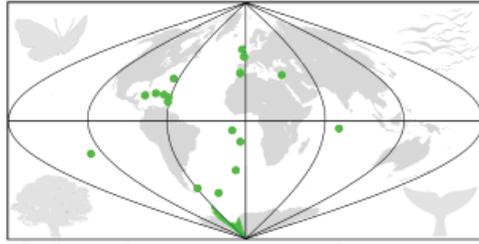


30-year Anniversary

OVERSEAS TERRITORIES



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FORUM NEWS 47

OCTOBER 2017

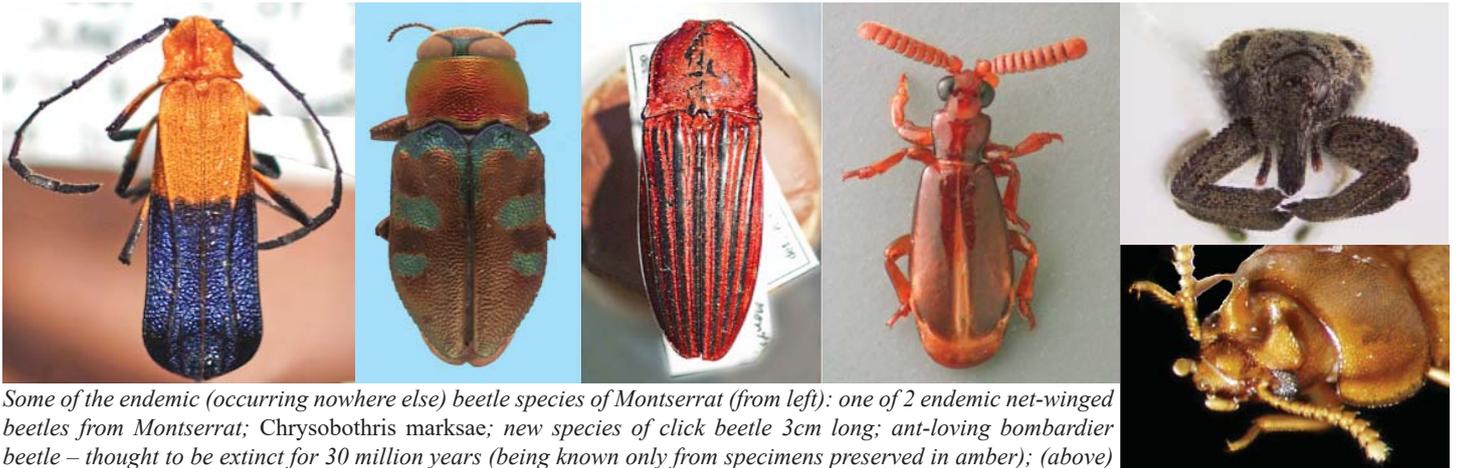
www.ukotcf.org

Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat project progresses

The half-year since our update in *Forum News 46* has seen a great deal of further progress in our joint projects in Montserrat. The main one of these is the project entitled *Maximising long-term survival prospects of Montserrat's endemic species and ecosystem-services*, which is part-funded by UK Government's Darwin Plus initiative (see logos at bottom of page for all main partners). Together with several related complementary projects, we are using the collective popular title of *Saving Our Special Nature of Montserrat*.

on sustainable use of the natural environment. These elements are:

1. Making existing information that is not readily accessible easily available to Montserrat's conservationists, planners, students, tourism enterprises and others – and enabling local students and others to develop such studies in the future.
2. Facilitating local land-owners, businesses and communities to take responsibility for conservation in the new *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* initiative.



Some of the endemic (occurring nowhere else) beetle species of Montserrat (from left): one of 2 endemic net-winged beetles from Montserrat; *Chrysobothris marksae*; new species of click beetle 3cm long; ant-loving bombardier beetle – thought to be extinct for 30 million years (being known only from specimens preserved in amber); (above) ant-loving weevil, which has South American relatives; (below) new Montserrat darkling beetle 3mm long. Photos:

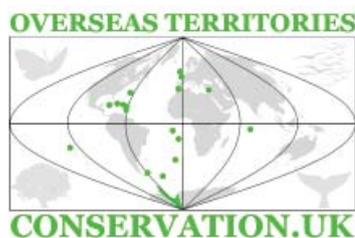
Dr Ivie, Montana State University

We report these in our project newsletters (available at www.ukotcf.org/WGnewsletterlist/WGNewsletterslinks.pdf), but include below summaries of some of the main features.

This project centres on four main elements, combining to maximise the chances of survival of Montserrat's endemic and other native species, and rare ecosystems, while enhancing the capacity of Montserrat's badly stretched conservationists, and supporting prospects for better employment and economy based

3. Bringing together local stakeholders, with varying interests and viewpoints, to reach a consensus on what to aim for in the future management of the southern two-thirds of the island; these areas have severe access constraints due to the volcanic threat, but hold habitats of crucial importance for the survival of Montserrat's wildlife.
4. Helping Montserrat's physical planners put in place – without major cost – systems to meet the challenge of constructing

continued on next page



UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum



a new capital outside the volcanic zone while minimising any potential negative effects of the wildlife already under pressure.

Hidden gems: Montserrat's insect fauna

When the project partners first drafted their application to the Darwin Plus initiative, they were inspired by the words of the Minister for Agriculture, Trade, Land, Housing and Environment, Hon. Claude Hogan, back in 2015 at a workshop on Environment Impact Assessment organised by UKOTCF with the Montserrat National Trust. He said that we must do everything we can to protect every “nook and cranny of our island”. This couldn't be any more true, especially when we consider the insect world. They are often hidden in every “nook and cranny” where we don't tend to see them. Yet, they are working hard for us everyday in many different ways. Montserrat is particularly rich in insects compared to many of its neighbouring islands. More study needs to be done and, of course, they need to be protected and conserved.

Dr Mike Ivie is a Professor in Entomology at Montana State University (MSU) in the United States. He is the curator of the West Indian Beetle Fauna collection (WIBF). He has been visiting Montserrat for over 20 years and, during this time, he has amassed an impressive number of specimens. MSU is located in Bozeman, which benefits from a very dry climate with very low humidity, making it the perfect place to hold and preserve a biological collection of this kind. Some of the specimens originate from scientists who first explored Montserrat over a hundred years ago.

Between 2000 and 2005, Dr Ivie was part of a team that conducted a biological survey of the Centre Hills. Working closely with many Montserratians, they collected an estimated 1.5 million insect specimens. 13,044 of these were mounted back at the laboratory in Montana.

It takes a long time to analyse the specimens, and often there are so few specialists available that some may not be analysed for many years. Dr Justin Runyon, an associate researcher at MSU, recently published a paper on the long-legged flies of Montserrat, without ever visiting the island! His expertise helped to identify flies (see *SOS Nature of Montserrat 4*, pages 13, 14 & 17), which were collected incidentally during many visits to the island, when

other insects were the main target. They were stored in the laboratory until Justin started to study them.

The beetle fauna of Montserrat is now quite well known. 728 species of beetles are found



Areas under bark are very important habitats for beetles and other insects. Frank Etzner levers bark off dead trees, to inspect the rich insect-hunting area under it. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski



Part of the audience – who, to their own surprise, became insect enthusiasts – attending the lecture at Montserrat National Trust. Photo: Catherine Wensink

on the island. Of these, 81 are single-island endemics: that is, they are found nowhere else on earth; 53 are exotics (*i.e.* introduced by people); and 273 have an unknown status.

As part of the current project, Dr Ivie and his team re-visited the island in June and July 2017. The team included Dr Justin Runyon, PhD candidate Frank Etzner and Donna Ivie (see *SOS Nature of Montserrat 4*, pages 13-16). The purpose of this visit was to see if what they think they know about the beetle fauna is correct, and to extend the survey. They estimated that, for beetle species, the inventory is 90% complete. There were several habitats where the 2000-5 surveys did not collect. These were coastal areas and land associated with agriculture. There were also several species from historic records that were not found. Dr Runyon was looking for long-legged flies, as they are largely undescribed for Montserrat but provide important functions including predating on pest species.

Beetles and other invertebrates are crucial for livelihoods and the economy. They provide Montserrat with many services, which go largely unnoticed. These include: pollination, pest-control, food sources to other, larger animals, and a role in nutrient-cycling. Oxygen produced by healthy vegetation and clean water production depend largely on soil-quality. Insects stimulate and accelerate the breakdown of organic materials by other organisms, such as soil-mites, bacteria and fungi. This enhances soil-fertility. Some insects mix organic and inorganic material, which increases the soil's ability to capture and store water. For example, this can be seen clearly on Montserrat. When insects are doing their work, there will be no negative effect on the marine environment as, usually, fresh clean water runs from the Centre Hills along the ghauts into the sea. However, when insects on land are not able to provide these functions, *e.g.* after extreme rainfall, silt-water runs on to the reefs and damages them.

Dr Ivie gave a word of caution about human activities that modify the natural environment and its complex workings. “The fact that nature works is a mystery. It's a puzzle with many pieces. We risk ecological collapse if we lose one piece of that puzzle. We are talking about complex processes and we don't really know the impacts that the loss of each part of the process would have. We fool around with them at our own risk.” But he also talks about what the island has to offer the outside world in terms of its biodiversity and its welcoming community.

In order to transfer his enthusiasm for insects to the people of Montserrat, on 27th June, Dr Ivie, together with Dr Justin Runyon, gave a lecture on the island's unique invertebrate fauna at the Montserrat National Trust. It was attended by 54 people including: HE Governor Elizabeth Carriere, school children, students, farmers, government departments, non-government organisations, private sector, and the news media.

The full lecture was also recorded to broadcast a few days later on Montserrat's radio station ZJB. Several attendees requested that

the lecture be made widely available on the Trust's website as it was so interesting but a lot to take in.

Dr Ivie believes that access to information on the invertebrate fauna of the island is the next step in the process. Currently, a secure and stable database houses the data at Ohio State University, on behalf of a consortium of universities. It meets all international standards and is funded by an endowment, which means that funding for it is unlikely to end. It also means there are data-managers to fix bugs (computer bugs that is) and to ensure that it is constantly updated. James Beck at MSU has developed a portal that will sit in front of the database so that the data can be accessed readily on Montserrat (see *SOS Nature of Montserrat* 4, pages 5-6). It will be possible to extract data from this for research, analysis, mapping, student projects etc. Training workshops for this took place on 30th June. These included participants from Montserrat National Trust, Department of Environment, Statistics Department, GIS Specialist from Physical Planning Unit, Montserrat Community College as well as several interested students, and project organisers from Montana State University and UKOTCF.

Adopt a Home for Wildlife gains more partners

In *SOS Nature of Montserrat Issue 2*, we gave the background to the setting up, as part of the current project, of *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*. Through this, the Montserrat National Trust (with the support of UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, the Darwin Plus fund and the other partners in the present project) aims: to conserve and enhance the beauty of Montserrat; preserve the fauna and flora of Montserrat; make the public aware of the value and beauty of the island's heritage; pursue a policy of conservation; and act in an advisory capacity.

MNT is looking for partners in the community to lend a hand in keeping the island beautiful, clean and full of unique wildlife and habitats.

The *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* in Montserrat programme allows individuals, organisations, community groups and businesses to agree to maintain and protect a public space for a year at a time, with renewals annually. The programme runs all year round, and gives everyone the opportunity to make a difference in their local area.

New site: Ventana, Garibaldi Hill

Tropical dry forest is one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world. In Montserrat, this occurs at lower levels of the hill than the rain- and cloud-forest, but many areas have been lost because this level is the main area for townships. We were delighted when Mr Tim Orton told Mike and Ann Pienkowski of UKOTCF when they met him by chance that he would love to manage the area of dry forest around his house with guidance from Montserrat National Trust as part of the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* programme.

Tim had been looking for some time for the right place to retire. He fell in love with his present home, *Ventana*, a few years ago - despite it being grey and covered in ash at the time! It is now very rich tropical dry forest. Like most areas of Montserrat, it does suffer from the presence of several alien invasive plants. However, under the guidance of the project, Tim will be removing the invasive plants which harm native vegetation, and replacing them with native species reared in Montserrat National Trust's new native plant nursery. This will fit his philosophy about how to manage the natural areas: "to do as little as possible to the land, so that it can



Above: Tim Orton (centre) discusses with Catherine Wensink (UKOTCF) and Nicolas Tirard (MNT) the view of the tropical dry forest behind his house. Below: Tim leads Frank Etzler (Montana State University) and Nicolas Tirard (MNT), up a path inside his forest.

Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski



develop naturally.”

New sites: Underwater and shores at Carr's Bay and Little Bay

Montserrat Island Dive Centre, led by Jay Steed and Charley Bartlett, have added two new sites to the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* initiative. These are Carr's Bay and Little Bay. For both sites, the work includes both underwater conservation and beach clean-up operations, all tackled on a voluntary basis. Charley is a PADI (Professional Association of Diving Instructors) *AWARE Dive Against Debris* Instructor, and regularly trains other willing divers on the importance of removing marine litter, so that they may spread their impact even further from the shores of Montserrat.

