



# DArWiN in TCI

DEVELOPING BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT CAPACITY  
AROUND THE RAMSAR SITE IN THE TURKS & CAICOS ISLANDS

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CABI Bioscience  
A Division of CABI INTERNATIONAL

What's in a name? Quite a lot really!

The subtitle of our newsletter is the formal name of the Darwin Initiative Project, but we wanted a main title which reflected the beauty of the natural environment and heritage of the Turks & Caicos Islands. Inspiration came at a community meeting in Middle Caicos, where villagers expressed concern that a rubbish dump was too close to an important wetland. As they described the ponds and marshes, the word 'dawn' was used repeatedly. This is the local name



Dawn (*Typha*) and a newly fledged West Indian whistling duck, a vulnerable local species

for what scientists call *Typha*, a plant also known as 'catstail' or 'bullrush'. It is associated locally with clean waters, and considered a very attractive feature of the environment. The resonance of 'dawn' in its other senses was too great to resist. The local accent pronounces "dawn" with every letter stressed, and the word drawn out, so it sounds remarkably like "Darwin" – hence our slight adjustment to the spelling. What more could we ask for? Welcome to a new *Dawn*: we hope that you enjoy it!

## The Darwin Project

Our planet supports an incredible variety of plant and animal life, on land, in the sea, and in rivers and ponds. Millions of different species, all contributing something to the workings of the natural world, make up this treasury of 'biodiversity'. The Turks & Caicos Islands support a fascinating range of species, many of which are poorly documented, and some of which occur nowhere else on Earth. The island of Middle Caicos, which lies at the heart of a substantial Ramsar site (wetland habitat of international importance), is as yet untouched by major tourist developments, and local people are keen to protect the assets of their local environment. These include important archaeological sites, which trace the heritage of the islanders back over hundreds of years, as well as the local biodiversity.

Throughout 1999, the Turks & Caicos National Trust hosted community meetings for Middle Caicos residents, which set the stage for the Darwin Project. Local people were encouraged to express their concerns and views openly in an informal setting, on how they would like to see development pursued on their island. The consensus was that, although they would like to see some development on Middle Caicos, to stem the exodus of young people seeking employment on other islands, they would not like Middle Caicos to become like Providenciales (the island in TCI with the most intensive tourist and other developments).

In October 1999, the *Darwin Project* began; funded by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative, this project is a joint venture



The Planning for Real workshop in Conch Bar, November 1999

between the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, CABI Bioscience, and the Turks & Caicos National Trust. The *Planning for Real* workshop, held on Middle Caicos in November 1999, brought together the project partners and local residents. The objective was to establish what local people

valued about their environment, and to determine how they would like to be involved in future development on Middle Caicos. A table-top map of the island was used as a participatory research and planning tool, to get people to identify sites of historical and wildlife value, or of cultural and personal significance. It was clear that the local people value the natural features of the area, many of which have provided focal points for activities on the island for generations. However, there was a strong desire to see stimulation of the local economy, as well as protection of irreplaceable assets such as the ponds, caves, wildlife havens and heritage sites.

The Darwin Project will conduct surveys of animals and plants, and identify sites of particular value for wildlife (and of particular interest to visitors). Results will be used to produce a management plan for the precious terrestrial habitats and species around the Ramsar site. This will help to raise awareness of local biodiversity, whilst stimulating activities and businesses which are sensitive to the value and fragility of the natural environment - such as eco-tourism. Bryan Manco has been recruited by the National Trust, as Project Officer. From his base on Middle Caicos, Bryan will co-ordinate project activities over the coming months, with the help of the newly formed Project Committee. Liaison with the Turks & Caicos National Museum will ensure that archaeological and heritage sites are not forgotten.



Ponds represent an important habitat on Middle Caicos

The Darwin Project has attracted the support of the Governor, and the Chief Minister and his colleagues, and will work closely with Departments of the TCI Government. The outputs of the project will be available for integration into the local planning process and environmental education programmes, ensuring that biodiversity is increasingly appreciated and protected in TCI.

## Project Officer Appointed

Bryan (Naqqi) Manco is the new Darwin Project Officer. Bryan hails from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, where he worked as a Zoo Instructor and Animal Keeper in the Pittsburgh Zoo's Educational Department. He is a graduate of Shippensburg University, with a BA in English and a concentration in Botany and Field Biology. His interests include animals, plants and the world of nature, as well as the cultures and languages of the world.

Bryan will work under the management of the Executive Director of the Turks & Caicos National Trust, to implement a detailed programme of work developed by the Darwin Project Committee. Some of the key tasks will be co-ordinating arrangements for visits by volunteer project scientists, and recruiting volunteers from the local community to work alongside them to benefit from exchange of skills and knowledge. Bryan will organise biodiversity survey work and biological monitoring by local people between and following visits by teams of



Bryan Manco arriving in Middle Caicos

project scientists; collate data arising from this work, and track down existing information on the biodiversity of the study area, and key heritage sites.



