# Collaborating through the Forum's web-database

### Frances Marks and Mike Pienkowski, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum



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The web-data base (www.ukotcf.org) is a multi-functional management tool, and one of the main and most frequently used sources of information on UK Overseas Territories. It has three main elements:

1. The 'static' (conventional web-site) pages

2. Data-base - The main purpose is to find information on topics easily. It has the ability to save work and make the best possible use of this work in every possible way as it can be used many times and in many different ways.

3. Discussion Group facility - This facility is already available and has the potential to be used as a remote 'think-tank'. Although not yet fully implemented, it potentially complements the data-base. The database readily stores information that can be easily accessed later, whilst the discussion group is more suited to current exploration of ideas.

The data-base was designed to meet the frequent requests to the Forum to set up a system which would share information in a structured way and allow information entered once to be accessed for various purposes. These are important given the dispersed nature and work overload of the users concerned.

The database is designed in three tiers:

1. Any person with a password and basic training can access the database to add or edit information.

2. The data goes into a holding area. This allows for any queries, corrections and safeguards put in place by the second role, the administrator. Additions and alterations are not viewable by the general public until after verification by the Forum.

3. Thirdly the data goes public and can be accessed by anyone Modules of the Database:

*Conservation Priorities:* These were the conservation priorities that the Territories themselves developed in the mid 90s. Now on the database, they can be reviewed and updated. This is effectively a forerunner of the Environmental Charter process, and provides a context in which to develop project proposals.

*Projects Module*: This allows for projects to be developed and followed from the first ideas, through to the project proposal, and then allows for their progress to be monitored.

*Funding Sources Module*: The module provides a place for potential funding sources interested in UKOTs to be recorded. This is not as large a set of data as we would like!

*Information Sources Module*: This versatile module allows for any information that does not fit into the other four categories.

*Sites and Topics Module:* This has recently been added and its design benefits from what was learned using the earlier modules. For example, data entry involves fewer fields and it has more capacity to include pictures. It helps make these known and assist in their conservation, monitoring and management. It will also help to exchange knowledge and expertise on issues, protection and management, so that we learn from each others' successes and problems;

The success of the database is dependent on information being put on the database by as many people as possible.

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# Introduction

WWW.UKOTCF.ORG is not just another website. It is one you should all remember as it is <u>your</u> website.

It is frequently accessed. Some checking last week showed it at the top of the search engines for Google and yahoo in this area. More and more emails and calls are coming from people who say "I found your details on the website".

The web/data base (www.ukotcf.org) is a multifunctional management tool, with three main elements:

- 1. The Static pages Keeping people updated on events and links to member organisations and the UKOTs. The Forum's web site is one of the main sources of information on UK Overseas Territories
- 2. Data-base The main purpose is to find information on topics easily. It has the ability to save work and make the best possible use of this work in every possible way as it can be used many times and in many different ways.
- 3. Discussion Group facility This facility is already available and has the potential to be used as a remote 'think tank'. Although not yet fully implemented, it potentially complements the data-base. The database readily stores information that can be easily accessed later, whilst the discussion group is more suited to current exploration of ideas.

#### Static pages

The "static pages" (i.e. conventional web-pages, rather than database) include a wide range of material for sharing. For example, they draw attention to (and in some cases hold copies of) certain publications, information about the Forum and its member organisations (with links to their web-sites for more information) and information about the UKOTs.

New or important events can be flagged up on the home page of the website. A link to the details of this conference were there for many months, updated as arrangements settled. Many of you will have already been to the website and either downloaded the registration form or the conference



#### programme.

The website has a facility to store (usually in pdf form) publications, thereby making key but not conventionally published material (such as management plans) widely and immediately available. *Forum News* 22 was on the website before it got into the Christmas post. It also has the added bonus of being in colour on the website. Other publications include back copies of *Forum News*, Annual



Reports and the Proceedings from the conference that was held in Gibraltar in 2000. After this conference the proceedings will be published on the web pages.