On a monthly basis, a team of divers takes to the waters to collect marine debris from the reef while a second team collects along



Some of the volunteers in action, below and (on next page) above water. Photos: Montserrat Island Dive Centre



the shoreline. The work undertaken includes delicate removal of fishing line and clothing entangled around and smothering corals, as well as the careful retrieval of beverage cans, bottles and other trash items that lay strewn across the reef. On average, the dive team remove 30 kg of debris from underwater while, at the same time, a further 30 kg are collected from the beach in an attempt to stop the rubbish even making it to the waterline. The majority of trash collected is of plastic origin; along the shoreline, polystyrene and plastic cutlery are the biggest burden, whereas underwater plastic bags, cutlery and cups usually come out on top.

A range of positive responses from the island has ensued; volunteers have stepped forward from government offices and school groups as well as local conservation organisations and concerned members of the community. Montserrat Island Dive Centre has been requested to present their team's findings and speak publicly at different events in the hope that trends can change and a greener future can endure.

The Carr's Bay site is adjacent to the Collins Ghaut and Carr's Bay terrestrial site, which sees a great accumulation of debris washed down from the hillside residential development. Little Bay is the site most commonly referred to for tourism and port activity development. Future hopes are that general education and proper waste disposal become a stronger focus, to minimise the overall effect a small island community like Montserrat can have on the ocean.

New site: Belham River mouth at Old Road Bay

Mr Dwayne Hixon, already an "Adopter" for the Runaway Ghaut (see *SOS Nature Newsletter 3*, pages 3-4), has *Adopted* an additional *Home for Wildlife*. This is part of the area of new ground at Belham River Mouth over-run by introduced alien invasive *Casuarina* (see image below left, taken in late 2015 by Catherine Wensink).

As part of his development on land leased from the Government, he is working with the Montserrat National Trust to remove most of the *Casuarina* trees, as can be seen in the photo below taken from the slopes of Garibaldi Hill (photo below right, taken in June



2017 by Dr Mike Pienkowski).

List of current and planned sites in Adopt a Home for Wildlife initiative

Runaway Ghaut - Dwayne Hixon, real estate agent and contractor

This is a historical site adjacent to the Centre Hills forest reserve. It is important because it carries away surface run-off, a natural process, which limits localised flooding and erosion. If it is filled with rubbish, then it will not be able to do this. At present, there are several plant species, not normally found here, which are growing out of control. They threaten native plants and make it difficult to use pathways. Rats have been found in this area feeding on fruit-trees and rubbish, but there is also evidence of some of native wildlife using this area. In order to encourage more people to visit this site, some actions such as some natural landscaping are needed to create a cleaner, more beautiful, natural area for all to enjoy. The old MNT nature trail, disrupted by earlier road-works, can be reinstated as part of this.

Belham River Mouth, Old Road Bay - Dwayne Hixon, real estate agent and contractor

See above.

Ventana, Garibaldi Hills - Tim Orton

An extremely important area of globally rare and threatened tropical dry forest (see above).

Little Bay (underwater and beach) - Montserrat Island Dive Centre

Carr's Bay (underwater and beach) - Montserrat Island Dive Centre

See above on both of these marine sites.

Colin's Ghaut & Carr's Bay (land) - Julian Romeo, hardware store owner

In the north of the island, this area is one of the most built-up. It is important to protect this site from rubbish and litter, because these attract mosquitoes and other pests, and because these materials end up in the ocean where most cannot break down.

Nantes River ghaut - Julian Romeo, hardware store owner

This ghaut is one of the major water streams located just north of Salem. This site is important because again it helps to prevent erosion and flooding in times of heavy rain. Some dumping of rubbish has occurred which not only blocks this channel but also creates a dangerous environment for people and for wildlife. Every part of the island needs to be cherished by improving areas that have perhaps been forgotten about, including by depositing of rubbish in the correct way. Conducting regular clean-ups can restore and protect our island's natural areas for everyone.



Marguerita Bay and Brimm's Ghaut

Marguerita Bay is one of the last wetlands on island. The area includes some dry forest habitat. Seabirds can often be seen here including frigate birds, terns etc.

Soldier Ghaut - possible new site (see *SOS Nature of Montserrat issue 2*)

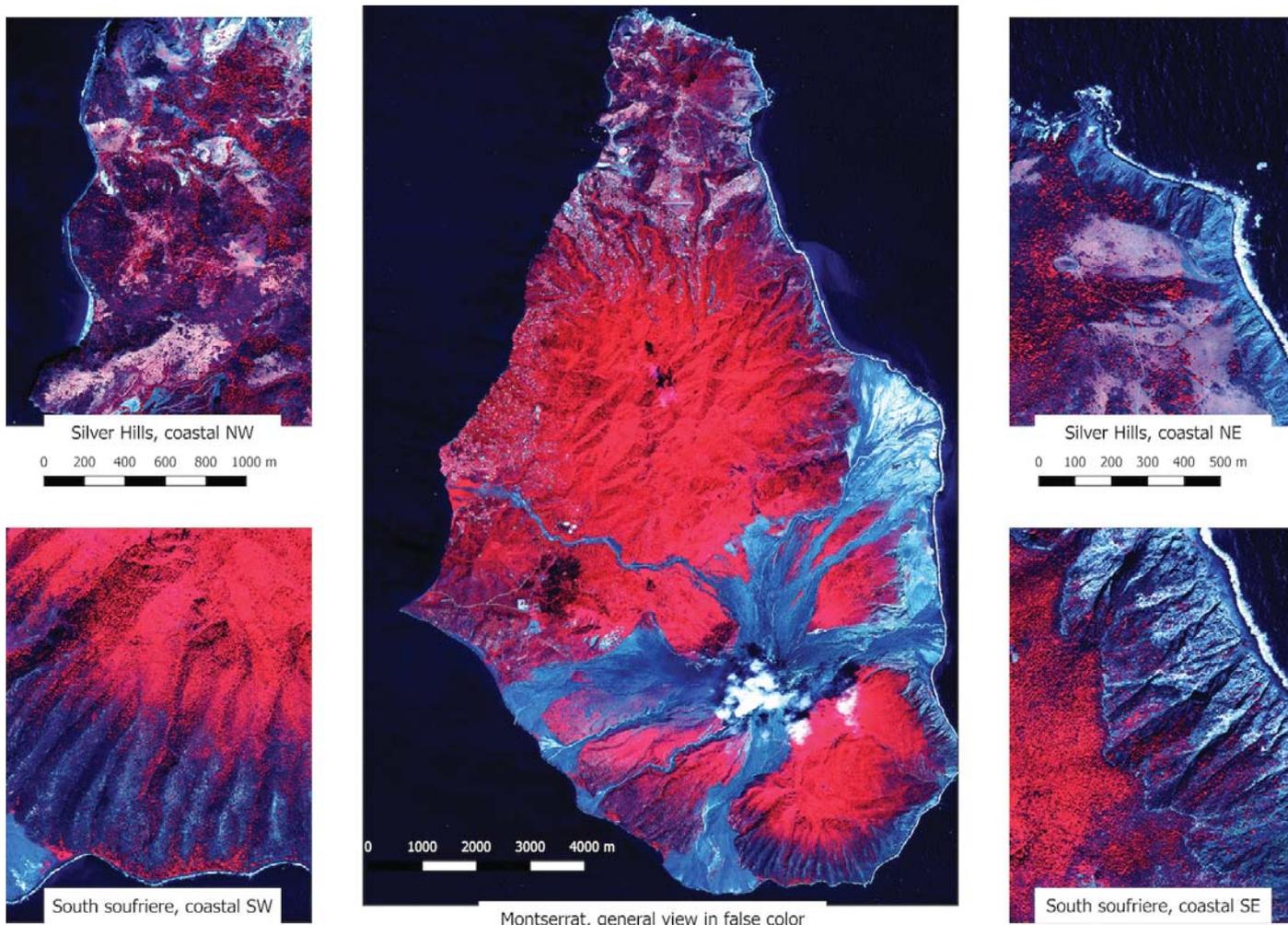
Third workshop for all stakeholders to explore options for the future of the south of Montserrat

The third workshop, in a series of four, that bring together stakeholders involved in different aspects of life on Montserrat to explore options for the future use of the south, was held at the Montserrat National Trust (MNT) on the 23rd June 2017. Project Officer, Nicolas Tirard (based at the MNT) was joined on-island by Dr Mike Pienkowski (UKOTCF Chairman), Mrs Catherine Wensink (UKOTCF Executive Director) and Dr Nicola Weber (UKOTCF Conservation Officer), who jointly facilitated the workshop. The aim of this meeting was to build on ideas proposed in the previous two, by gathering existing knowledge and data on all aspects of the south of Montserrat and, where possible, geo-referencing these (to their relevant places on the island), using recently acquired, high-resolution, satellite imagery of the island from the DigitalGlobe Foundation (www.digitalglobe.com).

org). The collection of such information will help in the development of a shared vision for how the restricted access areas can be used in the future, and the development of a management plan/strategy to move this forward. The team would like to thank UKOTCF's experienced volunteer, Duncan Hutt, for his help in satellite image analysis.

Catherine and Nicolas engaged the participants by outlining insights gained from the satellite maps, for example visualising areas of vegetation. It was clear that there were areas in the south, around Roche's in the south Soufrière Hills range that appeared to be as productive as the Centre Hills, as we would expect from James 'Scriber' Daley's reports in previous workshops. In addition to these rain- and cloud-forests, there are important areas of tropical dry forest, an extremely important, but relatively rare and declining, ecosystem throughout the world (*see images below*). The team explained that, while the satellite imagery can show the areas of high productivity, there is a need for 'ground-truthing' the natures of the forest in the south for more detailed analysis. These will help assess whether these are still largely intact native habitat or the extents that these species are spreading (as reported in the workshop by Department of Environment representatives who have been in that area most recently).

In previous workshops there was agreement that particular areas of



The 4 insets allow one to visualise the impact of goats on the coastal dry forest. In places of the Silver Hills (top right and top left), one can see the presence of large patches of light pink, that are absent from the South Soufriere Hills (low right and low left). On the ground, those patches correspond to savanna, with very limited biodiversity. It will be important to prevent over-grazing in the south following in the steps of the north. Healthy tropical dry forest (a rare and threatened ecosystem globally) appears as dark blue, and one can see that the largest patches of this colour lie around the South Soufriere Hill area. One can note that:

- Dry forest in the North is being threatened by goats.
- Dry forest on the west foothills of the Centre Hill is largely gone as a consequence of built development.
- Dry forest on the east foothills of the Centre Hills is threatened by further built development.

Protecting the South Soufriere Hill, mainly from feral animals, as humans cannot access, might be the best way to preserve this ecosystem in Montserrat (as well as particular areas further north – see pages 6-9).

Satellite image courtesy of DigitalGlobe Foundation (www.digitalglobe.com); analysis by Nicolas Tirard, MNT.



The workshop discussions draw to a close, before Minister of Agriculture, Trade, Lands, Housing and Environment, Hon. Claude Hogan (near right), addresses the gathering. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

the south should be preserved for Montserrat's special biodiversity, and discussion of invasive species promoted participants to consider the effects that unregulated feral animals were currently having in that area. James 'Scriber' Daley of the Department of Environment described damage to the native vegetation that he had observed from feral goats, and also the spread of invasive vegetation that can outcompete native species. Dr Mike Ivie, an entomologist from Montana State University, talked about the biological importance of this area in the south, commenting on its intactness and remarking that endemic invertebrates common in Roche's are now rare in the Centre Hills. He described how beetles are good indicators of biodiversity, and so the numbers found here are indicative of its health. Dr Ivie described this area as an ark of biodiversity for Montserrat, with the potential to repopulate other areas of the island should anything else happen.

The workshop participants discussed in more detail activities that had previously been suggested for areas in the south that include environment protection, job creation and growth of tourism. Information and ideas were gathered to help assess their feasibility, taking into account practicalities such as safety, local resources and capacity, demand and funding. Over the coming months, the team will be compiling all the information that they have collected through the workshops from those knowing the ground situation,

meetings during visits to the island, and also consultations with overseas experts. This will be put into a first draft of a Strategy for the South of Montserrat which will be the focus of discussions at the fourth and final workshop to be held in November 2017 at the Montserrat National Trust.

Minister Hogan Hogan ended the session by thanking everybody for their attendance and participation. He emphasised his support for the project and the need for a working plan for if and when the south of the island becomes more useable and the need for more immediate interim measures. He hoped that the plan resulting from these workshops will be good tool to guide the work itself and also for seeking funding and further collaboration to bring additional capacity, skills and training to the island.

Incorporating environmental considerations into physical planning

The consultation and analysis work undertaken by Dr Jo Treweek and Jennifer Hruza with Montserratian colleagues was described in *Forum News* 46: 20-21. Since then, work has continued with discussions as to how best to incorporate the conclusions and recommendations into operational procedures.

Planning matters in the Cayman Islands

Environmental Impact Assessment needed before rock removal

The recent general election in Cayman led to a change in government, and there have been concerns that environmental matters may not be so strongly supported in the future. However, with the National Conservation Law in place, and a legally binding Environment Charter Commitment, the National Conservation Council and the Department of Environment are firm in their advice to Government that an environmental impact assessment is required for a proposal to dig up 1225 linear feet of beach in the Seven Mile Beach Marine Park area, to remove beachrock in preparation for another five-star resort.

