, contribute, and lead.

Today, I want to share what we at the Bermuda National Trust have learned about mobilising volunteers across the generations – with a particular focus on young people. Students are not just "the future." They are active stewards right now. And their contributions, when structured well, can drive substantive conservation outcomes while shaping a culture of leadership.

### What Young People Are Doing Right Now

At the Bermuda National Trust, students form a strong part of our volunteer-base. Every student in Bermuda is required to complete at least twenty-five hours of service each year. We have built systems with schools, teachers and parents to ensure those hours translate into meaningful experiences.

Through partnerships with other NGOs and charities, we connect student-work to the bigger picture of protecting Bermuda. The results are substantial:

- Propagating critically endangered species such as the Bermuda bean and our iconic cedar.
- Clearing invasive species from nature reserves.
- Monitoring biodiversity and supporting science.
- Removing litter and plastics from mangroves and coastlines.



## Young People as Active Stewards



*Case Study Collage (planting, litter cleanup, propagation)*

### Bluebird Monitoring

Each Friday, students follow a trail of bluebird nest boxes, using the Cornell Lab's NestWatch app to record data on birth and fledgling success-rates. This project demonstrates how structured citizen-science engages students while generating reliable ecological data that contributes to global monitoring.



*Bluebird nest box, and app screenshot*

We are also seeing spillover effects. Students take what they learn and apply it beyond our reserves – creating school- or home-based “micro-forests” with native and endemic species. These projects show how service hours, if designed well, become a seed for long-term stewardship.

### Student Leadership (Hydroponics & Pollinator Garden)



**From Service Hours to Leadership**

Youth-led projects can scale into community restoration.



We don't claim to “build” leaders. What we do is create opportunities for young people to see themselves as leaders. When they take ownership of their community and environment, leadership emerges naturally.

### *Sam's story → service hours into hydroponics and mentoring*

There was a young man, Sam, who came to us wanting to complete his service hours for the Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award. At first, he didn't seem all that interested in heritage or conservation.

But after only a few visits, something shifted. He wasn't just showing up – he was bringing other young people along with him, drawing them in as part of the team. Sam developed a hydroponic garden where he grew herbs and strawberries, and each week he arrived eager to see what was sprouting. What's more, he wanted to share – to show other students how they could grow food too. By recognizing that he had skills to contribute, his confidence grew. And when his hours were finished, he didn't walk away – he kept coming, kept giving back, and kept sharing what he had learned.

### *Charlotte's story → pollinator garden into class-wide engagement*

And then there's Charlotte. She had a vision of creating a haven for butterflies, and she was curious to learn everything she could about pollinators and their host-plants. What began as her idea quickly became a project that at least ten other young people joined in. Together, they transformed an area at our head office, Waterville, that had been over-run with invasives, into a thriving pollinator garden. Now, on any given day, when we step outside, butterflies are fluttering across the space that she once dreamed up. But the story doesn't end there – Charlotte went on to bring her whole class to see the garden, teaching them about the plants and pollinators she had come to know so well. The pride she felt was unmistakable.

The lesson: youth leadership emerges when institutions provide responsibility, resources, and support.

### Institutional Role

Individual action is powerful, but institutions scale impact.

Buy Back Bermuda, a partnership between the Trust and the Bermuda Audubon Society, has safeguarded mangroves, woodlands, and coastal dunes. These spaces serve ecological, cultural, and climate resilience functions – while also becoming accessible community assets.

Students are integrated into these projects at every stage. For example, Somersfield Academy has



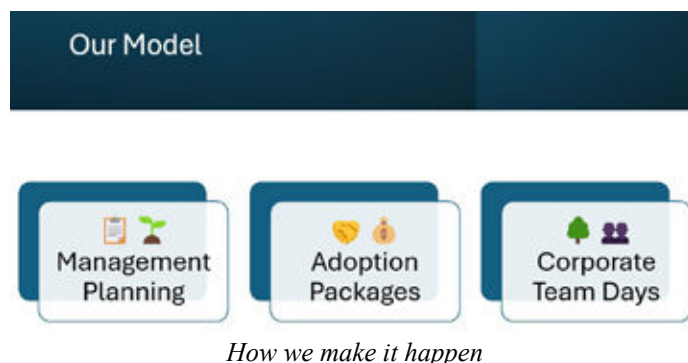
*Eve's Pond restoration*

adopted Eve's Pond Reserve — helping to restore an ecosystem neglected for 80 years.