If you had wanted to find out more about Bermuda, you could have gone to the site, clicked Territories, and then Bermuda in the side-menu. The pictures and text that illustrate Bermuda on the Forum's display boards would appear, with information on conservation issues in Bermuda and links to conservation organisations in Bermuda.

#### Accessing the Database

The data-base was designed to meet the frequent requests to the Forum to try to set up a system to find a way of sharing information in a structured way given the dispersed nature of the users concerned. Important elements in its design (following wide consultation) were:

• the need for information on conservation in the UKOTs to be made available once, and then be accessible for other purposes without overworked personnel in the UKOTs or their supporting bodies elsewhere having to be bothered again

- the need to make available to the UKOTs information that they may need only infrequently, but for which there is scattered experience
- the need for all users to "own" the database, i.e. to be able to enter and access information, rather than relying solely on some remote, centralised office.

To meet the last point, he database is designed in three tiers:

Any person with a password and basic training can access the database to add or edit information. Please contact Mike Pienkowski (pienkowski@cix.co.uk) for guidance on this. The data goes into a holding area. This allows for any queries back to the person entering the data (usually for clarity), corrections to be made and safeguards put in place by the second role, the system administrator. Additions and alterations are not viewable by the general public until after this verification by the Forum. Thirdly the data goes public and can be accessed by anyone

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means more work for us - I have not got the time to write anything special for the database". We can all empathise with this character here - piled high with paper work, not even a computer in sight. We want to emphasise that you probably already have everything that needs to go on the database already written. It is mainly a matter of copy and paste, and getting into the habit of connecting to the database.

- Projects
- Funding Sources
- Information Sources
- Sites and topics

# **Modules of the Database**

To enter the database to search it, click UKOTCF database on the side-menu at www.ukotcf.org. This will lead you to a page which allows you to select the module that you want. This in turn leads to some background information on that module. Then click Search, which leads to a page in which you can enter the search parameters (see screen on previous page for an example in Conservation Priorities module).

#### **Conservation Priorities**

These were the conservation priorities that the Territories themselves developed in an exercise conducted by the Forum in the mid-1990s. Now on the database, they can be reviewed and updated by the Territory concerned - and some have done this. This is effectively a forerunner of the Environment Charter process, and provides a context in which to develop project proposals.



The database itself comprises several modules:

• Conservation Priorities

The search in this module can be on the basis of Territory, subject heading, or for the occurrence of any words, phrases or strings of characters.

The screen at the top of the previous page shows part of the various subects for Anguilla.

#### **Projects Module**

This allows for projects to be developed and followed from the first ideas (for example, to pull in ideas and collaborators as to how an issue might be addressed), through the project proposal (for potential funders), to keeping track of the project (allowing progress to be monitored, and eventually others to be aware of the results).

The headings of this module were actually set to match the original ones set up in FCO's Environment Fund for Overseas Territories, but the latter changed its headings just after. Nevertheless, any relevant informmation can be fitted into appropriate free-text modules of the module.

The example screens show firstly (below) part of the list of projects resulting from a search in this module for Environmental Educaton projects. Clicking on the title or summary of one of these gets to the details of that project. The other two screens shown (next page) give the results of clicking on Turks & Caicos National Trust's FCOand UKOTCF-supported primary school Our Land, Our Sea, Our People project.

#### **Funding Sources Module**

The module provides a place for potential funding sources interested in UKOTs to be recorded. For instance there are details and links for the Darwin Initiative, the former Environment Fund for Overseas Territories of FCO, and various NGO small grants programmes, e.g. RSPB or British Ornithologists' Union. This is definitely not as large a set of data as we would like - but that is a function of the limited funding available to UKOTs. Additions are welcome to this module as well as to the others!

The Funding Sources module is actually a special sub-set of the Information Sources module.

#### **Information Sources Module**

This versatile module allows for any information that does not fit into the three previous, and the following, categories.