The full article can be read here: <https://caymannewsservice.com/2017/06/ncc-stands-firm-on-eia-for-7mb/>

Economics of the proposed Cruise terminal

It has been suggested that Cayman will need to attract between 2.3 and 2.5 million cruise passengers per year if the proposed cruise berthing facility in George Town is to be financially viable. The number comes from the latest, as yet unpublished, consultants' report. There is also concern that Cayman's more popular attractions, such as Stingray City, are already over-subscribed.

Balancing the experiences of overnight guests with accommodating cruise passengers has long been a concern for many of those involved in tourism, not just in Cayman but across the Caribbean. It is suggested that the need to increase cruise passengers by such a significant amount could lead to a decline in the overnight visitors.

To read the full article see:

<https://caymannewsservice.com/2017/07/2%c2%bdm-visitors-needed-to-make-cruise-port-viable/>



The design of the proposed cruise berthing facility in George Town. Image: Cruise Port Insider / World Maritime News

2nd Meeting of UKOT & CD Environment Ministers

Representatives from 13 UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and Crown Dependencies (CDs) from as far afield as Bermuda, Pitcairn and the British Virgin Islands participated in discussions on 27th and 28th April on the Channel Island of Alderney to discuss the future of the environment in their jurisdictions. The aim of the meeting was to develop the benefits of joint and collaborative working, and discuss common priorities and approaches to negotiations with the UK Government.

This was only the second meeting of its kind, the first having been hosted by the Government of Gibraltar in 2015. The Environment Ministers' Council was chaired jointly by Victor Brownlees, Alderney's Chief Executive, and Dr John Cortés, Minister for the Environment of Gibraltar and was made possible by the work of the UKOTCF.

The Ministers' Council has published its statement, which has been sent to those UK Government ministers with responsibilities in this area, and which expresses regret that UK Government again failed to send a representative to the meeting. The statement made a number of key points:

- In terms of UK's responsibility for global biodiversity, the UKOTs are many times more important than metropolitan Britain, and these ecosystems are of great economic importance.
- The territory ministers expressed their concerns that UK Government no longer represents the territories adequately at international conferences, but now no longer includes in its delegations representatives of the territories. They expressed pleasure at the joint working by territory governments with UKOTCF and other NGOs, both to monitor progress in environmental conservation and to undertake some of the actions that achieve this. However, they were concerned at the

lack of continuity or a coordinated approach to the territories by UK Government.

- The ministers' statement noted that UK Government's financial contribution to meet its commitments to conservation in the UKOTs does not meet the requirements identified by its own agencies nor by House of Commons Select Committees, and is not deployed in the most effective ways. It regretted also the loss of UK Government financial support: to help NGOs deploy volunteers to fill some of the needs, conferences to help conservation practitioners to be more effective, and for environmental education – all vital for the territories' futures. It regretted also that work in support of territory conservation was still not given support from UK National Lottery funds. Although the territories themselves, helped by NGOs, continued to identify new funding, larger contributions from UK Government remained essential.
- The statement notes that the departure of UK from the European Union will remove a major funding source achieved only recently after many years of lobbying by NGOs. The UKOT Ministers echoed the recommendation of the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee that UK Government should replace the potential environmental conservation funding lost to the territories as a consequence of 'Brexit', as there is no other source to avoid this set-back to conservation.
- The ministers identified other negative consequences on their environments of 'Brexit', and called on UK Government to act to mitigate this. Such measures include assistance to territories to join other international agreements, and strong support to Gibraltar in resisting damage to its marine and other environment by Spanish activities. Gibraltar has been



The meeting in session. From left: Mrs Michele Christian, Divisional Manager, Environmental, Conservation & Natural Resources, Government of Pitcairn; Dr Richard Axton, Chairman of Council, La Société Sercquoise, on behalf of Sark Agriculture and Environment Committee of the Chief Pleas [Administration] of Sark; Mr Chris Carnegy, UK Representative Tristan da Cunha, on behalf of the Island Council; Hon. Claude Hogan, Montserrat (part hidden); Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF; Dr Liesl Mesilio-Torres, Chief Executive Officer, Gibraltar Department of the Environment, Heritage & Climate-Change; Mr Stephen Warr, Senior Environment Officer, Gibraltar Department of the Environment, Heritage & Climate-Change; Hon. Dr John Cortés, Gibraltar; Mr John Young, Planning Officer, States of Alderney; Ms Claire Thorpe, People & Wildlife Officer, Alderney Wildlife Trust; Mr Victor Brownlees, Alderney; Mr Paul Veron, Economic Development Officer, States of Alderney; Mr Adrian Lewis, Chief Secretary to the Committee for Environment and Infrastructure, States of Guernsey (and Designate Acting Chief Executive, States of Alderney); Deputy Barry Brehaut, President of the Committee for the Environment & Infrastructure, States of Guernsey; Deputy Steven Luce, Minister for the Environment, Jersey; Hon. Geoffrey Boot MHK, Isle of Man; Hon. Kedrick D Pickering MD, British Virgin Islands; Hon. Sylvan Richards MP, Bermuda; Mr Willie Peggie, Director for Environment / Deputy Chief Officer, States of Jersey (right edge) Photos: Catherine Wensink, UKOTCF



*Conference participants at Island Hall, Alderney
Standing (left to right):*

- *Mr John Young, Planning Officer, States of Alderney*
- *Mrs Catherine Wensink, Executive Director, UKOTCF*
- *Dr Sandra Besson, Deputy Director of the BVI London Office,*
- *Ms Sarah Barnsley, Conservation Officer, UKOTCF, record of meeting and support*
- *Mrs Ann Pienkowski, Hon. Environmental Education Coordinator, UKOTCF – videoing the meeting and support*
- *Mr Willie Peggie, Director for Environment / Deputy Chief Officer, States of Jersey*
- *Mr Victor Brownlees, Chief Executive, States of Alderney*
- *Mr Chris Carnegy, UK Representative Tristan da Cunha, on behalf of the Island Council*
- *Hon. Geoffrey Boot MHK, Minister of Environment, Food & Agriculture, Isle of Man*
- *Hon. Kedrick D Pickering MD, Deputy Premier & Minister for Natural Resources & Labour, British Virgin Islands*
- *Mr Adrian Lewis, Designate Acting Chief Executive, States of Alderney*
- *Ms Marva J. O'Brien, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Government of Bermuda*
- *Hon. Sylvan Richards MP, Minister of Environment, Government of Bermuda*
- *Ms Norma Paris, Chair of General Services Committee, States of Alderney*
- *Dr Liesl Mesilio-Torres, Chief Executive Officer, Gibraltar Department of the Environment, Heritage & Climate-Change*
- *Mr Stephen Warr, Senior Environment Officer, Gibraltar Department of the Environment, Heritage & Climate-Change*
- *Deputy Barry Brehaut, President of the Committee for the Environment & Infrastructure, States of Guernsey*
- *Mr Richard Lole, Chief Executive for the Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture, Isle of Man*
- *Dr Richard Axton, Chairman of Council, La Société Sercquaise, on behalf of Sark Agriculture and Environment Committee of the Chief Pleas of Sark*

- *Deputy Steven Luce, Minister for the Environment, Jersey*
- *Dr Mike Pienkowski, Chairman, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum*

Seated (from left):

- *Hon. Claude Hogan, Minister of Agriculture & Environment, Montserrat*
- *Mrs Michele Christian, Divisional Manager, Environmental, Conservation & Natural Resources, Government of Pitcairn*
- *Hon. Dr John Cortés, Minister for Education, Heritage, Environment, Energy & Climate Change, Gibraltar*

Participants missing from photo:

- *Mr James Dent, Chair of Policy & Finance Committee, States of Alderney*
- *Mr Roland Gauvain, Executive Director, Alderney Wildlife Trust*
- *Mr Paul Veron, Economic Development Officer, States of Alderney*
- *Ms Sue Price, Executive Assistant to the Chief Executive, States of Alderney*
- *Mr Matt Birmingham, Chair of Building & Development Control Committee, States of Alderney*
- *Mr Steve Roberts, lead member responsibility for environmental/agricultural issues, States of Alderney*
- *MLA Michael Poole, Portfolio Holder for the Environment – Falkland Islands; with:*
- *Mr Nick Rendell, Falkland Islands Government Environment Officer (participating via Skype)*
- *Councillor Mrs Pamela Ward Pearce, Chairman of Environment & Natural Resources Committee, St Helena (participating via Skype)*
- *Derek Henry, Environment & National Resources Department, St Helena (participating via Skype)*
- *(Prevented from participating remotely by technical difficulties: Mrs Michelle Fulford Gardiner, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry for Tourism, Environment, Heritage and Culture, Turks & Caicos Islands, with colleagues)*

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski



*Some of the Ministers visit the important gannet colony off Alderney. From left: Hon. Dr John Cortés, Minister for Education, Heritage, Environment, Energy & Climate Change, Gibraltar (Meeting joint chairman); Hon. Kedrick D Pickering MD, Deputy Premier & Minister for Natural Resources & Labour, British Virgin Islands; Hon. Sylvan Richards MP, Minister of Environment, Government of Bermuda; Mr Victor Brownlees, Chief Executive, States of Alderney (Host & meeting joint chairman); Hon. Geoffrey Boot MHK, Minister of Environment, Food & Agriculture, Isle of Man; Hon. Claude Hogan, Minister of Agriculture & Environment, Montserrat; Dr Mike Pienkowski, Chairman, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (Meeting organiser). Out of picture: Roger Harrabin, BBC.
Photo: Catherine Wensink*

successful in using EU procedures to resist these – but this possibility will end with ‘Brexit’. The statement welcomed current initiatives by UKOTCF and partner organisations in the territories to empower local people to become champions of the natural environments on which their economies and well-being depend.

The UKOTs and Crown Dependencies all have their own identity and governing structure, with no representation in the UK Parliament; however they all form part of the nation-state of the UK. The exact relationship between the UK Overseas Territories (UKOT) and the Crown Dependencies (CDs) with the UK differs for each, though the UK is generally responsible for defence, international relations including international conventions, and also reserve powers in respect to their legislation. Combined, the UKOTs and CDs are home to a far greater concentration of endemic (found nowhere else) and endangered species than any other part of the UK. There are thought to be over 100,000 native species, 300 of which are thought to be endemic species restricted to a single location.

The Ministers’ Meeting was co-ordinated by UKOTCF, whose Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski, commented “UKOTCF is the only body solely concerned with conservation and environmentally sustainable use across all UK’s Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. Especially in our 30th anniversary year, we were honoured to have been asked by Territory governments to organise the meeting, as a result of these years of bringing conservation practitioners together to pool resources and share experiences. We congratulate Alderney for hosting it in a fantastic setting for holding two days of discussions. UK and its family of territories should be proud of striving to fulfil their world responsibilities for protecting this uniquely important heritage.”

The event was hosted by the Government of Alderney, one of the smallest of the UK’s Crown Dependencies, and was co-ordinated on island by the Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT), UKOTCF associate and the 47th member of the British Wildlife Trusts partnership. Delegates also had an opportunity to discover the wildlife of the island, including a close up visit to the most southerly colonies of the northern gannet in the British Isles and the largest puffin colony remaining in the English Channel.

Alderney, a community of just 1900 residents, had offered to host the meeting in recognition of the need to improve communication between the UK’s remote outlying communities. The Island’s President welcomed the delegates and hosted the ministers and others on Thursday evening at an informal dinner in the grounds of a Roman Fort known as the Nunnery which sits on the Island’s south-eastern coast, the nearest point of the British Isles to the Continental mainland just eight miles away.

Victor Brownlees (Alderney’s CEO) said of the importance of the meeting “We were delighted to welcome our friends and colleagues from the UK Overseas Territories and fellow Crown Dependencies. That Alderney is the host of such a high level meeting is a measure of the importance we as a community attach to preserving our distinct and special island home. I enjoyed sharing experiences and learning how we can work even more closely together across the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies in preserving and celebrating our distinct environmental heritages.”

Videos (of about 5 minutes each) about the meeting are available at <https://youtu.be/1s8IFL5uLyE> & <https://youtu.be/j2c0iVP1OvU>.



Gannet and gannetry at Les Etacs, in Alderney’s Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention, designated during UKOTCF’s review and with UKOTCF assistance. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski



UKOT/CD Environment Ministerial Meeting, Alderney, April 2017: Statement

1. The Environment Ministers (or their equivalents or representatives) of 14 of the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (UKOTs/CDs), met at the Island Hall, Alderney, on Thursday 27th and Friday 28th April 2017. This was the second in a series of Environment Ministerial meetings, the first having been held in Gibraltar in 2015. We invited UK Government Ministers for the second day of the meeting and they sent their apologies, but planned that Dr John Kittmer (FCO Director for Overseas Territories) would attend. Unfortunately, Dr Kittmer withdrew at the start of the week of the meeting due to the increased work pressure caused by the calling of the UK general election. We thank Mr W Victor Brownlees, Chief Executive of the States of Alderney, and Hon. Dr John Cortes, Environment Minister of Gibraltar, for convening the meeting, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) for helping to organise the meeting, and the States of Alderney and the Alderney Wildlife Trust for their hospitality, including the particularly memorable special evening event at their fascinating historic site at the Nunnery, a major heritage feature.