Bryan says, "I am looking forward to working with the people of Middle Caicos to learn more about the unique aspects of the island, including culture, folk art, history, flora and fauna... and to working with the National Trust in our effort to preserve the natural areas and special culture of the islands."

The Project Officer provides a key link between the Darwin Project Committee, TCI Government representatives, other project stakeholders and visiting project scientists. Bryan will also be organising regular meetings with Middle Caicos communities, to communicate progress on the project and gather feedback from local residents.

And, in his remaining time, Bryan will establish and maintain an information management system for mapping and storing biological records, and co-ordinate the development and distribution of environmental education materials, drawing on information from the project, as well as co-ordinating the Trust's eco-tourism initiatives in Middle Caicos.

It is a good job that Bryan is an enthusiast!

## Formation of the Project Committee

One of the most exciting aspects of the Darwin Project is that it aims to pull together a very wide variety of people, with a whole range of insight and expertise, to pool their efforts and exchange skills and knowledge. A Project Committee has been appointed, to represent some of this breadth of experience. It includes people from Middle Caicos and elsewhere in TCI (representatives of governmental and voluntary bodies, and local volunteers) as well as the organisations joining together to lead the project.

The main role of the Committee will be to support the project and its personnel. In particular, it aims to identify novel ways to progress conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, by drawing on the combined knowledge and creativity of its diverse membership.

In line with the policies of the Turks & Caicos National Trust and UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, and the approach of the Darwin Initiative itself, it is anticipated that the current group will evolve into a local committee of the TCNT when the Darwin Project is completed.

The present committee membership is:

Ethlyn Gibbs Williams, TCNT, Executive Director (Co-Chair)

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

Bryan Naqqi Manco, TCNT, Darwin Project Officer (Secretary)

Norman Hamilton, TCNT, Council Vice-Chairman

Kathleen Wood, Biologist, TCI

Mark Day, Director, TCI Dept of Environmental & Coastal Resources

Dottis Arthur, District Commissioner, Middle Caicos

Cardinol Arthur, Conch Bar, Middle Caicos

Alton Higgs, Lorimers, Middle Caicos

Clyde Robinson, TCI Planning Dept

Sara Cross, Director for Development, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

Dr Oliver Cheesman, Co-ordinator, Characterisation and Conservation of Biodiversity, CABI Bioscience

## Related Events - Small Business Workshops

The Turks & Caicos National Trust is pursuing a number of its own initiatives, which complement the activities of the Darwin Project and will help ensure that it has a lasting legacy in TCI. In January and February 2000, the Trust conducted small business workshops on Middle Caicos, which aimed to:

1. Engage local entrepreneurs in exercises to help organise their ideas.
2. Assist business people with respect to starting and managing a small business.
3. Obtain information from individuals to make sessions relevant to their needs.
4. Provide information to enable participants to complete a simple business plan.
5. Expose participants to samples of relevant documents required for establishing and managing a business.
6. Provide Tour Guides with additional valuable information on historic sites and other places of significance to incorporate into their presentations.
7. Provide basic First Aid Training.

Role-play was one activity used to emphasise statements and reinforce points raised in the discussions and presentations. Participants were placed in various situations to see how they would deal with visitors to the islands with varying interests.

The workshop setting also allowed for small working groups. Group exercises involved: identifying a business; designing a flyer for publicity; and making a presentation on the business. Participants had a chance to use their creativity and presentation skills. Other activities included packing and wrapping; some items were products made by the participants. All participants were given receipt books and business cards to help them with their record keeping and promotion of their business.

Participants from all three settlements on Middle Caicos were actively involved in the sessions, which covered topics including:

- Product
- Promotion
- Pricing
- Distribution
- Effectiveness as a customer service person
- Packaging
- Customer service
- Business plan
- Professionalism

At the end of the last session, much appreciation was extended to the Trust for conducting these training exercises. The Trust will maintain contact with this interest group, and hopes to conduct an evaluation exercise in July to determine the effectiveness of the small business workshops.

## Future Events – Biodiversity Surveys



Groups to be studied in Darwin Project biodiversity surveys include those pictured above: birds, plants, amphibians and insects

Over the next two years, the Darwin Project will assemble a valuable store of information on the biodiversity and other features of terrestrial habitats around the Ramsar site. Fred Burton of the Cayman Islands National Trust (in his limited spare time) is working on a habitat map, using satellite images of the Turks & Caicos Islands. This map, and records of particular species collated from existing publications and reports, will provide a foundation for biological surveys of the area.