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	Means:	Phase 1: Revision of the social studies and science curricula and conduct a pilot study, cooperatively developed and tested by the National Trust staff and educators and students of a primary school in Providenciales. Phase 2: Incorporate the results of the pilot study into all other Providenciales public schools. Phase 3: Develop new materials and activities. Phase4; Extend the educational programme to all other primary and secondary schools countrywide.
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The example screen (above) shows part of the initial results of a search in this module for International Conventions. The inset illustrates the storing of publications on the database noted earlier. In addition to the link to the details for a particular entry, the summary - as well as other fields in the full entry - can include (as here, highlighted in green) links to such publications. Clicking the

green resulted in opening a pdf window to the Forum's 1998 review of the implementation in the UKOTs of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

#### **Sites and Topics Module**

This has recently been added and its design benefits from what was learned using the earlier modules. For example, data entry involves fewer fields and it has more capacity to include pictures (for example the map here of the Ramsar site which is the subject of Ethlyn Gibbs Williams presentation in the next session). This module is not just for protected areas but also other areas of importance, to help make these known and assist in their conservation, monitoring and management. It will also help to exchange knowledge and expertise on issues, protection and management, so that we learn from each others' successes and problems.

Unlike the other modules, which tend to contain a





single updatable record for each project, funding source or whatever, this module can have an effectively unlimited number of 'events' for each site. It is therefore usually expanded by adding another event to the relevant site. The screen image shown is part of an event for Inaccessible Island, Tristan da Cunha. This 'event' was the production of the management plan. The plan itself (inset) is accesssed by clicking the colour-highlighted part of the main entry.



# Some final thoughts

We need to reiterate that the success of the database is dependent on information being put on the database by as many people as possible. It is your database. We are happy to help give some basic training and issue you with passwords (contact pienkowski@cix.co.uk). We want you to feel more like this character – cool calm and collected with a clear desk (unlike Mike)!

We are not asking you to do another major task in your busy day. There is some work involved but, after the initial frustrations which seem inevitable whenever one uses a piece of unfamiliar software, it soon becomes easy, usually by electronic cutting and pasting from existing documents. We will not try to describe this here, because it will sound more complicated than it is. However, those present at the conference witnessed our unscripted use of Bermuda Audubon Society's newsletter to add information to several modules. Newsletters, project proposals and much other existing material can readily be lifted and popped into the database. For larger documents (such as the management plan noted above), please email to consult how most easily to upload these.

At present emphasis, with our limited resources, is on "populating" the existing modules with information, but in the future there is the potential to add new modules (some of which have already been suggested by colleagues in UKOTs) providing funding can be secured.

Remember that to interrogate the database (as opposed to data entry), no password is required, anybody can do it. It is very easy with menus and easy to follow instructions at www.ukotcf.org.

One of the data-entry screens being explained (BP)



A Sense of Direction: a conference on conservation in UK Overseas Territories and other small island communities, page 119

# **BVI** National Parks Trust's computerised management system

# Joseph Smith Abbot, BVI National Parks Trust



Smith Abbott, J. 2003. BVI National Parks Trust's computerised management system. pp 120-128 in *A Sense of Direction: a conference on conservation in UK Overseas Territories and other small island communities* (ed. M. Pienkowski). UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, www.ukotcf.org

Information requirements associated with National Trusts and similarly structured organizations are multidimensional and varied. Conservation-related organizations are called upon to manage natural and historical sites taking into account ecological and socio-economic factors which may have led (or to continue to lead) a resource to be in peril or to be improperly managed. Management must occur within the context of best biological/ecological information, adherence to solid management planning practices, fiscal prudence, the development of capacity to conduct daily operations and the ability to link on the ground activities to a great number of regional and international agreements governing natural or cultural elements of our environment.

The management of natural/cultural, human and financial resources can only be facilitated via the creation of more comprehensive **management information systems** which account for the particular needs for the integration of biodiversity, socio-economic factors, historical attributes associated with properties, human resource management and financial information. Ultimately all of the information acquired through various planning exercises and day-to-day operational activities should be available to produce custom reports detailing contributions to the progress in attaining goals embodied in regional and international conventions. A strength-ened network of Overseas Territories conservation-related organizations will emerge as they begin to harness the power of customized applications designed to manage information in an efficient manner. This presentation will summarize efforts undertaken by the British Virgin Islands National Parks Trust to create and test a custom-built management information system which accounts for variables impacting the operation of the organization.

