



Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat

Newsletter 20, April 2026

Foreword



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

Welcome to the 20th issue of the newsletter about the current joint programme of work coordinated by Montserrat National Trust and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, in conjunction with the Government of Montserrat and others. The Darwin Plus funding (DPLUS155) for *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* has ended but we hope and plan that the project continues under the leadership of the *Adopters of Wildlife Homes* supported as far as possible by Montserrat National Trust and UKOTCF. The Darwin-funded project DPLUS192, *Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development* (or *Biodiversity Toolkit*) has now also reached its end of funding. Previous articles on this project appeared in earlier *Newsletters*. Proposals have been submitted for further funding for joint projects building on the work, although UK Government's commitment to funding work in the UK Overseas Territories, for which it shares responsibility, appears to be wavering. We are pleased to acknowledge a recent grant from the Stanley Smith (UK) Horticultural Trust.

Much of this issue is devoted to a series of articles celebrating the successful conclusion of DPLUS192. These include items on: Montserrat iNaturalist Project; introducing an activity book to primary schools; supporting online resources; a Day of Birds, Creativity and Well-being; Montserrat National Trust Conducts Site Visits to Test DPLUS192 Toolkit; and Exploring the Biodiversity of St George's Hill, Montserrat, a Successful BioBlitz in Zone V. We feature also articles on Montserrat National Trust's Annual General Meeting; a new wildlife video from St Lucia and potential for Montserrat; and a view from the Government of Montserrat's Representative to the UK.

We are very grateful for the many kind and encouraging comments from people welcoming *Newsletters* so far. We hope that you enjoy this extra large one too. Comments are always welcome. For contributions to this issue, we thank Catherine Wensink, Dr Jodey Peyton, Ann Pienkowski, Chris Sealys, Dr Rebecca Machin, Ms Kei-Retta Farrell, Sam Lauren & Emmy Aston of Island Solutions and Dr Mike Pienkowski.

Please feel free to show or forward these newsletters to others. If anyone sees these and would like to be added to the circulation list, please send your email address to jpeyton@ukotcf.org. Earlier issues can be accessed at: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/newsletters/>. For more information on the project, the main contacts are:

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



A few illustrations from this issue: to learn more, see pages 4, 8, 11 & 13.

This issue published on 31 March 2026

Toolkit progress in Montserrat – Update on DPLUS192

As we reach the end of March we are both proud and a little saddened to mark the closing chapter of the DPLUS192 project. Whilst this phase is coming to an end, the past month or so have been filled with such energy, collaboration and achievement that there is much to celebrate and share. In particular, the two intensive weeks of project activities in February showcased the very best of what this initiative has aimed to achieve — bringing people together around biodiversity-learning and community-action.

We begin with a truly impressive milestone: the project has now contributed over 10,000 records to iNaturalist, all collected through careful planning, fieldwork and community-participation. This achievement reflects not only the dedication of project-teams but also the enthusiasm of volunteers, students and partners who made data-collection both meaningful and impactful.

February's activities included a vibrant MNT AGM gathering where stakeholders connected to reflect and push ideas forward,

alongside the engaging Bioblitz at St George's which brought biodiversity to life through hands-on exploration. Educational outreach has remained central with teacher materials developed and shared, a colouring book successfully delivered to all primary-age children in schools, and a growing suite of online resources, ensuring continued access beyond the project's lifespan.

We have also been trialling the *Biodiversity and Wellbeing Toolkit*, exploring how nature-based engagement can support both environmental awareness and personal well-being. Additional highlights include: updates from MVO; continued connections with Montserrat in the UK; and the premiere of a new film celebrating the wildlife of St Lucia screened on-island in collaboration with the Monty's Ambassadors.

As we look back, it is clear that, while DPLUS192 may be concluding, its legacy — through data-resources and strengthened partnerships — will continue to grow as the partners find ways to continue working together.

Montserrat iNaturalist Project Hits Major Milestone — 10,000 Records and Counting!

Catherine Wensink, Executive Director, UKOTCF

(All images © Catherine Wensink unless otherwise stated)

The Montserrat biodiversity community has reached a significant achievement on the global citizen-science platform iNaturalist — with a total of over 10,800 biodiversity records logged as of March 2026. This represents a remarkable growth from when the MNT started to foster support for a iNaturalist project in 2022, with just 180 records. This highlights how community-observation efforts have steadily expanded over time.

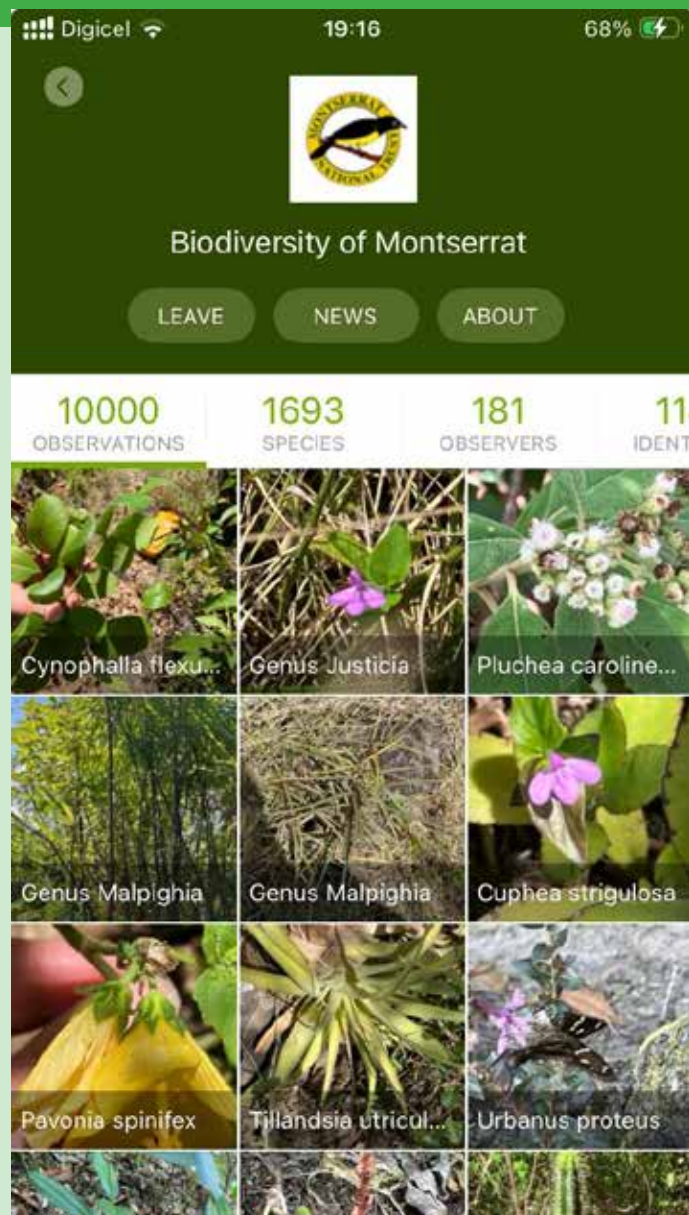
One of the most recent observations on the Montserrat iNaturalist project has captured a colourful Montserrat oriole, one of the island's flagship endemic birds that draws interest from observers and scientists alike. This sighting — now part of the cumulative dataset — helps paint a richer picture of how key species are distributed on the island.