Unique biodiversity and natural heritage

2. In a global sense, the biodiversity of UKOTs is of even greater importance than that of metropolitan Britain. This is in terms of endemic species (those which occur nowhere else in the world), proportions of other species supported, sensitive ecosystems and threatened species. For example, about 90 endemic species occur in mainland Britain, compared with 3300 known so far in the UKOTs; about 75% of those formally reviewed are globally threatened.

3. The uniqueness of biodiversity and ecosystems, within the UKOTs and CDs, was reason enough for us to support positive environmental action through the Environment Ministerial meetings. Equally as important was the fact that the economies of many UKOTs and CDs depend on their special environments for: fishing, tourism, storm protection, energy supply etc. The relevance of this 2nd meeting in particular was to build on the success of the first meeting of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers, so as to develop further the benefits and economies of joint and collaborative working, and develop common priorities and approaches in discussions with UK Government.

International commitments

4. UK Government makes, and is ultimately accountable for, international commitments made on behalf of the UKOTs, including Multilateral Environmental Agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. For example, the UK has a significant role within the United Nations climate change process, as it has responsibility to its Overseas Territories to negotiate on their behalf and consult them. However, the legislature and executive of each territory is responsible for local implementing legislation and its enforcement. The Crown Dependencies have enjoyed domestic autonomy for many centuries, and with the agreement of the UK Government have been developing their international personality. On entrustment from the UK, the Crown Dependencies may also negotiate internationally. However, the UK is still ultimately responsible for signing international treaty commitments.

5. It is for this reason that a series of Environment Charters were created for most of the UKOTs, and signed, in 2001, by both the governments of these territories, and UK Government. They aimed to reflect the responsibilities of each party towards the environment. However, this responsibility applies equally to the relationships between UK and those territories which do not have Environment Charters. One of the core elements of the Charters

is a set of Commitments by each territory government. These Commitments were not created under the Charters, but brought together existing commitments under other international measures. The other core was a set of corresponding Commitments by UK Government to provide support.

International environmental agreements, and review of progress in implementing the Environment Charters, as well as reaching the Aichi Targets and relevant Sustainable Development Goals

6. We agreed that the progress on joining UK's ratification of international conventions is encouraging. For example, all eligible UKOTs/CDs are included in the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, all but two in CITES, all but one in the Convention on Migratory Species, and all but 8 in the Convention on Biological Diversity. We ask UK Government and NGOs to continue to provide support for those remaining UKOTs/CDs to join UK's ratification of international conventions, should they request this.

7. Under environmental conventions, and on behalf of Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories to which its ratification has been extended, UK Government includes coverage of these territories in its reports to Conferences of the Parties (CoPs). UKOTs therefore have no direct representation to Conferences of the Parties or Depository Bodies, such as the UN. We believe that UK Representation at such meetings would be strengthened by at least a single UKOT/CD representative being in attendance.

8. We welcomed the work of UKOTCF in collating information from our government officials, the UKOTCF's 30+ member and associate organisations and others, to produce the recent "Review of performance by 2016 of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies in implementing the 2001 Environment Charters or their equivalents and moving towards the Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Targets." This gathered information from the UKOTs and CDs on progress towards implementing the aforementioned Environment Charters (or equivalents for those territories without). At the same time, an assessment was made on progress towards the Aichi Targets, internationally agreed in 2010 by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and other Conventions. Late in the process of data-collating, the UN Sustainability Goals (SDGs) were linked into the reporting process. We noted the use to which this review had already been put by our officers and others. The review provided an understanding of the current environmental situation, and what has been achieved so far, as well an assessment of what remains to be done. In turn, this helped us to take an overview of further actions that UK Government should be taking to meet Commitments under the Environment Charters. We endorsed this review.

9. We valued the contributions to, and analysis in, the review – both by people who understand the environment and social climate of the UKOTs and CDs, and congratulated UKOTCF on its 30 years of bringing together NGO and official environmental bodies in UKOTs and CDs, as well as in Britain and elsewhere. This has facilitated mutual assistance, and access to a wealth of expertise and knowledge to provide environmentally-related support and advice to the UKOTs and CDs. As part of this, UKOTCF organised, jointly with the Government of Gibraltar, the Sustaining Partnerships conference in 2015. It was following this conference that the initial Environmental Minister's meeting was held. Both in the original meeting and in the most recent, we welcomed the Sustaining Partnerships conference conclusions and recommendations. We look forward also to UK Government's response to these.

10. We identified a need for UK Government to develop a

coordinated approach to engage with us on major environmental issues. At present, this is spread across several UK Government departments and many individuals who tend to change post frequently, with consequent lack of adequate corporate memory.

Climate Change

11. We addressed climate, another of the core issues facing UKOTs and CDs. Many of the UKOTs will suffer drastic impacts of climate change including: sea-level rise, extreme weather events and the degradation of the ecosystem services on which many of their small economies depend on. We therefore welcome the fact that the UK Government has acknowledged that the UKOTs will be some of the places worst affected by the impacts of climate change, in its second White Paper on Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability (2012).

12. The Paris Agreement's ambitious goals can be reached only if appropriate financial flows, a new technology framework and an enhanced capacity building framework are put in place. Climate finance refers to local, national or transnational financing, which may be drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing. Climate finance is critical to addressing climate change because large-scale investments are required to reduce emissions significantly – but, equally as important to the UKOTs, it is important for adaptation, for which significant financial resources will be required to allow us to adapt to the adverse effects and reduce the impacts of climate change. We ask for a clearer understanding of green financing alternatives and the role HMG will take in providing as well as facilitating access to green funds.

13. We heard, with concern, of the high cost of energy based on shipping fuel to Pitcairn, and we call upon DFID to support renewable energy there. This situation has resonance too for other UKOTs, such as Tristan da Cunha, suffering increased severe weather effects probably related to climate change. We note that some other territories, such as Gibraltar, are exploring commercial investment in renewable energy, but this may be less feasible in small, remote communities.

Funding from UK Government and making the deployment of current resources as cost-effective as possible

14. The Environment Charters recognise that the territory government must be committed to best practice in its management, and that UK Government will ensure that each territory government has the help and resources it needs. Whilst we are undoubtedly in difficult financial times, the urgency of the threat of extinction of many species that occur only or mainly in UKOTs is immediate. We therefore highlight the fact that the UK has global commitments to avoid this, and that many remaining needs, as identified by UKOTCF's review, do require resources. The financial support to which UK Government committed itself is still greatly needed. Estimates of needs by both NGOs and UK Government's own agencies have indicated a minimum of about a 10-fold increase in the budget that UK Government generally allocates to this. In this context, we welcomed the current additional "Blue Belt" funding for extensive marine protected areas around oceanic territories. We urge similarly increased support for terrestrial conservation and environmental education.

15. We agreed that changes need to be consulted upon and considered in respect of the size of project funds. EFOT and early OTEP were small-project funds. They made possible, usually by combining with voluntary work, a great deal of highly cost-effective progress on small issues or piloting work which could beneficially be applied on a larger scale to address major conservation issues. There is a need too, for funding for medium-sized and/or longer duration projects, for species-recovery programmes, ecosystem restoration, organisational capacity development, etc. We welcomed therefore the recognition of this

need in HMG's 2009 UKOTs Biodiversity Strategy. However, whilst such larger (but not longer) projects are now possible, they are resourced from the same total funding previously limited to small projects. Inevitably, this will mean fewer small projects, despite their excellent track record.

16. UKOTCF has organised working conferences for conservation practitioners, in recognition of the fact that sharing experience and skills is a major way of maximising cost-effectiveness. These conferences are highly valued by the UKOTs/CDs. We, as the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers or equivalents, were involved in the most recent of these, held in Gibraltar in 2015. We saw first-hand the value of such conferences and welcome others in the future. While the first 4 were part-funded by UK Government, this funding was then ended, against the wishes of UKOTs/CDs. The resulting long gap was ended by HM Government of Gibraltar, which funded much of the 2015 conference (complemented by a much smaller grant from Defra). We therefore encourage UK Government to provide funding for future UKOTCF conferences as well as the UKOT element of UKOT/CD ministerial meetings, as is the wish of ourselves and the UKOTs/CDs as a whole. It will become increasingly important to share resources and expertise, as some of this may become unavailable to us as a result of leaving the EU, which we address more generally below.

Additional funding sources

17. Whilst we need to make use of current resources in the most efficient way possible, we agreed that there are other funding sources that warrant considering. Some territories have had success with visitor taxes ear-marked for environmental work. If these are handled well and are allocated towards a popular cause, they can be one of the few forms of taxes that are popular with those paying, especially if these benefits are clearly communicated to those paying. We congratulate the Government of Cayman on the enactment of the National Conservation Law. Regulations being brought into force will overcome problems in using the Cayman Environmental Protection Fund, set up in 1997, to be used for the originally intended conservation purpose of acquiring land for conservation purposes and for other projects on the natural environment.

18. We welcome the manifesto commitment by the incoming Turks & Caicos Islands Government to restore the Conservation Fund, and the decision by BVI to introduce an environmental levy. We welcome also the interest expressed in late 2016 by the Government of Montserrat in introducing a conservation fund financed on the lines of that in the Cayman Islands, and note that some others may consider similar arrangements.

19. The possibility of UK National Lottery funds being available to UKOTs has been investigated. These are a major funder of nature and heritage conservation in Britain. We therefore welcomed the suggestion, in the UK Government's 2012 White Paper on UK Overseas Territories, that National Lottery funding is available for work in the UKOTs. For this to happen, it would be necessary to make several changes. The Ministers in UK Department of Culture, Media & Sport would need to give a direction to the Lottery distributing bodies. These bodies would subsequently need to change policy accordingly, and set up a system for applications which include an office and supporting committee that understand UKOTs, and overcome the current administrative difficulties. We call upon UK Government to lead actively in this area.

20. We agreed to continue investigating the potential for UKOTs jointly to seek support from international funding sources / commercially-based bodies. We also agreed to investigate the possibility of obtaining support from some of the aid funds currently supporting Caribbean projects, e.g. CARICOM, to contribute to a UKOT environmental small grants programme.

21. We considered that we were not accessing available environmental funding, including climate funding, effectively. We felt that it was important that the territories should have the main voice in determining where and how cross-territory funds available should be spent, and that the territories should not have to compete for the allocation of such funds through an assessment process external to them. We agreed to explore the possibility of setting up an OT or OT/CD Environment Fund, to be administered and allocated by representatives of all the relevant territories and of the UK. The possible sources of these funds would be discussed further, but could include the potential UK Government post-Brexit replacement of EU funding called for by Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee (see para 28), funds currently available from UK for OTs, funding obtained collaboratively from private sources, international funding organisations, etc., and possibly contributions from territories who could and wished to do so.

Consequences of leaving the European Union

22. In addition to recognising the fact that UK Government resources to UKOTs/CDs need to be increased in the present situation, we agreed that UK's departure from the EU would remove major funding opportunities only recently achieved after many years of lobbying.

23. Gibraltar, like Great Britain & Northern Ireland, is within the EU and, as this ends, Gibraltar will be affected in the same way as Britain itself but will also face other challenges. These are related particularly to the way in which the environmentally and other damaging acts by a neighbouring country have hitherto been moderated most effectively through common membership of the EU. Ending this will necessitate increased diplomatic support from UK, with associated costs. The other UKOTs and CDs are not within the EU but will suffer various problems, the UKOTs by losing their status as Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) of the EU. As OCTs, the UKOTs are eligible to apply for various forms of funding from the EU, including major environmental funding. Furthermore, the access to EU trade and information is of major economic benefit to UKOTs. A substantial amount of direct funding also goes to UKOTs, this having major indirect effects on the environment.

24. The relationship between the Crown Dependencies and the EU is enshrined in Protocol 3 of the UK's 1972 Accession Treaty: the Islands are essentially within the Single Market for the purposes of trade in goods, but are "third countries" (i.e. outside the EU) in all other respects. The Channel Islands are outside the EU VAT area. The Channel Islands and the Isle of Man have a close relationship with the EU in many different fields – not simply those covered by the formal relationship under Protocol 3, including certain maritime matters. They choose also to implement selected EU legislation with an international dimension or to apply the standards on which it is based, for example sanctions, asset freezing, anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism. The Crown Dependencies are not in the EU and are not OCTs. However, there have been cases in which their natural environments have benefited both financially and through facilitated cooperation. This is because EU policies recognise that conservation measures need to take account of neighbouring countries, for example for effective ecosystem-conservation or to address the needs of migratory animals. With UK's departure from the EU, the potential for such collaboration and financial support will be much reduced.

25. We discussed the implications of the EU situation on the safeguarding of environmental protection. For example, much EU conservation legislation is based on the Council of Europe's Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural

Habitats (1979). The Council of Europe is not an EU institution and Brexit therefore has no direct effect. UK is party to this and its ratification includes the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas, the Isle of Man and Jersey. However, Gibraltar, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark are not included in this ratification. We therefore trust that UK Government will support the UKOTs/CDs in respect of the potential impacts of Brexit, e.g. by expediting the extension of the Bern Convention to Gibraltar, Guernsey, Alderney and Sark, should their respective governments request this. For similar reasons, we call on UK Government to support Gibraltar's request to join the Barcelona Convention and the Paris Agreement.