**Joseph Smith Abbott,** National Parks Trust, PO Box 860 Road Town, Tortola, BVI. director@bvinationalparkstrust.org

#### Introduction

National Trusts and other similarly structured organizations manage natural and cultural assets of national importance and of tremendous biodiversity or historical value within a complex context of degrading ecosystems and dynamic human interaction within and without these areas. Often the rationale for setting aside an area of natural or historical significance is grounded in a relatively good understanding of the need to designate and protect a percentage of a country's total land or sea mass. To that avail, many countries have employed IUCN models and criteria for drafting System Plans, which identify networks of areas in need of protection and legal designation. IUCN based System Planning tools were employed in the BVI as early as 1979 to rationalize the inclusion of areas of national importance in terms of biodiversity and cultural significance. The network of terrestrial and marine areas existing today is a testament to that process. Two iterative processes of review and update have taken place since (1986 and 2000) which have allowed for:

- 1. Further refinement of the rationale for site inclusion into a system of protected areas using the most up to date information on the biodiversity status or cultural values of an area;
- 2. Amalgamation of terrestrial and marine elements comprising more holistic ecological units; and,
- 3. An update of socioeconomic factors affect-



ing the ecological integrity of areas under our mandate and those that we seek to include within the system of protected areas.

The iterative process of review of the BVI System Plan continues to provide a solid basis for the refinement or creation of management plans for either individual or collective units of the network of protected areas. Moreover, all activities undertaken within the protected area network will stem from an assessment of principles contained therein.

# Rationale for the Creation of a Custom Computer Application for the Management of Protected Areas in the British Virgin Islands

Effective management of national parks and protected areas require good baseline information, whether for terrestrial or marine areas of biodiversity or cultural value. Moreover, there is always the need to benchmark progress in the attainment of objectives and activities outlined in management plans, which are to be carried out within the protected areas. While great emphasis has been placed on the formulation of management or restoration plans and baseline information through inventories or ecological assessment for a great number of areas represented in Overseas Territories and throughout the world, lesser emphasis has been placed on the capture of information related to day-to-day activities related to the management of protected areas with the exception of a few notable areas.

The revolution in computational processing capacity and iterative refinement of business models for profit making ventures has not reached the large number of conservation related organizations and therefore, we are not fully benefitting from technologies currently available to improve the operational side of our organizations. A discussion of management models pertinent to the type of work that National Trusts and other conservation related organizations undertake traditionally centre around the realms of management planning, biodiversity conservation management or geographic information systems. In some instances, integration of biodiversity and geographic information is possible and models to capture such information are highly developed; however, tools, which capture business processes and other types of information relevant to our context, do not exist. Computer applications or custom-designed software which may aid in the proper management and understanding of our operations are less developed therefore, shortchanging great opportunities available to capture and share valuable information which may contribute to a discussion of best management practices related to the management of biodiversity or cultural assets. National Trusts and related

conservation organizations will increasingly require better ways of documenting information in databases which record business processes, biodiversity, geographic and cultural attribute information.

Central questions which must still be answered and are related to strategic and operational issues include:

- 1. How is the work undertaken by the Trust under management plans and other working documents linked back to principles embodied in the Convention on Biological Diversity, Ramsar, the Cartagena Convention's protocol on Special Protected Areas for Wildlife, the St George's Declaration, individual Environment Charters produced under the White Paper and so many other international, regional and national frameworks for action without being overwhelmed by the entire exercise?
- 2. What tools are available to document and track the progress and performance of a myriad of programmes and projects?
- 3. How can institutions effectively document daily activities, which support the formulation of reports on progress, associated with the attainment of principles within conventions and other agreements or frameworks and allow for the awareness and feedback at

a number of organizational levels?