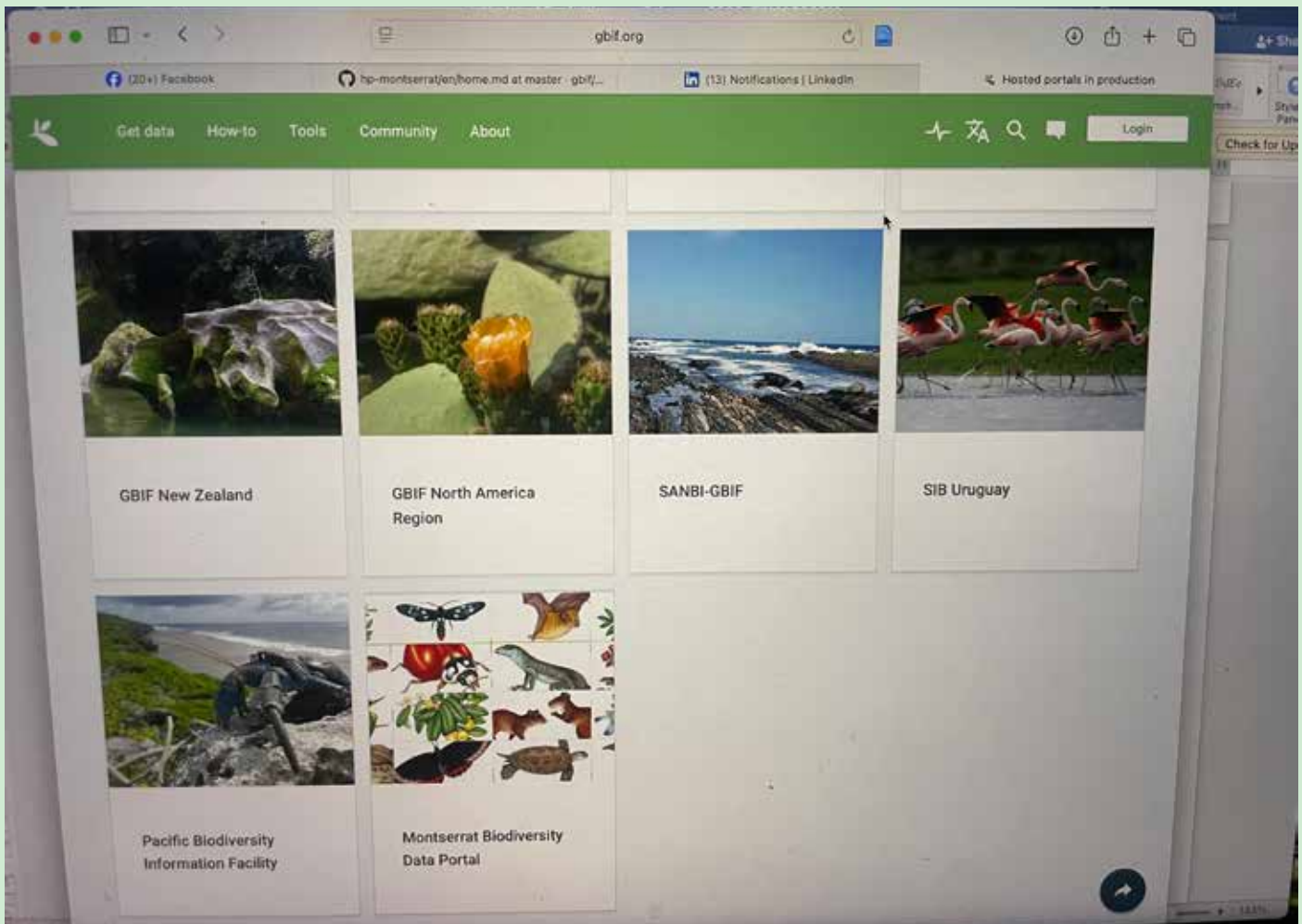
Why a Total of 10,800 Records Matters

iNaturalist is a global citizen-science platform that enables everyday observers, from school-groups to seasoned naturalists, to contribute photographic or audio records of organisms anywhere on Earth. Every observation includes the time, location, and supporting media, creating open data that can be verified and refined by the community globally.

These collective records do far more than simply catalogue sightings: they help fill crucial knowledge gaps about species presence, range and behaviour, particularly in places like Montserrat where formal scientific surveys can be sparse. Large datasets from platforms like iNaturalist are increasingly used in research, conservation-planning, and public education.

Reaching 10,000+ records shows both growing participation and sustained interest in local biodiversity across resident and visiting observers. It means also that Montserrat is contributing to global biodiversity-databases that underpin international research into species-distributions, ecological trends, and conservation-priorities — with records potentially being shared with resources such as the Global Biodiversity Information





Facility (GBIF) once “research grade” criteria are met: that is three people agree on the identification.

Citizen Science in Action

Platforms like iNaturalist demonstrate the power of citizen science — where members of the public contribute directly to scientific understanding. This inclusive model allows people of all ages and backgrounds to be involved in real science, helping to document biodiversity and generate data that can be used by researchers, land-managers, students, and conservationists.

As the Montserrat project has grown from a modest set of observations to over ten thousand, it reflects a broader shift in how scientific data are collected; embracing contributions from volunteers, hikers, students and everyday nature-lovers right here on the island.

Supporting Tools: FIT Count and Beyond

In addition to iNaturalist, local biodiversity-monitoring makes use also of tools like the FIT count app, another citizen-science tool designed to help record pollinator species efficiently in the field. These complementary platforms broaden the ways that people can contribute to conservation data, whether they are using smartphones to photograph wildlife or entering structured counts on organised surveys.

A Note on iNaturalist’s Origins and Technology-Conversations

iNaturalist began in 2008 as a graduate project at the University of California, Berkeley, and evolved into a major global citizen-science platform supported by the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society. It now operates as an independent nonprofit, with millions of users around the world contributing hundreds of millions of observations.