We've also seen young people turn personal milestones into conservation opportunities — asking for donations to Buy Back Bermuda in place of birthday gifts. These small acts, added to larger community support, make land acquisition and restoration possible

### How Do We Make It Happen?

None of this happens by chance. We intentionally weave support for young people into our planning, partnerships, and funding.



Management Planning → Community and youth engaged from the outset, active in monitoring.

Adoption Packages → Corporate sponsors fund reserve management and create community links.

Corporate Team Days → Employees restore sites, schools follow up to sustain progress.

### Youth Programmes + Volunteer Data

Alongside these frameworks, we run programmes like:

- Waterville Garden Club
- Friday Eco Club
- Monthly Saturday Community Days
- Cross-territory invertebrate study and Bioblitz surveys

We teach science classes at private and public schools, Middle years to College age, sometimes at their schools but often taking them into the wild.

On average, we work with 400–500 volunteers annually – about 25% youth from high school to university.

And the results speak for themselves. Last year, with significant student help, we:

- Planted over 2,200 native and endemic plants
- Propagated 700 seedlings
- Built 6 new bluebird boxes
- Collected 1,500 invertebrates

These numbers represent ecosystems restored and knowledge built – with young people at the centre.

### Turning Guilt into Action – Engaging Older Generations

Many older adults express guilt about environmental decline, often saying: “It’s too late for me.” But guilt is not weakness – it is a signal of care. And it can be redirected into action.

Older adults bring perspective, skills, and resources. Their role can include: mentoring, sharing history of the land, or contributing time, money, and space.

### Bridging Generations



*Bridging Generations (student & elder working together)*

Examples:

- Governor allows use of slat house at Government House
- Stop-gap restoration crops → Students grow food crops that support both ecosystems and senior homes.
- Mentoring moments → Parents or elders sharing carpentry or gardening skills alongside youth.

These practices reduce workload, strengthen community bonds, and make stewardship a shared, collective effort.

### So, Whose Environment Is It?

We began with a question: Whose environment is it?

After examining the role of youth, institutions and older adults, the answer is clear:

It's ours. All of ours. Now and forever.





*Bermuda landscape*

### Three Principles

Three principles for organisations seeking to replicate this work:

- Empower youth as present leaders.
- Redirect guilt into structured opportunities for older adults.
- Build systems where everyone has something to give — and something to gain.

#### Three Principles for Stewardship



Any organisation can adapt this model: engage youth in management planning, link corporate support with education, and create intergenerational spaces for mentoring. When institutions align conservation, education, and finance, we don't just protect places — we build cultures of stewardship that last.

So, whose environment is it?

It's ours. All of ours. And it will be — if we choose it, together.

“Stewardship is not the work of a few — it is the shared responsibility of all generations, shaping an environment that is ours, now and forever.”



### Q&A

**Mike Pienkowski:** Thank you very much, Myles: that was really inspirational. I am going to ramble on a little bit while people think up questions. I am particularly attracted to an idea which parallels something I have thought for a long time. Although organisations do run projects, the really good organisations, as you describe, are ones which allow people, small groups of people, individuals, to think up things and give them the conditions and support to make them work. And that's where the really successful projects come from. In a similar way, your point about responsibilities is great. Responsibility is a mentored thing; it builds up. People think that one day you will reach an age and become responsible, it doesn't quite work that way. I think that is a really key point.

So do we have any questions?

**Julie Thomas:** What a way to finish a wonderful day — absolutely powerful and inspiring. You, along with our very own National Trust, do so much work that moves our respective islands forward. Congratulations and well done!