26. We welcomed a 2016 announcement by the UK Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rt Hon. Philip Hammond MP. This stated that EU structural and investment fund projects signed before the Autumn Statement in 2016, and Horizon research funding granted before leaving the EU, would be guaranteed by the Treasury after the UK leaves. We welcomed also Baroness Anelay, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, telling the press that, if territories have already signed EU agreements that would continue past Brexit, the Treasury would underwrite these.

27. Apart from ongoing projects, UK Government has not yet indicated that it will provide funding to replace the EU potential funding, so that UK's international conservation commitments in its Overseas Territories are not disadvantaged, although discussions in the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee have underlined the fundamental need for this. Furthermore, expenditure in Caribbean UKOTs and Bermuda is linked to the US\$. Travel costs to anywhere tend also to reflect the US\$ because that is the currency for fuel. Therefore, the value of UK environmental grant-funding is now reduced by up to the effective devaluation rate of the GB£ against the US\$.

28. We therefore agreed that UK Government needs to make available to UKOTs funding to replace the funding external to the UKOTs lost due to leaving the EU. This is additional to the funds (currently as Darwin Plus and shorter-term initiatives) which are to meet part of the UK Government Commitments under the Environment Charters. We agreed also that UK Government should take steps to replace the actual and potential financial and facilitation support to environmental conservation in CDs lost due to UK's departure from the EU. This is in line with the recommendation of the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee in April 2017: "We recommend that the Government commits to replacing BEST funding after we leave the European Union."

29. These considerations apply also to climate-change, as well as conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services. Under the EU-BEST (Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of European overseas) scheme, some climate change focused projects have been funded, e.g. to provided the basis for better conservation of native plants, the habitats they form and the services they provide in the face of a changing climate.

30. We ask that the UK, through its International Climate Change Fund, provide significant additional support to its UKOTs, to replace that lost from the EU. UK Government could, through this fund, earmark some proportion for meeting UK Commitments under UNFCCC. We ask also that HMG make provisions for those UKOTs not currently signed up to the UNFCCC, but which have been progressing towards it, e.g. the British Virgin Islands.

31. We remind that, whilst the departure from the EU may have an impact on potential sources of technical expertise and financial resources, it could present an opportunity for the UK to be a greater champion of its UKOTs, particularly on the international stage through the support it gives them to mitigate and adapt to climate change. For example, if energy-relevant EU policy is to

be grandfathered into UK law, updated and enforced, then the UKOTs (especially Gibraltar) and Crown Dependencies should be consulted fully. The UK should continue also to fund climate science and the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services, including through the National Environmental Research Council (NERC) and through its Overseas Territories Environment and Climate Fund (Darwin Plus).

Safeguarding Environmental Protection

32. We reiterated the fact that the economies of many UKOTs depend on their special environments, for fishing, tourism, storm protection, power generation etc. If the UK supports sustainable development and conservation, this assists the UKOTs in making their economies stronger, for example through the establishment/enhancement of sustainable fisheries, increased sustainable ecotourism, more resilience to severe weather damage, and more sustainable energy.

33. We welcomed the work of UKOTCF and several partner organisations in the UKOTs and CDs, which have been piloting work related to the empowerment of local people and communities, in taking the lead in sustainable use of the environment. This goes some way towards meeting several of the Targets under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Some of those persons and businesses using the natural environment as a basis for their livelihoods have been encouraged successfully

to become champions of its safeguarding. This has included, or has potential, among many other actions such as: the development of environmentally sensitive strategies for tourism, agriculture, fisheries, water management, and hill management, and the development of charcoal-making from alien invasive trees.

34. Unfortunately, the level of UK Government support to NGOs for this novel sort of approach has not so far reflected the importance placed on it in the SDGs. We recommend that UK Government grasp more opportunities, in its programme for environmental grant support in the UKOTs, for supporting novel collaborations between UK and UKOT NGOs, which draw upon this approach of empowering local users / environmental champions. We encourage also UK Government to resource UKOTs so that they might meet other goals under the SDG Targets, e.g. those relating to protected areas (as reflected in UKOTCF's review of progress on the Environment Charter/Aichi Target/SDG).

35. We discussed the idea of developing a project looking at the sharing of good practice in development and conservation in UKOTs and CDs through the creation of a facilitated and managed database. We agreed to support this, welcomed the contributions to costs already committed by some territories, and agreed that other territories would explore matching contributions. We recognised the role of Mr Victor Brownlees, Chief Executive of the States of Alderney, and UKOTCF in organising this project.

UK Overseas Territories EU Brexit Talks

Over 10-13 July, a series of meetings were held in London to discuss Britain leaving the European Union and how this will affect the Overseas Territories. The first day saw eight territories giving evidence to the House of Lords European Union Select Committee, with the main concerns of those who spoke relating to funding, trade and the ability to travel freely. The video of the meeting can be viewed here: <http://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/4cf6edb8-d6b9-41ad-965f-044f41d9c882>

The following day, the pre-Joint Ministerial Council meeting had leaders/heads of delegation covering topics including a joint approach to establishing a renewed relationship between the UK and UKOTs after Brexit, the importance of infrastructure (including for access) and the topics to be tackled at the full JMC to be held in November.

At the UK Joint Ministerial Council meeting that followed, the new Minister for Exiting the European Union, Robin Walker, told attendees that "Negotiations to leave the European Union are now underway, and we are working hard to deliver a deal that works for everyone including our friends in the Overseas Territories. We have engaged extensively with the Overseas Territories already and will continue to make sure their interests are taken into account as the UK leaves the EU". The Foreign Minister, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon was in attendance and told UKOT representatives at the meeting that "The Overseas Territories are integral to what defines Britain on the global stage and to our influence across

the world. I look forward to continuing engagement with the territories on the key challenges they face as a result of Brexit and to work collaboratively on the great opportunities that lie ahead". Leaders and representatives discussed the areas of priority for their territories at the meeting, although these have not been publicly disclosed.



Pre-JMC leaders/ heads of delegation assembled at Church House (11th July 2017). Left to Right: Leaders of Cayman Islands, British Virgin Islands, Pitcairn, Anguilla, Turks and Caicos Islands, Montserrat, Falkland Islands, St Helena, Gibraltar, Tristan da Cunha and Bermuda.

Photo: www.tristandc.com

Cathy Hopkins MBE, 1946-2017

The flags at the Castle and Signal Point on St Helena were flown at half-mast on 3 April 2017, as a sign of respect to Mrs Margaret Anne Catherine (Cathy) Hopkins, who died aged 70.

UKOTCF met Cathy during the period from 1997 to 2000, when she served as St Helena Government's UK Representative. Whilst finding time to fulfil the wide range of duties in that post, Cathy worked closely with UKOTCF to promote many conservation initiatives for St Helena and more widely in the UKOTs. In retrospect, it is surprising how much progress was made in that 3-year period. One means was via her regular and effective participation in the twice yearly meetings of NGO and UK governmental bodies and UKOT reps, chaired jointly by UKOTCF and FCO. These meetings managed to unstick many initiatives lost in the labyrinths of Whitehall and to stimulate further collaboration.

After her return to St Helena, Cathy continued to promote conservation issues and became Chairman of the Group established by St Helena Government to guide this. In this role, she noted the pilot project that UKOTCF was facilitating in the Turks & Caicos Islands to agree across stakeholders a strategy to implement the new Environment Charter. She led a successful application to UK Government for a grant for a similar exercise in St Helena, as the second model for other UKOTs, and asked UKOTCF to implement the facilitation. This was done by Mike and Ann Pienkowski, with Isabel Peters, St Helena Environmental Co-ordinator, working with many island stakeholders, under Cathy's guidance.

In her early 20s, Cathy Bell had gone from Britain to St Helena as a teacher in the Voluntary Service Overseas programme. She soon fell in love with St Helena and its people, in 1972 marrying a "Saint", Keith Hopkins, and settling there permanently in 1976. She became involved in island life through her music, running a successful youth orchestra. She realised that the future of the island lay in finding ways young people could prosper at home, rather than being forced to travel overseas. In recent years, she encouraged the training of youngsters in local crafts as a way to profit from the increased tourism that a new air-link with the outside world will provide.



Cathy was first appointed as a teacher in the Education Department in September 1980. She became a vital part of the teaching team and held positions such as President of the Teachers Association and Chairperson of the Schools' Music Fund during her time. She spent nine years working in Prince Andrew School (PAS) during which time she was promoted to Pastoral Head (Upper Age) in 1995. Cathy held her position in PAS until May 1997 when she decided to move on from the Education Directorate. She replaced Dr Corinda Essex as SHG's UK Representative in July 1997, based in London.

As well as being a teacher, Cathy also became a Member of Legislative Council from 1989 until 1992. Cathy had not expected to become involved in island politics but felt bound to do so when the islanders' citizenship was reduced, along with those of other inhabitants of UK Overseas Territories, by the 1981 Nationality Act. It took 21 years for UK Parliament to restore full citizenship, but all those who knew Cathy were not surprised by her iron will and perseverance in lobbying for this.

After her return to St Helena, Cathy went on to serve on the Legislative Council, as both Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the House, during which time she presided over formal Legislative Council Meetings on a number of occasions.

Cathy combined her political activities with a major role in promoting the island's heritage and nature conservation, many years as a churchwarden and her recent appointment as chair of the island's Equalities Commission. This last was most appropriate as she always saw full gender equality as the natural state of things.

Cathy was an active, popular, invariably helpful, feisty and witty person, who strove untiringly for a better world. She devoted her entire adult life to the wellbeing of her adopted home, St Helena. In 2007, she was appointed MBE for her service to the community. St Helena, UKOTCF and many have lost a great friend and ally. Our sympathy goes to her husband and family.

UKOTCF is grateful for some of this information to the obituary in *The Guardian* by Cathy's brother, David Bell, and to St Helena Government.

Bermuda bird-hide tribute to the late Sir Richard Ground

Bermuda Audubon Society Newsletter 27 notes the inauguration of the new bird hide at the Seymour's Pond nature reserve, built as a tribute to the late former Chief Justice of Bermuda (and previously of Turks & Caicos) Sir Richard Ground. Sir Richard and his wife, Lady Dace, did much to raise public awareness of the special wildlife in the Caribbean UKOTs, especially Bermuda, TCI and the Cayman Islands, through his superb bird photography and the beautiful books laid out by Dace. In retirement, Sir Richard was a very helpful supporter of UKOTCF. Dace serves on UKOTCF Council and chairs its Wider Caribbean Working Group.

The two latest issues of the *Bermuda Audubon Society Newsletters* (27, Winter 2016, and 28, Spring 2017), as well as earlier issues are freely available from their website: <http://www.audubon.bm/news/newsletters>



Lady (Dace) Ground in the new bird-hide, with Geoffrey Bell (left) and Andrew Dobson (right). Photo: Bermuda Audubon Society

More transport problems for Ascension and St Helena

As if UK's mid-Atlantic Islands had not been hammered enough in recent years as regards their transport links, Ascension's Airport has now been closed to its UK-Ascension-Falklands flights for at least two years.

The government of Ascension Island confirmed in May 2017 that all heavy aircraft flights at the Island's Wideawake are cancelled until further notice, pending repairs to the 3,000-metre asphalt runway. They do not expect South Atlantic Airbridge flights (operating with the RAF A330-200 Voyager aircraft from UK to the Falklands) to recommence before 2019/20 although emergency medical evacuation flights will not be affected and nor will the US Air Force operations. The Falklands flights have been staging instead at Dakar, Senegal since 16 April.

Ascension Airport is owned by the US Government, but there has been no clarity as to why this problem was not foreseen or why it will take at least two years to repair, nor the extent of any discussions between the US and UK Governments about measures for its repair.

Travellers and those of the 800 residents wishing to get to and from Ascension are now restricted to travel via sea aboard the Royal Mail Ship St Helena – which itself has been suffering prolonged breakdowns, during its temporary reprieve following the failure of the DFID-funded project to build the St Helena Airport to the intended functional level.

UK Government's Department for International Development has declined to indicate to those enquiring, including even St Helena elected Councillors the reason why DFID did not implement the pre-construction wind tests that its own aviation consultants recommended, nor the arrangements for the Inquiry which the Secretary of State promised to Parliament into this failing (see *Forum News* 46: 31). In the process of this exercise, UK Government has also breached its commitment to conservationists in UK and St Helena that it would minimise the 'foot-print' of the airport's impact as a condition of their not objecting to the construction of the airport on an area of immense importance to endemic species, especially invertebrates.

Some better news for St Helena is that a South African airline, SA Airlink has been chosen to provide scheduled commercial air services to St Helena Island. Airlink will also operate a monthly charter service between St Helena and Ascension Island. Airlink is finalising regulatory approvals with the South African Civil Aviation Authority. This will include a proving flight to the Island.

Following these, SHG will be able to announce the commencement date for a service between St Helena Airport and OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, South Africa. It is expected that the monthly service between St Helena and Ascension Island will start soon after and operate on the second Saturday of each month. (Tickets have now gone on sale for the first St Helena flight which is expected to be on 14 October 2017 (see www.flyairlink.com). The monthly Ascension service is due to start in

mid-November. Details and outline arrangements are available at www.ascension-island.gov.ac/air-link-ticket-and-schedule-faqs/.)