Like many community science efforts, iNaturalist has navigated



Female or juvenile Montserrat Oriole. Observation © nancyborowick_ iNaturalist CC BY-NC 4.0.

discussions about the use of technology, including debates around automated species-identification tools. Some users have engaged in conversations regarding artificial intelligence features and

their implications for data-quality, volunteer-motivation and the broader culture of volunteer-driven science. These discussions highlight the ongoing balance between human observation and technological support in modern citizen-science.

Looking Ahead

With more records logged every month and new observers joining the project, Montserrat's iNaturalist dataset will continue to grow, offering ever richer insights into the island's remarkable biodiversity. Whether of endemic birds like the oriole, colourful insects or native plants, every new observation brings us one step closer to understanding and protecting Montserrat's natural heritage.

The growth of Montserrat's iNaturalist records also directly feeds into the island's new GBIF-hosted biodiversity portal, providing a structured, accessible repository of verified species data for researchers, policy-makers, and the public. By linking iNaturalist observations to GBIF, Montserrat can ensure that its citizen-science data contribute to global biodiversity-knowledge, supports conservation-planning, and informs sustainable-development decisions. This integration strengthens the connection between local engagement and international data-networks, allowing Montserrat's unique species to be documented, studied and protected on a worldwide scale.

Congratulations to all of Montserrat's recorders — here's to the next 10,000 observations!

Bringing Montserrat's Wildlife to Life: Activity Book Visits Primary Schools

Catherine Wensink, Executive Director, UKOTCF

(All images © Catherine Wensink)

During February, the Montserrat National Trust (MNT), in partnership with the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) and zoologist Dr Rebecca Machin, visited primary schools across Montserrat to deliver a vibrant new biodiversity activity book to students at Lookout, Brades, and St Augustine's.

The initiative coincided with special school assemblies, where the children were introduced to the book, learning about the island's unique plants and animals through its colourful illustrations. The result? Smiling faces all around.



Above: Rebecca Machin and Chris Sealys present the book to the Principle of LookOut Primary School

Below: Year 6 pupils at LookOut Primary School show off their new books



Above: Brades Primary School pupils are presented with their books with Rebecca and Chris

Below: MNT's Chris Sealys and UKOTCF's Catherine Wensink share the books with pupils at St Augustine Primary School



Engaging Teachers and Building Resources

Whilst visiting the schools was a highlight, the team-members were invited to take part in teacher-training events, giving educators a chance to review the book first-hand. Dr Machin gave a presentation also on the teacher-training tools that have been developed as part of the DPLUS192 toolkit project. With feedback already received from the Department of Education, and at the suggestion of Honourable Minister for Education, Dr Ingrid Buffonge, the materials have been developed with the Montserrat National Curriculum in mind. In doing so, this links





Above: Rebecca shares materials with Darwin Local team.

Below: MNT's Chris Sealys introduces Rebecca Machin to Brades teachers during their training day at HillTop Cafe with MNT's Mrs Sarita Francis watching on.



also to the Darwin Local project being led by the Montserrat National Trust, which is developing curriculum-linked materials on climate-change, blue economy and biodiversity.

The educational materials developed will be available from UKOTCF and MNT websites here: <https://www.ukotcf.org.uk/key-projects/biodiversity-and-wellbeing-toolkit/> and <https://montserratnationaltrust.ms/projects-2/biodiversity-well-being-toolkit/>.

Teachers were able to ask questions about the materials, and the activity book's content as well as the information sheets produced on pollinators and grasses. They discussed ways to integrate these into classroom lessons.

This engagement allowed the project team to gather valuable feedback and ensure that the materials would be as effective and enjoyable for students as possible.

The book, illustrated by botanic artist Lizzie Harper, who visited Montserrat in 2025, introduces children to the island's endemic and other characteristic species, from the brightly plumaged Montserrat oriole to the mountain chicken, green turtles, and polka-dot moths.

Each page of the book uses a rainbow of colours to link familiar hues with local flora and fauna, making biodiversity both accessible and playful. A black-and-white pull-out section gives students space to colour and personalise their own interpretations of Montserrat's wildlife.

A Hands-On Experience

During the school visits, students were treated to assemblies where the story of the book's creation was shared — from the initial storyboard sketches to the final illustrations. Children were encouraged to ask questions and explore the species



Rebecca delivers a presentation on teaching materials to the Teacher Training Day at Lookout.



The rainbow theme was perfect for the booklet and even matches the walls of LookOut Primary School.

featured, making the experience interactive and memorable. Teachers reported that the activity book would not only engage students creatively but also reinforce environmental awareness and pride in Montserrat's unique wildlife.

With the activity book now in the hands of all 147 primary students on Montserrat, the MNT and partners are helping to ensure that learning about biodiversity is inclusive, hands-on, and fun, planting the seeds for a lifelong connection to Montserrat's natural heritage.

Darwin Plus 192, environmental education 2026

Dr Rebecca Machin, UKOTCF Volunteer

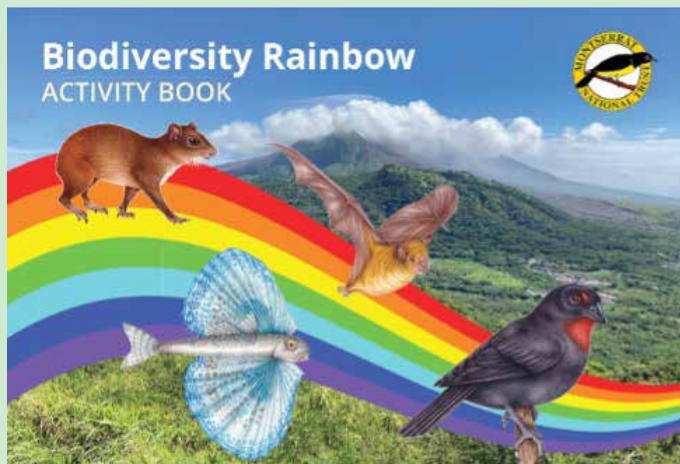
As part of the Darwin Plus 192 project, I have been working with Montserrat National Trust and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, producing environmental education resources based around biodiversity and well-being. We have also been involved in delivering youth activities during our visits to Montserrat throughout the project. At the outset of the project, based around sustainable development benefitting biodiversity and human well-being in Montserrat, there were a number of outputs to deliver. These included a children's activity book, interpretation on the journey of a plant from MNT's Botanical Gardens' nursery to gardens around Montserrat, and new signage for MNT's medicinal-plant garden. As the project progressed, additional outputs, such as identification guides, were also added to the project.