**Mike Pienkowski:** Can I ask: one of the big challenges in Bermuda is its high human population-density and the long period of settlement are obviously factors in the invasives problem. Do you think that high population gives you the chance to work and clear invasives in patches and get the natives back. Can you scale that up as well?

**A:** I think there's a couple of things there. I think having numbers on the ground definitely does help, as does being really clear about where we are going and what we are doing. We are not just clearing for no purpose and all those invasives are just going to grow back. There is a clear transition occurring. Being really clear about what we are trying to achieve. The numbers help that certainly is important, but I don't think in Bermuda we can scale up much more than where we are at currently because, as much as we have got all these volunteers in place, there's still only a few of us here at the Trust to be able to manage them, the volunteers, and that's one of the things we have learnt. It really is a team of two here in our department, managing 300 acres and 500 volunteers. That's a lot of relationships you need to maintain and engage, and their needs are all very different. So scaling-up is difficult. I think we are reaching our plateau. I think the key point here is the principles and the framework that you are really going to need to focus on if you are going to get more people. Once we have more donors in place, then maybe we could scale-up our staff a little bit. Then I think we would be looking at taking on some more volunteers. We are not currently able to meet the corporate requests. More people want to partner with us than we are actually able to meet with currently. On the screen right now I've got a section of our corporate and partnership volunteering schemes so people will get an

## PARTNER WITH US FOR A BETTER BERMUDA



myles.darrell

### Corporate Volunteer Days

Volunteers can help by removing invasive species, planting native and endemic trees and shrubs, nurturing previous plantings, maintaining pathways and clearing litter. As well as getting their hands dirty and reconnecting with nature, your team will learn about Bermuda's natural heritage. They will get satisfaction from knowing they have helped mitigate climate change and enhanced Bermuda's biodiversity.

Overseeing volunteer days requires professional knowledge and experience, as do some conservation tasks. That's why we ask our corporate sponsors to please support us not just physically but financially. Your contributions pay for materials and our own expert staff who facilitate and guide the volunteer work, as well as supporting ongoing care of the nature reserves year-round. See the chart below for suggested donation levels.

| Number of volunteers   | Donation for Half Day (4 hours) | Donation for Full Day |
|------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| Up to 10 volunteers    | \$1,500                         | \$2,000               |
| 11 – 25 volunteers     | \$2,500                         | \$3,500               |
| 26 and more volunteers | \$3,500                         | \$5,000               |

To book a corporate volunteer day in one of our nature reserves, please contact Head of Natural Heritage Myles Darrell at [myles.darrell@bnt.bm](mailto:myles.darrell@bnt.bm).

### Adopt a Nature Reserve

Adopting a nature reserve is a great option for a company looking to make a long-term and meaningful commitment to Bermuda's environment. With assured support for two or more years, we can embark on a conservation management plan knowing that we will be able to follow through with the after care that is necessary to ensure the success of new plantings, prevent the regrowth of invasive species, manage the impact of hurricanes and maintain any man-made amenities.



Adoption can also include volunteer sessions for company staff, with the chance to build an ongoing relationship and the satisfaction of seeing positive progress over time. Branded signage at the reserve is included.

To discuss potential nature reserve adoptions, please contact Head of Development, Dörte Horsfield at [dhorsfield@bnt.bm](mailto:dhorsfield@bnt.bm).

### Buy Back Bermuda

Buy Back Bermuda (BBB) is a joint initiative by the Bermuda Audubon Society and the Bermuda National Trust to purchase and conserve our precious open space for the enjoyment of everyone, forever.



Since the first campaign in 2004, BBB has acquired four properties to conserve habitats for biodiversity, natural open space for human health and enjoyment, and to mitigate climate change. Campaign One raised \$2 million and saved 2.86 acres from a condominium development, resulting in the beautiful Somerset Long Bay East Nature Reserve which opened in 2006. Campaign Two raised \$2.5 million and resulted in two new nature reserves. The 8-acre Vesey Nature Reserve in Southampton opened to the public in 2013 and the 3.5-acre Eve's Pond Nature Reserve on Shelly Bay stretch in Hamilton Parish opened in April 2022.