Between Johannesburg and St Helena, there will be a stopover in both directions at Windhoek International Airport in Namibia. In both directions, there will be an opportunity for a connection at Windhoek to a connecting flight to and from Cape Town.

The initial weekly service on a Saturday will be operated using an Embraer E190-100IGW aircraft in a two class configuration (Business Class and Economy). Because of the runway challenges, this is a much smaller and slower aircraft than originally envisaged. The flight time from Johannesburg to St Helena will be approximately 6hr 15 min including a half hour stop in Windhoek. Because of the flight times, the departure from Johannesburg is expected to be too early for same-day connections from early morning arrivals from Europe.

The agreement with Airlink is for an initial term of three years from the date of the first flight.

HE Governor Lisa Phillips said: *“Undoubtedly, 2017 is the year of positive change for St Helena. Very soon a trip to South Africa, for St Helenians, will take a matter of hours rather than days. And we will be able to welcome tourists here in larger numbers and improve the economy of the Island and offer a better life for those who live here. My thanks to everyone who has worked so hard in getting to this point and also my thanks for the funding we received to enable it to happen. I am confident the future is a bright one.”*

Airlink's CEO and Managing Director, Rodger Foster, added: *“We are delighted to have reached this milestone and we are extremely excited to be preparing for the proving flight and to the inaugural flight shortly after. Airlink is confident that our Embraer E190 ETOPS certified aircraft is most suited to the demanding environmental conditions prevalent at St Helena and that we will establish a safe and reliable air bridge between St Helena and South Africa – thereby creating air linkages between St Helena and the rest of the world by way of the interconnectivity offered at Johannesburg.”*

“We are pleased to be able to connect both Cape Town and Johannesburg to St Helena by way of designed flight coordination at Windhoek – we acknowledge that Cape Town is an important destination for Saints and we recognise that Cape Town enjoys significant tourism visitations growing at thirty percent annually which could become an important source market for St Helena's tourism aspirations.”

Information on the commencement date, ticket sales and details on the cost of fares and sales distribution, including for Ascension Island, will be issued in due course. The fares offered are anticipated to be the same or similar between Johannesburg and St Helena and Cape Town and St Helena.

Airlink is a privately owned airline registered in South Africa. It is a franchisee to South African Airways. Airlink is a member of the International Air Transport Association (IATA) and as such is IATA Operational Safety Audit (IOSA) accredited. Airlink is a well-established South Africa domiciled airline operating on a comprehensive scheduled network with domestic and regional passenger and cargo services offering more than fifty thousand flights annually.



RAF A330-200 Voyager aircraft



Above and below: views from Anguilla: in the eye of the major hurricane; intense wind and rain; flooding; cars thrown over walls, overturned and smashed; roofs blown off and buildings blown down; roof and structure of church damaged severely; destroyed hangar and aircraft.



close to the south of the Turks & Caicos Islands, creating further major damage there and in northern Cuba, before turning (a little further west than shown in that prediction), along western Florida and into other US states.

At its peak, wind speeds reached 185mph. According to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), it maintained these speeds for a record 37 hours, which could explain why the impact was so severe. The wind speeds were even greater than the 167mph of *Hurricane Ivan*, which hit the Cayman Islands in 2004.

The following hurricane, *Jose*, had been expected to hit along the same route but, luckily, it changed course and went back out into the Atlantic.

A state of emergency was declared in all of the UKOTs with worries about basic human needs and security. While the UKOTs preparing as best they can for the hurricane season, *Hurricane*



Irma, a category 5 storm, has wiped out many coastal communities because of its shear force.

Many homes throughout the islands were damaged and many were left without roofs, power or clean water. The cost of the clean-up



Above: The National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands has supplied photos and a comment that Hurricane Irma caused much damage to several of their National Parks. They report that they are slowly making their way around to assess the damage. Left is the Joseph Reynold O’Neal Botanic Gardens National Park, named after the first Chairman of the National Parks of the Virgin Islands. Right is the new visitor centre at Sage Mountain National Park, opened only in December 2016, and funded partly through the MPASSE project co-ordinated by UKOTCF. The ever-resilient NPTVI add: “But today, instead of destruction, we see new beginnings and great opportunities.”



Left: Royal Fleet Auxillary Mounts Bay arrives at BVI.



Right: transferring supplies from the RFA to shore. Photos: Royal Navy

efforts will be significant, especially to those, which were already on low incomes. In Anguilla, it is anticipated that the power lines will be restored by the new year.

In the Turks & Caicos Islands, there is severe damage on all islands. (Previous hurricanes have tended to affect only parts of the archipelago, but major hurricane Irma travelled the length of it, with its centre just to the south of most islands.)



Above: the historic White House, the former centre for salt-production on Salt Cay (Turks and Caicos) is adjacent to the former salt-pans, now internationally important for wetland birds. It was built in traditional style to resist hurricanes. However, the force of Irma was so exceptional that parts of the roof have been damaged. Many less strongly built structures (and many strong ones) throughout TCI have suffered even more damage.

Only a matter of days after *Irma* moved on, *Hurricane Maria* arrived from the Atlantic slightly further south in the Lesser Antilles, devastating Dominica and Guadeloupe, and then passing extremely closely along the west coast on Montserrat, causing major damage. It crossed the NE Caribbean to hit the US Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, before giving another pounding to the eastern Turks & Caicos Islands, especially Grand Turk and Salt Cay. The hurricane season is not yet over.

The economies and resources available to the UKOTs, given their small population sizes, means that outside help is desperately needed in order to get the islands up and running. The UK Government provided £32million to those UKOTs affected immediately following the hurricane, with a further £25million in

Right: Caicos Pine Recovery Project Nursery at Kew Government Farm was completely destroyed by Hurricane Irma. Wise placement of trees and seedlings by Junel Flash Blaise is what saved all of the trees but one from lethal damage. In the coming weeks CPRP plans to establish a crowd-funding programme through a local NGO to procure the needed materials for rebuilding. Bryan Naqqi Manco adds: "We will complete the new expansion nursery site and move directly in when complete. More news to come on the near future." Photos: Bryan Naqqi Manco





Left: Severe damage, especially widespread roof-loss as well as total destruction of some buildings, at South Caicos. Right: Premier Sharlene Cartwright Robinson (left) visits the aid distribution team at a shelter in North Caicos, where Bryan Naqqi Manco (centre), leading local conservationist and Caicos Pine Recovery Programme Officer, was undertaking one of his volunteer shifts. Photo: Shaun Malcolm



the following week, but the ways in which these are being allocated are not yet known. Over 1000 British troops and 50 police officers have been sent out along with equipment and supplies (but it is not known whether the cost of this is additional to, or included in, the cost figure above). *The Guardian* newspaper in UK reported that some insurance experts put the economic cost to the region as high as \$300bn.

The economies of all the islands are dependent on tourism and the financial services industry, and so work to clean-up and restore power to the islands is fundamental to their recovery.

Other UKOTs have been supporting their fellow UKOTs by providing urgent resources. Gibraltar has sent vehicles; Cayman has sent planes, supplies and personnel; the Bermuda Chair of UKOTA put out a statement pleading to the UK Government to do all they can to help now and in the future.

UKOTCF has joined with several UK NGOs to show support for its members and associate organisations and others in Anguilla, BVI, TCI and Montserrat, in helping them to recover from the hurricane in whatever way they can. There will be much to do over the coming months and years to recover from *Irma* and *Maria*.

The only remaining dedicated source of environmental grant funding for the UKOTs, *Darwin Plus*, has – even at the best of times – a fairly inconvenient time-window, during the main vacation period, for preparing applications, which should be collaborative between organisations. It had been expected that it would delay the deadline because of the impossibility of effective communications in several UKOTs as a result of the hurricanes – but many were surprised that this was not done.

It is true, however, that it would be impracticable for the Darwin Plus fund to be able to address all the subsequent environmental challenges ahead for Anguilla, BVI, Montserrat and TCI (and other islands suffering before and, one fears, after). This means that substantial funds will be needed for many years to come. Furthermore, building resilience in other vulnerable UKOT communities to the impacts of severe weather events is vital. So where do the UKOTs get the support that is needed? Should other UK Government funds such as the International Climate Fund be open to the UKOTs for this purpose? As the UK leaves the European Union, funds and other resources, such as technical staff, which have, in the past, helped to re-build some infrastructure in the UKOTs following major hurricanes (e.g. Turks & Caicos after *Ike* and *Hanna*, and Cayman after *Ivan*) – as well as supporting environmental work more generally – will, almost certainly, be unavailable.

In contrast, the costs will be high (relative to the UKOTs' budgets – but much lower in UK budget terms). This includes restoring conservation and interpretation infrastructure (which itself, when operational, generates funding and underlies much of the

economy), habitat restoration (especially for endemic and sensitive species), maintaining salaries of key staff where these are normally supported from visitor income or local subventions, and strengthening

capacity to adapt for future impacts. We recognize that adding more administrative roles to UK officials at this time would be particularly difficult. Accordingly, UKOTCF would be very content to use its strong and long-established network with the UKOTs to facilitate appropriate disbursement of funds under whatever guidelines are agreed.

We have stressed that by far the greatest part of global biodiversity, for which the UK is internationally responsible, lies in the UK's Overseas Territories (where the population are mainly UK citizens). These environments are fragile, and they face major global challenges (e.g. climate change), which they cannot cope with alone.

As always after major events, it will be worth UK Government, in consultation with the UKOTs and others with interest, to review its preparations for future emergencies. The armed forces perform excellently in these situations, but questions have already been raised about their tasking by government and the civil service. It may be a stretch for the one ship on station in the Caribbean in the hurricane season to assist adequately BVI and Anguilla, which are 170 km apart. However, TCI is a further 750km away, and Montserrat some way in the other direction. A single vessel cannot assist all and, in fact, the first supply vessel to reach TCI was the normal commercial shipping service – and congratulations to them. The line of *Hurricane Irma* was well predicted about a week ahead of its arrival. Indeed, it then looked as if a fourth UKOT, Montserrat, would be impacted too, but this was delayed until *Maria*. However, a further naval vessel was not diverted from across the Atlantic until after the impact, and did not arrive until over two weeks after the hurricane's actual impact.



Above: Royal Air Force freighter transferring British troops and equipment to help the UKOTs in the region. Photo: RAF

3rd Island Invasives Conference, Dundee



The conference was welcomed by the Provost of Dundee at the Discovery Point Centre, where RRS Discovery (left) sits. Right: Conference organiser, Professor Tony Martin, joins some of the original crew on board. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

As advised for many months in advance in *Forum News* and elsewhere, the 3rd Island Invasives Conference was organised by the South Georgia Heritage Trust and the University of Dundee from 10 to 14 July, and opened by the Princess Royal. Part of the meeting was attended by UK Defra Minister Lord Gardiner. The previous two conferences were held in New Zealand, in 2001 and 2010, and there are intentions to organise the fourth in North America, in the early 2020s.

Presentations and talks explored and tackled issues including:

- What can be done about the spread of invasive plant species which greatly threaten biodiversity on islands? Mapping species and developing action plans to help control them in specific areas is one way of addressing this issue.
- How to tackle what is regarded as the sixth mass extinction of species? How can we build on existing partnerships and advances in the field to achieve global conservation goals?
- Rodent eradication is possible using both land-based and airborne techniques, but when is it best to use these different approaches, and how do you successfully engage local communities?
- How do we prevent biosecurity from limiting the long-term benefits of our eradication ambitions and how do we stop it becoming the poor relation due to operational pressures in the delivery of eradication programmes?
- How can civil society organisations play a role in driving

forward better eradication programmes and what can we learn from previous collaborations between non-profits, technical experts, Governments and the public?

- Should we broaden the context of invasive species eradications? Often eradications involve targeting multiple species. We need to consider eradications carried out at much larger scales than on small islands, such as those implemented for human or animal health purposes.
- How can a strategic environmental assessment (SEA) approach to invasive species management on inhabited islands help to achieve the goal of an introduced-predator-free New Zealand by 2050?

Many examples featured UK Overseas Territories. The (we hope - it is in its checking phase) successful and ambitious South Georgia work obviously took pride of place. There were commendably thorough analyses by RSPB and colleagues on the challenges of the Henderson Island exercise and the best approaches to overcome them. The conference also looked forward to the next major ambitious RSPB-led project, in Gough Island. Smaller projects also featured, including the many islets now cleared of rodents in the Falkland Islands, as well as some in BIOT, and varied cases in the Caribbean. It was good also to see another strong focus on biosecurity; eradications are useless without such continued vigilance.

More information is available at www.islandinvasives2017.com



HRH The Princess Royal chats with Prof. Tony Martin and SGHT Chairman, Philippa Foster Back CBE, after opening the conference; the conference in session; Lord Gardiner of Kimble, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs including biosecurity strategy, commercial projects, landscape, climate change adaptation. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Pitcairn visit to UK

Michele Christian, Divisional Manager for Environment, Conservation & Natural Resources of the Government of Pitcairn was in UK in the northern spring of 2017, for holiday and a range of meetings. These included with various bodies, including UKOTCF, as well as participation in the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Meeting in Alderney in April (see pages 7-13).