Above: School session. © Chris Sealys
Below: Colouring in. © Rebecca Machin

Online resources

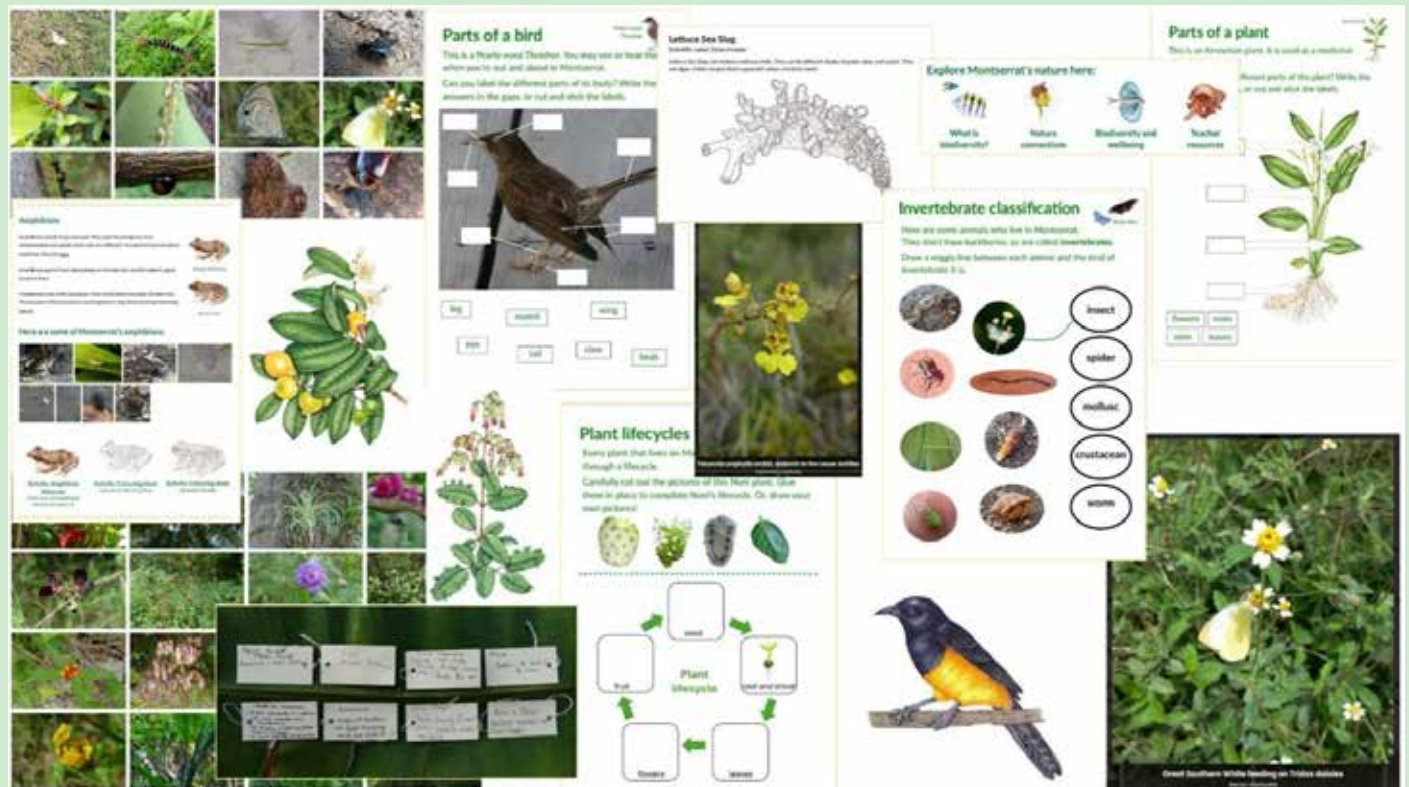
One of the key outputs of the project's environmental education resources was a website for children and young people, dedicated



Above: Activity book. Below: Materials. © Rebecca Machin



to Montserrat's biodiversity, and how it links to our well-being. Leading on from last summer's meeting with Dr Ingrid Buffonge and her colleagues at the Ministry of Education, the project's online resources now include also pages specifically targeted at Montserrat's primary-school teachers, using Montserratian



examples of biodiversity in national curriculum-linked worksheets and activities. Primary school students will now be able to make their own food-chains, and learn about plant parts, or amphibian lifecycles, using Montserratian plants and animals. Children will be able to link the knowledge they gain at school with the world around them, helping them to notice nature, and understand the importance of the island's biodiversity for our well-being.

Online Resources Page linked to UKOTCF and MNT websites

ukotcf.org.uk

What is biodiversity? Nature connections Biodiversity & wellbeing Teacher resources

Biodiversity and wellbeing in Montserrat

Welcome to the beautiful biodiversity of Montserrat! On these pages, we celebrate the amazing animals and plants that call Montserrat their home, and how they're important to us.

We think about how Montserrat's development can be sustainable, benefitting future generations, and the nature we're all a part of.

Montserrat's mountains and forest

Let's explore!

Click through the pages to find out more about biodiversity photos and facts about Montserrat's wildlife how we're all connected and how nature is important for our wellbeing.

There are downloadable resources for young people and educators including national curriculum-linked activities using Montserratian examples.

Purple-throated Carib

These online resources are part of a project called 'Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development'. This was funded by the UK Government's Darwin Plus funding.

OVERSEAS TERRITORIES CONSERVATION.UK
 MONTSERRAT NATIONAL TRUST
 DARWIN PLUS
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 the species recovery trust
 UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology
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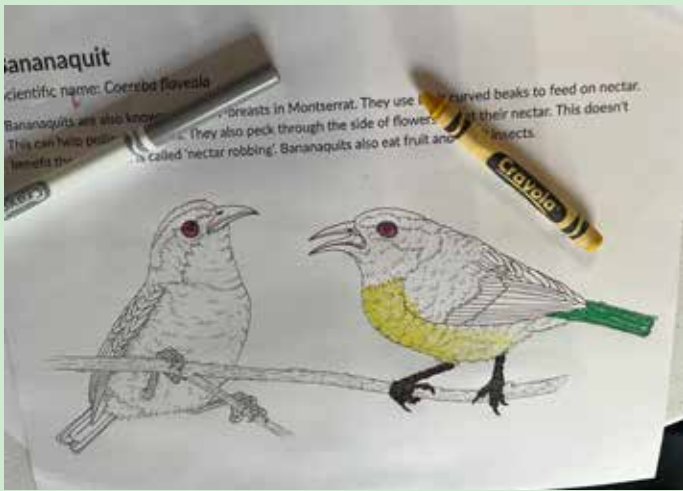
Love in the Air: A Day of Birds, Creativity and Well-being

On Saturday 14th February 2026, there was a special kind of magic in the air – one filled with joy, creativity and a shared appreciation for the natural world. It was a day where love wasn't just spoken about, but truly experienced: love for nature, love for birds, and love for the simple, calming moments that bring people together.