Campaign Three is now underway, with the goal to raise \$1.5 million to create a public nature reserve at the recently acquired 10-acre property at High Point in Southampton, and to maintain it and other Buy Back Bermuda nature reserves for the enjoyment of all.

For more information on Buy Back Bermuda and how your company can support Campaign Three, visit [www.buybackbermuda.bm](http://www.buybackbermuda.bm) or email BBB chair Jennifer Gray at [jmermaidgray@gmail.com](mailto:jmermaidgray@gmail.com).

VISIT OUR WEBSITE [WWW.BNT.BM](http://WWW.BNT.BM)

idea of what is going on, and if you are interested I can share that with you (*at top of page*).

**Mike Pienkowski:** Thank you. Let me ask Brian Naqqi Manco to put his mic on and ask his question.

**Brian Naqqi Manco:** I had the great fortune to visit Myles in Bermuda in 2023, I believe, on the habitat-restoration programme focusing on Bermuda Cedar and other native plants. I was impressed with how well supplied Bermuda is with volunteers. Visiting areas which didn't have anyone working at them at the moment, it was obvious that there was an enormous amount of work going on. It's not easy to get people in Turks and Caicos to come out; volunteering is still not a popular thing to do here. And I am wondering how much that has to do with the correlation of the scholastic requirements in place and how long that has been in place, and how it is co-ordinated.

**A:** That's a really good point. Students are required to do 25 hours of volunteering. I think it does make a difference. We are not the only country. I have found this in another island on a trip last year. I would encourage all governments to do it. It aligns with the STEM changes that we are seeing here in general across education. And a lot of people, not just me, feel that this integrated contextualised learning approach suits many of our learners, and not just in Bermuda; people

of colour, specifically, really identify with, and want to connect with, this. I do think having the 25 hours is a policy that could really help improve the volunteering. You came to Bermuda and visited one of our EcoClubs, and the students are still talking about you. They are still amazed that this guy came and told us everything about Sago Palms that I didn't know. We bring every visitor that comes here into that space. I think that you made it fun and we make it fun. The draw isn't just achieving the hours; it starts with the hours but, once it's here, they stay here, and they want to keep coming and they want to bring friends. So I think it's a good start.

**Mike Pienkowski:** Thank you. We have some other comments here. **Andy Pearce** says: Thank you very much, Myles, for such a thoughtful set of observations. Humanity and hope born of deep experience. No better way to finish our first day.

And **Janet Mackinnon** says: Thank you for a day of fascinating presentations and inspirational lecture.

There is a question here from **Helena Bennett**: "When you talk about corporate funders, are they on-island?"

**A:** Yes, that's a really good question. All of the corporate sponsors I am working with are on-island. Sometimes they reach out to us. Sometimes I go to them. Bermuda is small. We all know each other. We have social gatherings. And they might say "Could you come and



tell us about what you are doing.” And usually it will start with a meeting where I share what we do but they also share what are their ESG goals, environmental and sustainability and governance goals, that they want to reach. What I try and do is present ways to meet those goals and at the same time meet our goals. It works in that way. They totally appreciate where we are going; it is full transparency, I didn’t want to avoid talking about colonial issues and funding issues. They are quintessential and what’s really changed for us is that high-level transparency of really telling people. You see it. And we charge for a full day with 26 volunteers \$5000 to come and spend the day. I have heard people say: that’s crazy; why would people pay you to come and volunteer, but actually we give a lot. I often give talks, to let them see what they are getting for that dollar; how they are making a difference in the community; what every dollar is spent on. Clearly we don’t make any money and how that affects cultures. We are giving them clearly a lot of buy-in. We are not in a position to, or have the capacity to, take on much as the call is.