The meetings with UKOTCF involved Dr Mike Pienkowski, Ann Pienkowski, Catherine Wensink, Sarah Barnsley and Dr Nicola Weber. These addressed various issues raised from Pitcairn, as well as exploring and planning further collaboration in terms of the possible designation of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention of the proposed Sites of the atolls Ducie and Oeno, as well as the raised atoll of Henderson. Material has been prepared for consideration by the Island Council. Clearly, progression of any subsequent ideas for management will need to consider the plastic problem (see below), although solutions to that fundamental problem lie elsewhere, of course.

Pitcairn Environment Group Meeting

8th May 2017 saw UKOTCF representatives participate in the 9th meeting of the Pitcairn Environment Group at The Pew Charitable Trust's office in London. It was wonderful to have Michele present in person at the meeting and to hear her updates from the island.

It is a busy time for Pitcairn, with a long-term monitoring plan for Pitcairn's marine reserve having commenced in January 2017. The results from January to March 2017 appear to be positive, with no evidence of illegal activity detected in Pitcairn's EEZ. A Darwin Initiative project ended in March, one output being a draft Marine and Fisheries Management Plan which would undergo a public consultation, and for which regulations would be developed. Other activities include work by ZSL to enhance Pitcairn's tourism opportunities, with leaflets being produced with an environmental focus and a series of self-guided walks. The RSPB's Henderson rat eradication programme continues with researchers gaining a better understanding of why the previous eradication attempt was not successful. UKOTCF's Dr Mike Pienkowski also presented discussions taking place between the Forum and Michele Christian regarding further collaboration



Pair of Murphy's petrels in display over the prospective Ramsar Site at Ducie Island, where over 90% of the world's population of this species breed. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

with Pitcairn in terms of the designation of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention (see above).

Pristine Paradise to Plastic Rubbish Dump: Henderson Island 23 Years Apart

A recently published study by researchers at the University of Tasmania estimated that more than 37 million pieces of plastic debris have accumulated on the uninhabited Henderson Island, a World Heritage Site. This is the highest density of debris reported anywhere in the world and poses a threat to the local biodiversity, for example sea turtles and seabirds.

As the island is uninhabited, it is thought that ocean currents bring a steady stream of plastic debris from around the world, from rubbish swept into drains and debris dropped off fishing boats. The authors note that some of the world's most remote and otherwise pristine islands "have become reservoirs for the world's waste", with the study highlighting the effect that plastic

debris is having on the environment on a global scale. This results, in part, from the pattern of ocean currents.

Since the publication of the photo of the litter-covered beach, a photo (displayed below) has been secured from Professor Marshall Weisler. This was taken in 1992 when he visited the island on an archaeological survey expedition.

The image of the pristine coastline is a stark contrast to that taken in the same location by the research team just 23 years later that displays some of the millions of pieces of plastic debris that have washed up there on ocean currents. The authors note also that, following their publication, they received multiple enquiries about how people can help to clean up Henderson Island – the answer being that, with thousands of new plastic items washing up every day, the efforts would be futile. Instead, they note that rather than travel to a remote island to make a difference, people can simply make some changes at home to make a difference including reducing waste and how it is disposed of, and switching to products that are more environmentally friendly. The full article can be viewed here: <https://theconversation.com/pristine-paradise-to-rubbish-dump-the-same-pacific-island-23-years-apart-80811>. That is not to say, of course, that all adaptive local measures would be impossible – but the basic cause does need to be addressed elsewhere.



A stretch of beach on Henderson Island 23 years apart. Photo left: Marshall Weisler; Photo right: Dr Jennifer Lavers

Key Stakeholders Meet to Discuss Tristan's *Blue Belt* Commitment

A workshop was held 24-27 July 2017 to discuss Tristan da Cunha's commitment to implement a strategy to protect its marine environment by 2020 as part of the UK Government's *Blue Belt* programme. The purpose of the workshop was to identify what is already known about Tristan's marine environment and where there are gaps, as well as ideas on how they may be filled, so that the strategy is science-based and evidence-led. The first couple of days of the workshop were hosted by RSPB, with scientists coming together, including seabird and penguin experts, marine mammal experts, marine, fishery and oceanographic scientists, as well as those that will help to deliver the programme, including Tristan's Director of Fisheries, James Glass, and Administrator, Sean Burns, who both attended the workshop.

The final day, hosted by Tristan Government at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, was attended by a wider group including Chris Carnegy, Tristan Government UK Representative, Richard Grundy and John Cooper from the Tristan Association, representatives from the fishing company Oventones, Joint Nature Conservancy Committee (JNCC), South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI), UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), RSPB, British Antarctic Survey (BAS), and National Geographic, as well as other scientists, UK government experts and officials. The Overseas Territories Minister Lord

Ahmad was able to join for part of the meeting to discuss the *Blue Belt* programme generally and how it could be taken forward on Tristan. Work will now progress, with input from stakeholders on developing a strategy that protects Tristan's marine environment for the future and for the Tristan community (who, through the Tristan Government, will decide on the final plan) and its sustainability.

To coincide with the workshop, the National Geographic Society and the RSPB hosted the National Geographic *Pristine Seas* film premiere on the evening of 27 July at the Royal Geographic Society in London. Introduced by expedition leader, Paul Rose, the film features stunning imagery of Tristan da Cunha islands including aerial shots from drones as well as underwater filming. It also showcased the interesting marine and terrestrial scientific work carried out by the expedition team. Dr Jenn Caselle, Chief Scientist of the *Pristine Seas* expedition based at the University of California Santa Barbara, made the audience aware of the brilliant work the expedition was able to carry out in excellent weather conditions that allowed the full scientific programme to be carried out.

Information and photos from the Tristan da Cunha Government and Tristan da Cunha Association website: www.tristandc.com



Delegates gathered in the India Office Council Chamber of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office during the Workshop on Tristan da Cunha's *Blue Belt* Programme held on 27 July 2017 (including UKOTCF's Dr Mike Pienkowski). Photo: www.tristandc.com

Changes at UK and UKOT Governments

The ministerial reshuffle following the surprise UK general Election in June involved a few changes in Ministers with UKOT responsibilities.

At the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, Minister of State Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon took over responsibility for UKOTs (amongst many other roles) from The Rt Hon Baroness Anelay of St Johns DBE, who moved to a post in the Department for Exiting the European Union.

At the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Dr Thérèse Coffey MP remains the minister responsible for the natural environment, including biodiversity, the marine environment, and international wildlife trafficking; floods, water and waterways; air quality; and resource & environment management. Alongside her, Lord Gardiner of Kimble has been

appointed as another Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, in his case for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity. This includes: rural ambassador and rural affairs, covering rural life opportunities, broadband and mobile; and biosecurity strategy, including endemic and exotic plant and animal disease, invasive alien species and Kew Gardens. Their new boss as Secretary of State for that Department is the Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP.

Following the general election in the Cayman Islands, the new Minister of Health, Environment, Culture and Housing (HECH) there is Hon. Dwayne Seymour, JP, MLA.

In Bermuda, the new government after the general election, disbanded the Ministry of Environment as a standalone ministry, putting the Department of Parks into Public Works, and the Departments of Planning and of Environment & Natural Resources

into the Ministry of Home Affairs (Minister Walton Brown).

Mr Tim Foy took up post in August as Governor of Anguilla, as did Mr Gus Jaspers for BVI. Air Commodore (ret'd) Nigel Philips CBE took up appointment in September as Governor of the Falkland Islands and Commissioner for South Georgia

& the South Sandwich Islands. Mr Anwar Choudhury has been appointed as Governor Designate of Cayman and will take up post in March 2018. HE Elizabeth Carriere, Governor of Montserrat, has announced that she will leave her post in January 2018, to take up an international NGO development post in Africa.

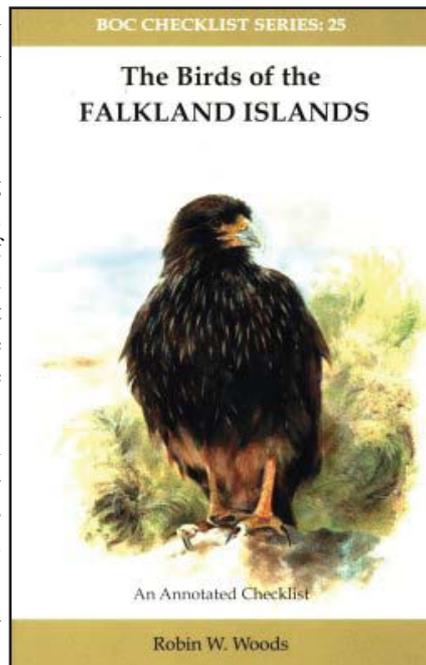
The Birds of the Falkland Islands: An Annotated Checklist

After a long wait, *The Birds of the Falkland Islands*, by Robin Woods, was published on 17th August, and launched on 18th August at the the Falklands Conservation stand at the British Birdfair.

This new checklist of the birds of the Falkland Islands is meticulously researched and fully referenced. It represents the culmination of decades of fieldwork by the author and others. It brings together information about the status and distribution of birds in this fascinating archipelago. A full introduction covers all the expected biogeographical and ecological ground, with strong emphasis on the history of human-avian interactions and the development of wildlife conservation – both among the author's special interests. The systematic list covers all 205 species whose occurrence in the Falklands is well-evidenced, plus another 54 species that require further confirmation. Seven appendices and 32 pages of colour photographs complete the work. This definitive account of Falklands birds will be an essential reference for all those with a detailed interest in the amazing wildlife of the South Atlantic.

Commenting on this new work Prof. John Croxall CBE FRS, Chair of the BirdLife International Marine Programme, said: "No one is better qualified than Robin Woods to produce this long-awaited Checklist for an archipelago whose limited (but spectacular) breeding avifauna is far exceeded by the number of visitors and vagrants. This is a checklist of meticulous detail, continuing the highest standards of the series."

BOC Checklists (formerly BOU Checklists) Volume 25, by Robin W Woods (author); foreword by David R Wells; paperback; 288 pages, 32 plates with 60 colour photos and colour maps; British Ornithologists' Club. ISBN-13: 9780952288664. Available from NHBS at £29.99.



Larsen C Ice Shelf Sets Free Large Iceberg in the Antarctic

The largest remaining ice shelf on the Antarctic Peninsula, the Larsen C ice shelf, lost 10% of its surface when one of the largest icebergs ever observed (about a quarter the size of Wales, or four times as big as London) detached from it on 12th July 2017.

Researchers at the British Antarctic Survey (BAS) and University of Leeds continue to track the iceberg's (known as A68) movements, using the European Space Agency and European Commission's Copernicus Sentinel-1 satellite. They have seen the iceberg drift about 5km from the ice shelf, and more than 11 other smaller icebergs have broken off both the remaining ice shelf and the giant iceberg itself. Satellite images also show that the cracks are continuing to grow on the main ice shelf

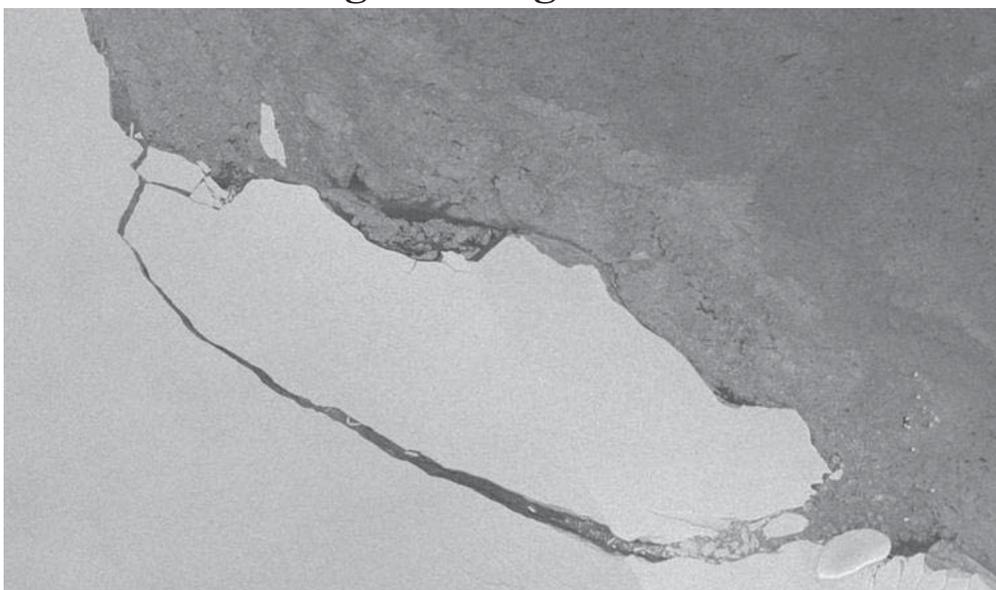


Photo: A Fleming/ British Antarctic Survey

with further destabilisation possible. The researchers report in a study published in *Nature Climate Change* that the 'calving' event itself might not be the result of changes in environmental conditions, but that the changes might bring about major alterations to the environment themselves, including contributing to global sea-level rise. Dr Gudmundsson from the BAS commented "With this large calving event, and the availability of satellite technology, we have a fantastic opportunity to watch this natural experiment unfolding before our eyes. We can expect to learn a lot about how ice shelves break up and how the loss of a section of an ice shelf affects the flow of the remaining parts". Source: www.independent.co.uk/news/science/larsen-c-ice-shelf-iceberg-huge-record-antarctic-climate-change-global-warming-a7873411.html.