The event, led by the Trust's special friend, Dr Rebecca Machin, brought together children, staff and volunteers for a unique session that combined environmental awareness with emotional well-being. Supported by members of the Montserrat National Trust team, including Pam, Chris and Fay, the day unfolded as a vibrant and meaningful experience for everyone involved.

From the very beginning, the atmosphere was warm and welcoming. The children arrived with curiosity and excitement, ready to explore both their creativity and the natural beauty around them. The Botanical Garden provided the perfect setting – lush, peaceful and alive with the sounds of birds calling from the trees.

At the heart of the session was a focus on birds — not only as fascinating creatures, but as a source of inspiration and calm. Through guided drawing using step-by-step guidance sheets, created with illustrator Lizzie Harper, and colouring activities, the children were encouraged to observe, imagine and express. Some chose to recreate birds they had seen before, carefully



Above: Bananaquit vibes in Montserrat colours
 Below: Example of the colours used to bring the images to life



adding details to feathers and wings. Others let their imaginations soar, designing vibrant, colourful birds that reflected their own personalities and emotions.

The creative exercises were more than just art activities; they were also a gateway into mindfulness. As the children concentrated on their drawings, there was a noticeable sense of calm that settled over the group. The simple act of colouring and observing helped them slow down, breathe and become more present in the moment.

At times, the session became beautifully quiet. Heads bent over paper, hands moving steadily with pencils and crayons, the children found a peaceful rhythm. It was in these moments that the connection between creativity and well-being became especially clear.



MNT's Chris Sealys and UKOTCF's Jodey Peyton enjoying the fun



MNT's Chris Sealys shows the Monty's Messengers around the garden to listen and look for birds.

Below: Monty's Messengers gather in MNT's confernece room for a short introduction to the session.



Beyond the art, the group explored also the gardens themselves. Moving gently through the Botanical Garden, the children listened carefully for bird-song and looked up into the trees, hoping to catch glimpses of movement among the branches. They showed remarkable respect for their surroundings, understanding the importance of staying calm and quiet to avoid disturbing the wildlife.

This part of the session encouraged not only observation skills but also a deeper appreciation for nature. The children learned that birds are not just something to draw – they are living beings that share our environment and play an important role in it.

One of the most inspiring aspects of the day was seeing how the children connected with both the environment and each other. They shared their drawings, talked about what they had seen, and supported one another's creativity. There was laughter, curiosity and a strong sense of community.

The involvement of the Montserrat National Trust staff added another layer of warmth and support. Their guidance and encouragement helped create a safe and nurturing space where the children felt comfortable expressing themselves.

By the end of the session, it was clear that something special had taken place. The children left not only with colourful artwork but also with a sense of calm, achievement, and connection — to nature, to creativity and to each other.

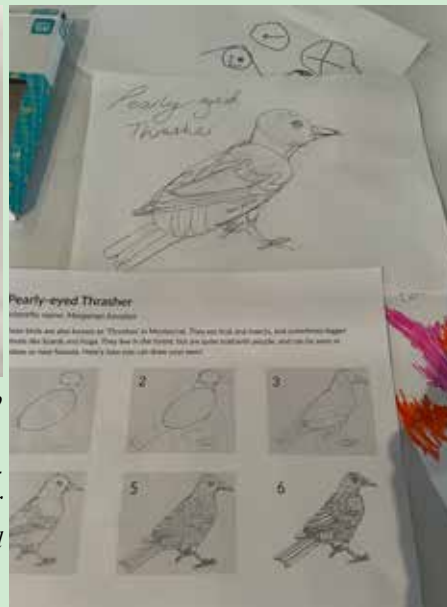
Events like this highlight the powerful role that nature and art can play in supporting emotional well-being. In a busy and often overwhelming world, taking time to slow down, observe, and create is more important than ever — especially for young people.



Above: One Monty's follows the steps to come up with a beautiful drawing.

Right: Step-by-step guide to drawing a Pearly-eyed Thrasher

Far right: Rebecca talks about biodiversity and well-being with the Monty's.



A heartfelt thank-you goes out to everyone who took part and contributed to the success of the day. From the organisers and facilitators to the enthusiastic young participants, each person played a role in making the event memorable.

This session was just one chapter in an ongoing journey, and there is already excitement building for the next Monty's

Messenger adventure.

Supported by the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum and the Biodiversity Challenge Funds, initiatives like this will continue to make a positive impact-bringing together education, conservation, and well-being in truly engaging ways.

Montserrat National Trust Conducts Site Visits to Test DPLUS192 Toolkit

Catherine Wensink, Executive Director, UKOTCF

(All images © Catherine Wensink)

As part of the ongoing DPLUS192 *Biodiversity & Wellbeing* project, a series of site-visits to assess the use of the toolkit across the island were conducted. The visits gave opportunities to review how the toolkit functions in real-world settings, while highlighting innovative approaches to conservation and sustainable land-use in Montserrat.

Medicinal Garden at the Hospital

The first site visited was the medicinal garden at the hospital,

where native and endemic plant species are cultivated for educational, therapeutic and research purposes. The toolkit was used to engage staff and patients in learning about the health-benefits and cultural significance of Montserrat's flora. This emphasised how biodiversity-resources can support well-being initiatives while raising awareness of traditional plant-knowledge. Some of the species planted are shown in the images as well as a reminder to staff and patients to cut the plants carefully so that they continue to regrow and be shared by all. The natural plantings at the site has also encouraged pollinators such as bees and butterflies.



From left, all in the kitchen garden: Aloe vera; Paracetamol bush – does exactly what says on the tin; Ramgoat bush



*Above: Plantings at the Hospital to encourage pollinators
Below: Sign at the hospital kitchen garden*



Some of the beds being irrigated supporting pollinators

Solar-Powered Irrigation at Drummonds



Irrigation supports growing of food in drier area at Drummonds.



New low-cost irrigation system installed

Next, the team visited the Bliss day spa at Drummonds, where solar-powered irrigation systems support sustainable agriculture. Here, the toolkit was applied to ensure that, in drier areas, efficient, low-cost irrigation can support a variety of well-being benefits such as medicinal

and crop plants. The integration of technology, conservation and sustainable food-production demonstrated how the toolkit could inform practical decision-making while promoting environmental stewardship.

Cacti Garden at the Museum

The final stop was the cacti garden at the Montserrat Museum, a unique collection showcasing endemic and adapted cactus species. The toolkit was used to provide educational prompts for museum visitors and to demonstrate what plants can be grown even in the drier conditions in the north of the island. Cacti and plants with tolerance to drier conditions were sourced just yards away from the museum itself in Little Bay and they include Turk's Head and Prickly Pear cacti.