**Mike Pienkowski:** Thank you. **Katie Medcalf** says “Thank you that was a great talk, very inspiring.”

**Nicholas Watts** says “It’s a joy to see the inspiration of an intergenerational approach, a beautifully modulated presentation; thank you. You did not avoid the issues of colonial legacy or of funding issues. I would be interested in any comment you may have on the impact of UK cuts in funding to the Darwin Plus programme?”

**A:** The issue of colonial legacy, that’s the one I picked up. Regarding impact of UK cuts in funding to the Darwin Plus programme, just to be clear, yes. The Darwin Plus programme and the Darwin Initiative are quintessential to the work that we are doing here in Bermuda. These cuts are having an impact on us, but we are still working with donors and sponsors and corporate groups to find that money. To be honest, the example that I used at Spittal Pond was part of a Darwin Plus grant, which helped to bring people together and it was cultural and environmental heritage that we were addressing. What we have found is being able to pull these volunteers together and have really solid plans is what better positions us to get Darwin grants if they are available, they are quintessential to make a big difference.

**Mike Pienkowski:** Thank you.

**Catherine Wensink:** Do you get the feeling that BNT could do even more if there were a few more extra staff members that were paid continuously to work with volunteers? Because there is a cost to that, isn’t there? And do you think corporate businesses on Bermuda would be supportive of that? I know that this has happened in the Isle of Man, for example, where corporate sponsors have paid for a staff member to work on island.

**A:** It hasn’t come about yet. And the way that I am managing it, I’ve asked – I am not too proud to ask for

almost anything, really. The way that we have been able to get the first staff member that we have now was through building up the adoptions. An increase in the corporate days was key – because I was doing it all on my own, and that was taking a lot, and I have done groups of 80. It does take more people but, through getting enough adoptions and enough corporate days, we have built enough money packaged in there to hire another person. My hope is now we have just found an adopter for Spittall Pond, our largest nature reserve that I talked about. I am working on 2 more adoptions right now. If I could get those adoptions done and maybe 2 more corporate days, then I could probably pull from that and extract enough money to hire another person. So we are kind of going that route in a roundabout way. We are almost self-sustaining. We are almost there.

**Mike Pienkowski:** Melanie Carmichael says “Hello Myles – absolutely love this. We managed to scale a small pocket park in Grand Cayman last year with a Darwin Plus Local grant, and just did our first corporate-volunteer planting day. Seeing this in a leaflet is super helpful. Would be great if we can connect and share it with us directly: [info@sustainablecayman.org](mailto:info@sustainablecayman.org)”

**Mike Pienkowski:** I am sure Myles would like to, and I am sure we can put that leaflet in the publication (*see previous page*).

**A:** I will definitely reach out to Cayman because I am excited about your Pocket Park poster; it was really well done. We also had a Darwin Plus Grant to do a similar thing, which we called *Micro-Forests*. I think we have built more than 25-30 across the island already, and they are very similar to what you have been doing with your pocket parks, so I would love to connect, and I look forward to looking at the posters together tomorrow.

**Mike Pienkowski:** Nicholas Watts says: “I saw the remarkable achievement of the Anguilla National Trust Fountain Reserve on Anguilla in June, but five of seven staff are at risk as dependent on external (largely UK) funding.”

I might make a comment myself, Myles, before you pick it up. One of the things we have been going at for a long time for UK grant funding, even before it was under Darwin – before that it was OTEP and EFOT – was that why should you have to be so novel. If something is working, why can’t you give grants to build on what you have done – which would allow that sort of thing. We will keep going at that but the more people that raise that issue the better.

**A:** I really totally agree with what you have just said. Having now been to Anguilla, and I want to be clear: what the Anguilla National Trust group have done is amazing. An amazing group of people doing amazing things on a very small budget, like us. I felt that the work they were doing surpasses even what we have done, and they have had significant challenges like Category 5 hurricanes. So I learnt a lot from them, to be honest,

and they definitely need the staff. I am not sure, with an island with such a small population, that building out in the way that we have done is going to work. They don't have that corporate base that we have, and they are really dependant on Darwin grants and other UK funding opportunities. That is why it is so important that we work together to ensure that the Darwin Plus programme not only continues but expands.