This deficiency poses tremendous challenges to managers and practitioners who seek to understand in a dynamic way, events that are taking place within individual components of the network of protected areas and their institutions. Information on how daily factors impact the integrity of an area and the efficacy of management regimes applied to ameliorate stress or potential loss of biodiversity is critical in this age.

It is against this backdrop that the BVI National Parks Trust embarked on an examination of methods to institutionalize and document daily processes related to the capture of activities undertaken within the network of protected areas while making the appropriate linkages to external frameworks of law or policy affecting our operation. The Trust has focused on the use of databases and customdesigned applications which allow for several layers of individuals to interact with, and be responsible for the acquisition of knowledge related to managed resources. The application is modular by design with layers of information captured in the Management Information System Trust including:

1. The applicability of international, regional and national environmental frameworks to the work undertaken at the Trust;





- 2. The documentation of strategic plans;
- 3. The documentation of management plans (using the Conservation Management System developed by the UK Countryside Management);
- 4. The documentation of programme and project structure; and,
- 5. The iterative documentation of daily and annual activities such as update reports on implementation progress, financial expenditure and staff contributions towards the attainment of programme and project goals, objectives and activities.

The BVI NPT Management Information System was developed using Microsoft Access, a relational database, in order to keep costs and application development complexity down. Initial expenditure entailed training in application development using Microsoft Access Software. All development was conducted within the organisation with individuals contributing to the review of management models expressed in the application and vetting ease of use of outputs produced. Overall development took place over the span of a year. Project management models employed by the BVI Government's Ministry of Finance and the Development Planning Unit of the same Ministry were employed to create portions of the database. Additionally, strategic planning methods employed by the U.S. National Park Service were used as a model for documenting the process at the Trust. Finally, a number of Human Resource models for appraising employees were explored to derive a consistent way of evaluating contributions to project implementation and their overall annual performance.

An introduction to the application exposes the user to a main dialogue box (screen at top of previous page) which allows them to choose to enter strategic plan, programme or project, financial expenditure and appraisal information. Choosing the strategic planning module allows a user to decide whether components of the strategic plan, global programme expenditure estimates and organisational information for the period in question will be entered (screen at bottom of previous page).

Relevant organisational information to be entered (screen at top of next page) include: the mission and vision, a summary of primary objectives and a synopsis of areas of the System Plan to be implemented for the strategic period in question. Strategic planning spans a period of three to five years at the Trust. Other screens (bottom of next page) allow the user to plan according to goal categories, mission, long term and short-term strategic goals, enter a description of the objectives of a project in its broadest sense (top of page 126) and budget for programmes and projects (bottom of page 126).

The project entry form allows users to further describe, justify and qualify constraints and risks associated with implementation (first part at the top of page 127). The form's second part (bottom of page 127) allows users to add more detailed information which may include the developmental, capital and recurrent elements of a project, specify individual goals and objectives for the project, budget and associate the project to individual components of the network of protected areas.

Finally (top of page 128), all projects can be directly correlated to policy instruments to which the Trust manages directly by inputting articles of convention or policy statements and describing their applicability to the Trust's work.

Ultimately, the Trust can provide information, standard and custom reports on its work, and their relationship to guiding policy documents (bottom of page 128).

Information is as valuable an asset as any other that we are likely to manage. Institutionalizing the management of information is an exercise that is as equally challenging as overseeing other complex factors impacting the efficacy of our organizations. Our organizations will have to rely on tools which integrate several streams of data and information to increase our understanding of the areas, species and socioeconomic context in which we operate. Therefore, effort should be expended in further refining existing applications which document biodiversity, geographic, project management, human resources and financial information. The ability to document planning and implementation exercises using relational databases and computer applications will continue to strengthen the network of overseas territories, as capacity will be augmented through the more efficient way of managing information and therefore, our organizations.

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Summary of Objectives	
The objectives of the Trust are in part derived from Government's overall development goal of improving the quality of life for all British Virgin Islanders, as well as those who may chose to live here. Hence, the overall objectives identified throughout the Budget Dutline are designed to manage select natural areas for the following:	-
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	monitoring and recording equipment. Staff training is required for proper scientific information collection and collation.	
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