Newly installed cacti garden fitting drier conditions

Reflections on the Testing

Across the sites, staff, volunteers and community-participants had the opportunity to interact directly with the toolkit, providing feedback on usability, functionality and applicability in different environmental and cultural contexts. These real-world trials helped the project-team ensure that the DPLUS192 toolkit is accessible, practical and adaptable, supporting biodiversity-monitoring, environmental education, and well-being initiatives throughout Montserrat.



The site visits highlighted how technology, conservation and community-engagement can be integrated to protect Montserrat's unique species while fostering sustainable practices and learning opportunities for residents and visitors alike.

Above: Turk's Cap cactus recently installed

Left: Prickly Pear cactus at new museum garden

Exploring the Biodiversity of St George's Hill, Montserrat: A Successful BioBlitz in Zone V

Catherine Wensink, Executive Director, UKOTCF

(All images © Catherine Wensink)

In February, some of the project scientists, conservationists and local experts gathered at St George's Hill in Zone V, Montserrat, for an exciting and productive BioBlitz. This event, designed to document and celebrate the island's rich biodiversity, brought together the Montserrat Department of Environment (DoE), Montserrat National Trust (MNT), the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), Meise Botanic Gardens, and botanical researcher Professor Donald McClelland from Lycoming College, USA. Using all their combined expertise allowed for a comprehensive survey of the area's flora and fauna.

The team was also accompanied by the Disaster Management Coordination Agency (DMCA), whose presence ensured a safe and well-coordinated field experience.

Biodiversity Highlights

Over the course of the survey, the team recorded an impressive 211 observations, identifying 121 species with contributions from six dedicated recorders. From bees and butterflies to a variety of plants, the BioBlitz captured the incredible diversity that thrives in this part of Montserrat. The stunning backdrop of St George's Hill, with its panoramic views of the surrounding landscapes and coastline, added to the richness of the experience.

Historical and Cultural Insights

Beyond documenting biodiversity, the visit provided opportunities to explore the historical and cultural heritage of St George's Hill. Generously shared by DoE staff, these insights revealed the deep connections between the local communities and the landscape, highlighting the hill's significance not only as a natural haven but also as a site of historical importance on the island.



From left: New sign St George's Hill; St George's Hill team; Pollinating wasp



The DoE's Stephon Hixon assists the team as they record some of the interesting plants and pollinators in the area. The foreground is a healthy stand of ferns; in the background the Soufriere Hills.

St George's Hill is located within Zone V — an area affected by volcanic activity and long closed off for safety reasons—the hill stands as a vantage point overlooking the buried capital city of Plymouth and the Soufrière Hills volcano. The eruptions that began in 1995 reshaped Montserrat's geography and forced the evacuation of large parts of the island, deeply impacting its communities and environment. Today, remnants of that history lie beneath the surface of the landscape, and sites like

St George's Hill offer insight into both the island's geological forces and its resilience.

Recent Government of Montserrat initiatives have focused on restoring access to this historically and scenically significant site. After nearly three decades of restricted entry, the main access route to St George's Hill has been cleared and rehabilitated, making it possible for visitors safely to reach the summit and enjoy the panoramic views. This reopening is part of a broader effort to enhance Montserrat's tourism offerings and to invite residents and visitors alike to experience the island's rich heritage first-hand. As part of these plans, structured tours are beginning with a small fee.

A Day of Collaboration and Learning

The BioBlitz was a testament to the power of collaboration between local authorities, international partners and academic researchers. Participants had the opportunity to exchange knowledge, strengthen networks, and deepen their understanding of Montserrat's natural heritage. The images captured during the event provide only a glimpse of the vibrant life that inhabits this special place.

We extend our sincere thanks to everyone involved, particularly the DMCA, for making the BioBlitz both meaningful and productive. This initiative not only enhances our scientific understanding but also fosters greater appreciation for Montserrat's unique environmental and cultural treasures.

Montserrat National Trust Holds Annual General Meeting

Catherine Wensink, Executive Director, UKOTCF

(Images © Montserrat National Trust)

Montserrat National Trust (MNT) held its 2025 Annual General Meeting in February, bringing together members, partners, volunteers and supporters to reflect on a year of progress in conserving Montserrat's natural, cultural and historical heritage. The AGM provided a platform to celebrate achievements, share plans for the year ahead, and acknowledge the vital contributions of partners and volunteers.

Opening Remarks from President Dulcie James

Mrs Dulcie James, President of the Montserrat National Trust, opened the AGM with a warm welcome and an overview of the Trust's mission to preserve the island's environmental and cultural legacy. Mrs James highlighted the resilience and creativity shown by the Trust's staff and volunteers throughout the year, noting the sustained efforts to expand educational outreach, strengthen heritage-conservation, and deepen community-engagement.

Reflecting on the Trust's journey, Mrs James emphasised the importance of collaboration, community pride and adaptive strategies in advancing conservation-goals. Her remarks celebrated both long standing traditions and exciting developments within the Trust's programmes, recognising that progress is achieved through shared vision and collective effort.

Remarks from Her Excellency the Governor

Her Excellency Ms Harriet Cross, Governor of Montserrat, delivered remarks underscoring the importance of organisations like the Montserrat National Trust in safeguarding the island's

unique biodiversity and cultural identity. Ms Cross, who has served as Governor since April 2025, praised the Trust's commitment to community focused conservation and education.

The Governor highlighted how Montserrat's heritage, both natural and historic, strengthens community well-being and offers opportunities for sustainable tourism and youth-engagement. She reiterated support for initiatives that empower Montserratians to protect and promote their island's distinct character.

Ministerial Perspectives on Heritage and Environment

The Hon. John Osborne, Minister of Agriculture, Lands, Housing, Environment, Youth Affairs and Sports, addressed the AGM with reflections on the government's environmental priorities and the collaborative relationship with the Trust. Minister Osborne affirmed the critical role of biodiversity-conservation in national planning and sustainable development, emphasising links between healthy ecosystems, community-livelihoods, and future resilience.

Partnership Voices: UKOTCF and Conservation Support



UKOTCF's Catherine Wensink outlines activities as part of DPLUS192



Mrs Sarita Francis, Director of MNT lists MNT's achievements in 2024-6



Above: UKOTCF's award for 30 years supporting conservation on Montserrat

Below: UKOTCF's Catherine Wensink thanks MNT's Fay Needham and Mrs Sarita Francis for the award, watched by HE the Governor Harriet Cross



Ms Catherine Wensink, Director of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), spoke about the longstanding partnership between UKOTCF and the Montserrat National Trust. She highlighted recent collaborative work supporting conservation efforts on the island – from biodiversity-surveys and capacity-building to education initiatives and specialist expertise shared through projects such as the *Biodiversity & Well-being Toolkit*.