**Mike Pienkowski:** Thank you. Any more comments or questions coming in? If not, then I think I can say that it is quite clear from the enthusiasm and the questions that have come in how inspired people have been by your talk, Myles. And also shows what a good choice Dace made in recommending you for this lecture. So thanks to her as well.

So, if nobody is coming in, let me thank you again for this brilliant lecture. Next time we do this we will have to find somebody who is as brilliant.

**A:** It has been great to talk here, and thank you so much for having me. I love sharing anything I can about what we are doing here in at the Bermuda National Trust. It's a special team; it's a special work; and it's all actually inspired by all of you. I see Helena Bennett there, and the work they are doing in St Helena is an inspiration for me. Brian Manco is like a mentor; the guru, that's what we call him here. He knew every plant, and that goes for everybody really. People like Alison Copeland from here in Bermuda, although she is now in the UK. I hope she was able to make it today. She is my own personal inspiration. So thank you to you all. And thank you to Dace especially and I hope she gets well very soon.

Oh, Alison is here. These are all my own personal inspirations – the work that I see you all doing. I had read about the Grand Cayman park poster and I thought that's a great idea.

So thank you all for coming, and thank you for listening. And continue to do the work you are doing

**Mike Pienkowski:** Thank you very much Myles. We now have some more nice comments:

**Nancy Pascoe** says "Well done Myles, great work and we need to charge for corporate volunteer days too in the BVI!"

**A:** I'll be in touch Nancy.

**Alison Copeland** says "Well done Myles!"

**Julie Thomas:** Myles - how does your Trust engage with your Government?

**A:** We work really closely. It is a difficult relationship in some ways and it's really positive in others. So the team at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, which included Dr Alison Copeland and Dr Mark Outterbridge: we are part of the same team really. So we have this amazing working relationship. I'm currently writing a really large management-plan

for one of our National Parks and I do it in conjunction with them. So we have this great relationship, but it is also a difficult relationship at times because of some awkward approaches to managing issues on our island, particularly at the time of dealing with invasives.

We have a tested relationship at all times, historically The Trust – and I am going back to Dace's time here – was receiving about \$300,000 annually from the Government to do the work that we do but, for the last 15 years, I don't think we have received anything. So we get no support from the Bermuda Government anymore which is why I have really come into a space. When I arrived here we had no adoptions, no volunteer days; we hadn't planted a tree in about 5 years. We have really had to build it up; not waiting for Government anymore, we are going to do this ourselves.

**Mike Pienkowski:** Very good. They might like to copy by example.

**A:** That was what I was trying to get across by some of the story-telling. I think that Karen and the Executive Council do a great job at that: leading from behind and allowing us to lead in our own way and just keeping us focussed on our goals. That's what I would really like to see from Government but it is not what we are seeing today.

**Mike Pienkowski:** Thank you very much. You have been questioned, and answered, for quite a chunk of time now, so I will let you go. But we will see you tomorrow as question-master for the poster session!

**A:** I'm looking forward to it.

**Mike Pienkowski:** Thank you Catherine, for the music and for keeping the presentations running as well.

It is with profound sadness that UKOTCF notes that our friend, colleague and UKOTCF Council-member Lady Margarita Candace (Dace) McCoy Ground did not recover from the hospitalised illness that prevented her from participating in the conference, although she was advised of the brilliance of Myles' Ground Lecture. Dace died on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025.

Dace made huge, pioneering impacts on conservation, a few of which are mentioned above in the background to this Lecture series. All found her a most supportive, positive and generous friend – who will be sorely missed.

It is UKOTCF's intention, with the encouragement of Dace's family, to continue the series of Sir Richard and Lady Dace Ground Lectures, as a continuing tribute and memorial to this inspirational couple.