A number of scientific specialists from the UK, US and elsewhere, are giving their time free to the project. These scientists will conduct biodiversity surveys, concentrating on plants, birds, bats, reptiles, amphibians and insects. The surveys will be combined with training exercises in identification and monitoring techniques, made available to a local team of National Trust personnel and volunteers, Government personnel, and other interested parties. The role of local residents, who already have a unique knowledge of local wildlife and other natural resources, will be critical to the process, and visiting scientists are likely to learn a great deal from them. Biodiversity

surveys and training exercises will take place at the end of 2000, and followed up towards the end of 2001.

The information on species and their distributions, collected by visiting scientists and the local team, will be fed into a biological records database, to be managed by the National Trust. Knowledge of where interesting or charismatic species occur will allow key wildlife sites to be identified. These, and important heritage sites, provide a basis for a more sustainable form of tourism, drawing visitors who appreciate the diversity and beauty of the natural environment.

Specimens of plants and insects will be collected, which will form the basis of biodiversity reference collections. These will be held in the US and UK initially, while the identification of each species is checked by experts, and then returned to TCI when facilities for their long-term storage and curation are available. The biological records database and reference collections will be built up over the coming years, and will provide a valuable resource for future generations of Turks & Caicos residents and visiting researchers.



## The Darwin Initiative



The UK Government's *Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species* was launched at the 1992 'Earth Summit' in Rio. Administered through the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR), the Darwin Initiative supports research and training projects which apply British expertise to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity. Projects are specifically targeted at countries which are rich in biodiversity, but where local resources for its characterisation and conservation are limited. The Darwin Initiative encourages a collaborative approach, matching British expertise with local institutions or communities in the host country. So far, the Initiative has supported 214 projects, in over 80 countries around the world. Individual project grants are not large in international terms, but Darwin Initiative projects are widely recognised as distinctive and innovative, and have a well-deserved reputation for high

quality and scientific excellence. Guided by the principles of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Darwin Initiative has already made, and continues to make, a real and lasting impact on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity worldwide.

## CABI Bioscience

### CABI Bioscience

A Division of CAB INTERNATIONAL

*CABI Bioscience* is the research and training Division of CAB International (CABI), an international, not-for-profit organisation, which aims to improve human welfare worldwide through the dissemination, application and generation of scientific knowledge. CABI's particular focus is on the support of sustainable development, with an emphasis on agriculture, forestry, human health and the management of natural resources. The organisation has 40 Member Countries around the world, and draws on over 80 years of experience in its field. CABI Bioscience brings together experts in biosystematics, molecular biology, ecology, crop protection, biological control and other related areas. The multidisciplinary skills of these scientists are applied to problem solving and capacity building, particularly in relation to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, agricultural production, and key environmental issues, such as invasive species and their control. CABI Bioscience operates from Centres in the UK, Malaysia, Pakistan, Kenya, Trinidad and Switzerland, and has many collaborative partners around the world. With these partners, CABI Bioscience is working towards solutions for some of the most pressing global challenges of today. For more information, visit [www.cabi.org](http://www.cabi.org).

## UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum



The UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) are important parts of the UK. Although small in size, they are home to many animals and plants, some not found anywhere else in the world. The UKOTs are not foreign. Because they are British, they are not eligible for most international grant sources - but they are not eligible either for most domestic British ones!

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum works to help people in the Territories to conserve their biodiversity, unique species and ecosystems, as well as other aspects of our shared heritage. We do this by providing assistance, expertise, information and networking between organisations in the UK and in the Overseas Territories.

Forum projects are based on sustaining biodiversity while contributing to the well-being of the local community. The Forum brings together non-governmental conservation and scientific organisations in the UK and the UKOTs. It works closely with appropriate government departments. The Forum relies on subscriptions, donations, and project grants. It maintains a small UK base so that most resources can be applied to conservation efforts by its local partners in the Overseas Territories. Individuals and corporate organisations can support this valuable work by becoming a Friend of Overseas Territories Conservation or by making a donation to the Forum. Please contact Frances Marks, Forum Co-ordinator, 15 Inshall Road, Chipping Norton OX7 5LF, UK. Email: [fmmarks@ukotcf.org](mailto:fmmarks@ukotcf.org). Web: [www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org)

## Turks & Caicos National Trust



The Turks & Caicos National Trust is the only statutory, independent organisation in the Turks & Caicos Islands responsible for safeguarding the environmental, cultural and historical heritage of the islands for present and future generations. One of the Trust's statutory roles is holding environmentally important land in trust for the country, and the TCI Government has started transferring some such lands to the Trust to hold and manage.

The Trust works in partnership with the TCI government, local businesses, national and international conservation organisations, schools and the community and is a popular and respected organisation amongst local people. The Trust plays a unique role in its partnership approach to sustainable conservation, the protection of the natural environment and promotion of environmental awareness and responsibility. Over the last five years the Trust has successfully implemented a varied programme of environmental initiatives and projects.

The Trust is supported by membership fees, private sponsorship and project grants and fulfils its mission by implementing a range of sustainable projects and initiatives, some of which are revenue generating and used to finance new programmes.