Ms Wensink emphasised the value of blending scientific knowledge, local insights, and international cooperation to address environmental challenges and inspire community-participation in protecting Montserrat's natural heritage.

Highlights of Trust Activities

Mrs Sarita Francis then provided a review of Trust activities over the past year, showcasing accomplishments across several areas:

- Biodiversity and education — including youth-engagement projects, school-outreach, and the development of educational resources that connect communities with Montserrat's endemic species.
- Heritage preservation — efforts to document and safeguard historical sites, archives and cultural narratives that define Montserrat's identity.
- Community-partnerships — collaborative work with government agencies, international partners and volunteer groups to advance environmental and cultural initiatives island-wide.
- Public engagement — events, workshops and campaigns designed to encourage stewardship, increase public awareness, and foster pride in the island's natural and cultural assets.

These efforts reflect the Trust's enduring mission — to preserve the past, protect the present, and enrich the future of Montserrat through inclusive and impactful conservation work.

Recognition of Volunteers and Partners

In the closing segment of the AGM, the Montserrat National Trust honoured the exceptional contributions of volunteers and partner organisations who have supported its work throughout the year. Special awards were presented to individuals whose dedication and service have made significant differences in community outreach, environmental projects, and heritage conservation.

Among the honourees, the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) was recognised for 30 years of unwavering support, expertise, and collaborative action in conservation on Montserrat — a milestone that underscores the strength of enduring partnerships and shared commitment to protecting the island's special nature.

As the AGM concluded, participants left inspired by the collective achievements of the past year and energised for the challenges and opportunities ahead – reaffirming that stewardship of Montserrat's environment and heritage continues to be a collaborative and community-driven endeavour.

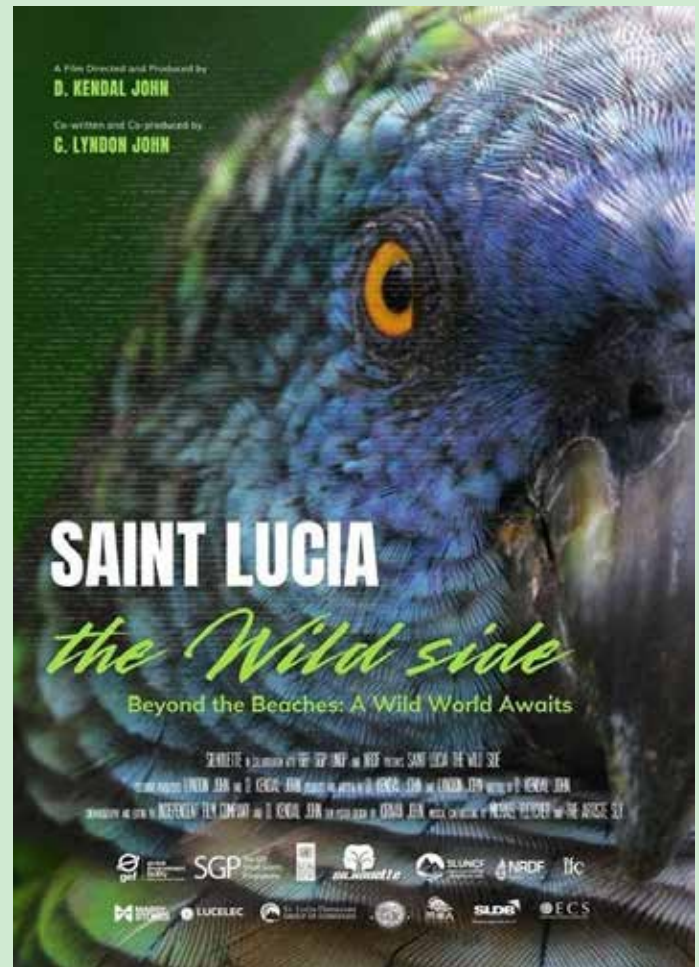
“You can’t protect what you don’t know”

Jodey Peyton, Senior Conservation and Projects Officer,
UKOTCF

“You can’t protect what you don’t know” (Ferdinando Boero, 2024: <https://www.un.org/en/delegate/you-can%E2%80%99t-protect-what-you-don%E2%80%99t-know>)

Lyndon John is the RSPB’s UK Overseas Territory Officer for the Caribbean. I was very privileged to be in Anguilla in February 2026 and to see a special screening of a wonderful film where Lyndon and his brother, Kendal John, have so beautifully highlighted the diverse nature of St Lucia. I have to say that, not since being a child, have I been so captivated by a wildlife documentary! The stunningly beautiful cinematography and wonderful narration bring St Lucia to life! Although not a UKOT, there are similar species found in St Lucia - this video brings their stories to life!

*Below: Lyndon (left) and Kendal John. © Mr. Jarde Pierre;
Right: the poster for the documentary*



You can see a promotional video at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=__uVladzsio, and find out more about the project. The video can be purchased via <https://www.kendaljohn.com/>.

A wonderful link to this film is the new WildShotz videography competition being run by Montserrat National Trust. This wildlife competition was initially undertaken in Saint Lucia, to encourage young people to engage in video-recording their local wildlife. It is hoped that this will inspire the next generation of wildlife protectors in the Caribbean. What a brilliant thing it would be to have a similar video for each of the uniquely beautiful UKOTs and CDs.

Wildshotz campaign. © Montserrat National Trust

The Montserrat Bat Project: Enhanced Species Health and Impact Assessments

Emmy Aston & Andrew Myers, Island Solutions

Island Solutions Incorporated, a non-profit organisation based in Montserrat, has been leading projects since 2023. Their latest project, the *Montserrat Bat Project: Enhanced Species Health and Impact Assessments* is a new biodiversity research and conservation initiative, with training provided to the Government of Montserrat's Department of Environment. The project is funded through the UK Government's Darwin Plus Local programme and runs from 1 October 2025 until 30 September 2026.

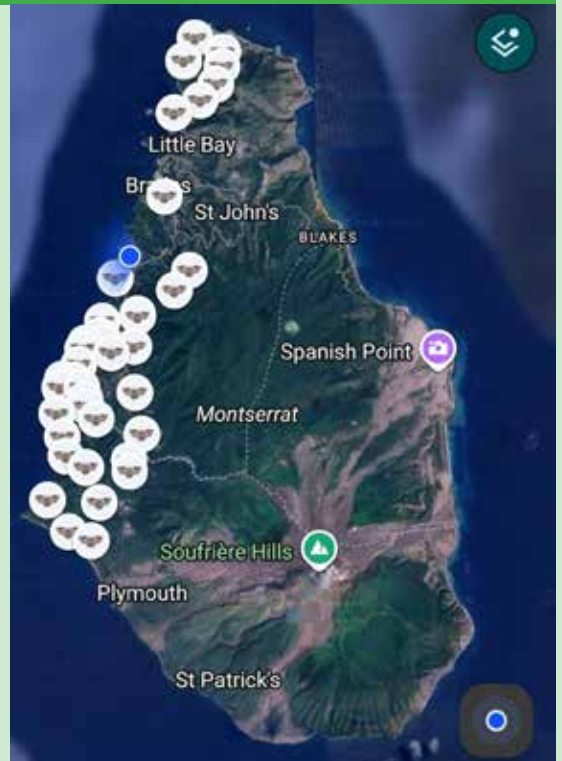
Bats are vital to Montserrat's ecosystems – acting as pollinators, seed-dispersers, and natural controllers of insect-pests. Yet the island's most recent comprehensive data on bat populations is more than a decade old. Much has changed since the last surveys were undertaken, with climate-shifts and human activities reshaping habitats across the Caribbean.

To bridge this knowledge-gap, the project will use acoustic monitoring techniques to understand bat-distribution around the island. Ultrasonic bat-recorders are being deployed at various sites to collect continuous data on bat-activity and species-diversity. Longer-term monitoring stations will operate for at least six months, while portable units will allow community-members to contribute data from over 30 short-term sites. These recordings will help confirm current species-presence, detect rare or previously undocumented calls, and assess trends linked to environmental and other pressures.

A key component of the initiative is community-engagement and citizen-science. Residents will be trained to use monitoring equipment and learn about bat-ecology, helping foster local stewardship for these often-misunderstood mammals. Educational outreach and public events will support broader awareness of bats' ecological importance.

Data gathered through the project will be shared with regional and international partners, including the North American Bat Monitoring Program and the British Trust for Ornithology, enriching global acoustic libraries and improving machine-learning models used to assess bat-biodiversity. Island Solutions will share open-source access to their classifier with neighbouring islands, with the aim of supporting the development of a regional bat-map, with Montserrat at the forefront. With MNT and UKOTCF, they are also exploring whether the Montserrat GBIF portal could be used to host bat-data.

The Montserrat Bat Project aims not only to update scientific knowledge of local bat-populations but also to inform the local community and evidence-based policy on land-use, agriculture, and climate-resilience. By blending cutting-edge research with public participation, it positions Montserrat as a leader in innovative biodiversity-monitoring in the Caribbean.



Above: Map of Data Collection Sites



Above right: Kaysie Ryan with the Mountain Chicken Project. Some insect-eating bats use the calls of frogs to look for food, so we were interested to see what bats, if any, were near the Mountain Chicken semi-wild enclosures



Left: Bat monitor by the Belham River Ponds



Right: Bat monitor installed above Rendezvous

Nature, Culture and Connection

Kei-Retta Farrell, Government of Montserrat Representative to the UK

Representing Montserrat in the United Kingdom is a role that is grounded in our relationship with the natural environment. For Montserratians, nature is not something separate from everyday life. It shapes our history, our culture and how we understand home. From the Soufrière Hills Volcano to our forests, coastline and wildlife, the environment has always influenced how we live, adapt and care for one another.

My family's move to the UK as a result of the volcanic eruption has shaped how I understand the relationship between environment, movement and resilience. That experience continues to inform how I approach my role today, particularly when advocating for Montserrat in UK and international spaces. Environmental change is not an abstract concept for our community. It is something that has shaped lives, identities and futures.

As the Government of Montserrat Representative to the UK, a large part of my work is about ensuring that Montserrat's story is understood in its full context. This includes advocating for the protection of our natural environment, but also for the people, culture and systems that depend on it. Montserrat's experience as a small island living closely with natural forces offers valuable lessons on preparedness, adaptation and long-term resilience, and it is important that these perspectives are heard in policy, funding and partnership discussions.

The Montserrat Government UK Office acts as a bridge between the island and partners across government, civil society, academia and the diaspora. Environmental protection and climate resilience are not standalone issues within this work. They run through everything we do, from engagement with conservation partners and researchers, to diaspora events, education initiatives and commemorations that reflect our shared history with the landscape.

The *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* newsletters are a strong example of what long-term collaboration can achieve. Coordinated by the Montserrat National Trust and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, working closely with the Government of Montserrat and others, they reflect years of practical partnership focused on biodiversity, knowledge-sharing and community-engagement. UKOTCF has played an important convening role across the Overseas Territories, bringing technical expertise, continuity and international networks that help small administrations strengthen conservation action and build lasting capacity. I would like to acknowledge and thank UKOTCF for its sustained commitment to Montserrat and for the collaborative way it continues to work alongside local institutions.

The most recent issue also highlighted the breadth of this work, from Darwin-funded biodiversity projects and data-sharing, to youth-engagement, citizen-science and the work of institutions such as the Montserrat Volcano Observatory. These efforts show clearly that environmental protection, community-wellbeing and cultural memory are deeply connected. It was particularly meaningful to see this reflected in the Thanksgiving Service in London marking the 30th anniversary of the Soufrière Hills Volcano, which brought together remembrance, music, faith and reflection from across the diaspora (see *SOSNoM* 19).

Our diaspora in the UK remains closely connected to Montserrat's landscape, even across distance and generations. Many people carry memories, stories and attachments shaped by the land and sea. Through community-engagement and cultural work, the UK Office supports those connections and helps create opportunities for people to contribute their skills, knowledge and experience, including in areas linked to conservation, education and environmental awareness.

I am especially encouraged by initiatives that make Montserrat's biodiversity more visible and accessible, and that bring together scientific research, local knowledge and community-participation. Work that documents and shares our natural heritage helps people feel connected to the island, wherever they are, and strengthens a shared sense of responsibility for protecting what makes Montserrat unique.

Looking ahead, my focus is on strengthening connections between people, place and policy. By advocating for Montserrat in the UK and supporting partnerships that recognise the link between environment and culture, the UK Office aims to play its part in ensuring that our natural heritage is protected and valued, not only as something to preserve, but as something that continues to shape who we are.

Other Newsletters

Readers may like to look also at the MNT Newsletter, which includes also Museum News (<https://montserratnationaltrust.ms/mnt-newsletter/>), and the Montserrat Volcano Observatory (<https://www.mvo.ms/category/news/>).

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



Partners in earlier phases of the *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat* programme included some of those at the top of page 1, plus:



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