An international agreement is now in place to give special protection to the area of ocean left exposed this huge icebergs broke free. This area is the first area to benefit from an international agreement in 2016 by the Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR), to designate Special Areas for Scientific Study in newly-exposed marine areas following the collapse or retreat of ice shelves across the Antarctic Peninsula region. The agreement came following a European Union proposal to CCAMLR, led by British Antarctic Survey (BAS) scientists Dr Susie Grant and Dr Phil Trathan. (see <https://www.bas.ac.uk/media-post/special-protection-for-area-exposed-by-larsen-c-iceberg/>)

The Ascension Island Ocean Sanctuary: Planning for the Atlantic's Largest Marine Reserve

In September 2016, at the *Our Ocean Conference* in Washington DC, the UK Government formally announced its commitment to designate a large-scale marine protected area (MPA) in the waters surrounding Ascension Island by 2019. This announcement forms part of the Government's *Blue Belt Initiative*, which seeks to support local administrations to advance marine conservation and sustainability objectives around the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.

Covering at least 50% of the Territory's 440,000 km² Exclusive Economic Zone, the *Ascension Island Ocean Sanctuary* is expected to become the largest Category 1 (fully no-take) marine reserve in the Atlantic Ocean, and promises to raise significantly the international profile of the Territory, as well as contributing to the global *Aichi Target* of protecting 10% of the world's oceans in MPAs by 2020. However, concerns have been raised locally regarding the impact of lost revenues from commercial fishing licenses on public finances and doubts expressed as to the effectiveness of planned closures for conserving highly migratory species such as sharks, billfish and tunas. Recognising these concerns, the UK and Ascension Island Governments are continuing to explore various economic models for the future management of Ascension's maritime zone, which could include continuing to operate a well-managed fishery in some areas of the Territory's EEZ, to subsidise management costs, as well as the potential of alternative revenue streams, such as tourism, to fill revenue gaps. Working with a consortium of partner institutions, the Ascension Island Government is also implementing an ambitious programme of scientific research aimed at identifying those areas that would benefit most from inclusion within an MPA network.

Funded by the Darwin Initiative, the European Union's BEST programme, the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Blue Marine Foundation, the scientific programme is using a combination of historical fisheries data, wildlife telemetry, offshore biodiversity surveys and satellite-based detection of habitats and fishing vessel activity to map key usage areas and risk areas for species threatened by commercial fisheries. It will also propose MPA configurations that maximise conservation gains. In May-June 2017, the project team also partnered with National Geographic's *Pristine Seas* programme and the British Antarctic Survey to study the biodiversity of three, previously unexplored, shallow-water seamounts lying within Ascension's EEZ.

Significantly elevated biomass, including notable aggregations of sharks and tuna, were documented on the summits of these features, along with rich benthic communities on the shallower peaks. Using surveys organised along transects radiating from seamount summits, the expedition aimed also to measure the "sphere of influence" of each peak on the surrounding pelagic ecosystem, as a basis for recommending MPA boundaries. These data are currently being analysed. However, it is clear that the biodiversity footprints of the seamounts extend many kilometres beyond the summit regions themselves. It seems likely that sizeable buffer zones surrounding each peak will be recommended for inclusion within the final MPA network.

In early September, project scientists Dr Sam Weber (University of Exeter) and Dr Andy Richardson (Ascension Island Government) attended the 4th International Marine Protected Areas Congress held in La Serena, Chile, to present the initial findings and objectives of the scientific programme and to network with other MPA scientists and practitioners. During the Congress, Dr Weber and Dr Richardson also attended the annual meeting of *Big Ocean*, a peer-to-peer learning network of site-managers and scientific/legal advisors working on issues surrounding large-scale marine protection, to discuss the process of Ascension Island joining as a member site when it is officially designated in 2019 (<http://bigoceanmanagers.org/>). The British Indian Ocean Territory is already a member of the network and, with a number of other UKOTs poised to designate or begin implementing large-scale marine reserves in the coming years, there is clear potential for a wider and more coordinated UK engagement with *Big Ocean* and the collective expertise and experience on offer.

In order to support effective and transparent planning, research and stakeholder engagement linked to the *Ascension Ocean Sanctuary*, all scientific content generated through the project is being made visible through a public-facing web GIS, hosted at the University of Exeter, where users can interact with the datasets that will ultimately underpin decision-making. The web GIS is currently under development, but initial results from the satellite tagging programme can be accessed at <http://asios.cles.ac.uk>, with data from offshore biodiversity surveys, oceanographic mapping and fisheries due to follow in the coming months.



Left: shallow marine biodiversity.

Photo Shallow Marine Survey Group.

Right: Dr Sam Weber (University of Exeter) and Dr Andy Richardson (Ascension Island Government) at the 4th International Marine Protected Areas Congress, La Serena, Chile. Photo Jonathan Hall



Restoration of Akrotiri Marsh, Cyprus WSBA

The completion of a two-year project to restore Akrotiri Marsh (whose early stages featured in a poster at the 2015 Gibraltar conference) was marked by a celebratory inauguration event at the Akrotiri Marsh hide on 18 May 2017. Locals from Akrotiri community, birdwatchers, photographers and nature lovers celebrated together the completion of the pioneering project.

Visitors had the opportunity to enjoy the Akrotiri Marsh and its new visitor infrastructure, as well as witness the on-site release of a long-legged buzzard, rehabilitated by the Game and Fauna Service. Visitors also had the opportunity to learn about the project's achievements and the future of Akrotiri Marsh as well as the significance of Akrotiri Peninsula for wildlife.

Akrotiri Marsh is part of the Akrotiri wetland complex, the largest natural wetland system on the island. As part of the Western Sovereign Base Area, UK designated it a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.

The Marsh has been unmanaged for the last 20 years, resulting in the overexpansion of reeds and the consequent loss of bird and plant diversity. Earlier project needs, identified about 10 years ago by the local bodies with UKOTCF, had unfortunately not received funding. However, the project *Akrotiri Marsh Restoration: a flagship wetland in the Bases* funded by the Darwin Initiative, started in April 2015, with the aim of restoring the biodiversity at this unique site. To achieve this, the project team (BirdLife Cyprus, Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre and RSPB) implemented on-site conservation actions centring on water-management and sustainable cattle-grazing, as well as awareness-raising actions, and created visitor infrastructure to enhance visitor experience.

BirdLife Cyprus' Director, Martin Hellicar, stated: "The completion of the project has been a very proud moment for all of us, as well as a crucial step towards making this unique area of immense natural value thrive once again. We now have a sound foundation for the long-term preservation of this key area, home to an abundance of plant and animal species and a go-to site for many nature lovers. The collaboration between BirdLife partners and the Bases, together with support from the local community and Republic of Cyprus authorities, has been the key factor in the project's success."

The Commander of British Forces Cyprus, Major General James Illingworth OBE, said: "This project, alongside others such as the Akrotiri Environmental and Education Centre, highlights the importance we place on protecting and maintaining the outstanding natural environment found in the Bases. I hope that this pristine area will continue to retain this favourable conservation status, and that we are all able to encourage the maintenance of the infrastructure here. This should enable others to enjoy this Darwin project for many years to come."

The successful completion of this project would not have been possible without the active involvement and support of dedicated people and bodies. The project team would like to thank especially the Darwin Initiative for providing the funds to carry out this project and the Tasso Leventis Conservation Foundation for its financial support to BirdLife Cyprus. Thanks also go to all the collaborators, researchers, contractors, birdwatchers, photographers, graziers and basket-makers who provided valuable information and feedback that has been helpful to the restoration and management efforts, and the Akrotiri Community and Council for embracing and supporting this Darwin project throughout its duration.

For more information on the project and the Akrotiri Marsh: www.akrotirimarsh.org



Visitors enjoying bird-watching from the newly constructed hide at Akrotiri Marsh. Photo: BirdLife Cyprus

But problems of illegal bird-catching persist at the Eastern Sovereign Base Area

Over many years, UKOTCF has drawn attention to the problem of illegal bird catching in the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) and has welcomed the initiatives of the SBA Authority (which reports to the UK Ministry of Defence) to address this problem. In a lecture at the Annual British Birdfair in August 2017, the international **Committee Against Bird Slaughter (CABS)** drew attention to continuing – and possibly increasing – problems in this area. CABS have supplied the following article (next page) about this matter.

On 19 August 2017, UKOTCF wrote to UK Government in the following terms:

"Over the years, UKOTCF has taken an interest in the Cyprus SBAs and published articles to report progress as well as querying concerns. Indeed, we hope to put something on the new Akrotiri hide in the forthcoming one. The illegal bird-catching saga has also dragged on for decades, and we have reported the positive actions that have been undertaken as well as raising questions. We have now received requests from some in our network to raise some further concerns about the efficacy of SBAA bodies in this regard. As a network, we are committed to airing these questions, but we are keen to give MoD/SBAA the chance to comment. If we receive comments within the next 2 weeks, by 2 September, we should be able to take account of these in anything included in our next newsletter.

"You will be aware of the general nature of current issues by virtue of the correspondence between MoD and various concerned people published around the turn of the year. The particular current concerns seen to centre on the following points:

1. The area of invasive acacia (planted by illegal netters to attract migrants for capture) cleared by SBAA appears to avoid clearing the well-known permanent netting sites routinely used in the illegal activities.
2. The active enforcement activity appears to be extremely ineffective, with 62 poachers arrested over 2 year (31/yr), despite an estimate of 30,000 trapper-nights per year.

3. This equates to an average catch of 1 poacher caught every 6 trapping days (0.16/day). This compares with the Cyprus police in the Republic, who achieved 22 poachers in 18 operational days in one month (0.73/day or 1.2/operational day), and the Italian Forest Police who, despite much more difficult mountain terrain, achieved 86 arrests in 23 operational days (2.7/day or 3.74/operational day).

4. Published statements by senior officers at SBA Police indicated that they saw their job as balancing the wishes of conservationists who wish the laws to be enforced with those of poachers who wish to continue illegal activity, rather than enforcing the law.

5. Given that poaching activity is obvious, not least by their broadcasting loud bird-song recordings to attract birds from acacia patches with permanent trap lines many of which are near roads and tracks, enforcement, both by acacia-removal and patrols arresting poachers, should be straight-forward – so that the continuing high level of illegal activity is puzzling.

6. The statements by MoD imply that law enforcement action is being deterred because of threats of violence by the poachers. If so, this would, of course, be unacceptable.

“We do hope to receive, within the next two weeks, comments from you or your appropriate colleagues.”

This was sent both to the contact point last notified to UKOTCF by the Ministry of Defence and to the hub for all UKOT enquiries maintained on behalf of UK Government by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs.

Unfortunately, despite an acknowledgement, no substantive reply was received by the date sent – nor by the end of September; when we had to finalise editing of this issue. UKOTCF remains ready to consider a response from the Ministry of Defence for a future issue.

The Sovereign Base Area of Dhekelia, or the Eastern Sovereign Base Area (ESBA) as it is also called, is one of two British Overseas Territories on the island of Cyprus. The area, which includes British military bases and installations, as well as large extension of farmland, was established in 1960, when Cyprus achieved independence from the British Empire. Although the SBA boundaries were drawn to exclude civilian population centres, the coup in 1974 and other developments over the years led to an influx of civilians into the SBAs; approximately 7,000 Cypriots now live within the SBAs. In addition, 7800 UK residents, mostly military personnel and their families, work or live on the Bases (House of Commons 2008).

Both Sovereign Base Areas are run as military bases and they report to the British Ministry of Defence in London, rather than the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Nevertheless, they are governed as a British Overseas Territory and the head, who is also the commander of the British Forces Cyprus, has executive and legislative powers comparable to those of a governor exercising direct UK rule in a civilian overseas territory. The commander is the Administrator of the SBAs, leading a civilian administration that manages the SBAs.

Despite the size of ESBA being only 131 km², this territory has become the worst area in Europe for illegal bird-trapping and mist-netting¹, with a density of trapping sites which, in autumn, is 4 times higher and, in winter, 16 times higher than the neighbouring bad area, of Famagusta District in the Republic of Cyprus².

According to BirdLife Cyprus, this is the result of an increasing trend, started in 2009³: gangs of trappers litter, with nets, all suitable gardens and hedges, but also creating new patches of green, by planting and irrigating fast-growing and invasive acacia plants for blackcaps and small olive plantations for thrushes (aerial view in image to right).



Up to 2017, CABS and BirdLife Cyprus recorded 320 trapping sites in the ESBA, out of which 147 were found active in autumn 2016 and 125 in winter 2016-17⁴.

95% of these sites were used for mist-netting and only 5% for lime-sticks, the centuries old local trapping methods more widespread in the rest of the island. Basically, all these trapping sites were advertising their activity through the use of tape-lures, whose song-birds calls were audible from up to 1 km away. Commonly, during the night, 3-4 tape lures can be heard from the middle of the military residential area of Agios Nikolaos.

For 6 years, CABS have been cooperating with the ESBA police to optimise their resources, providing intelligence and expertise in order to increase the number of prosecutions and the control over the territory. Yet, the police seemed not to have real interest in the cooperation, systematically reducing the requested number of days of cooperation down to a handful and refusing to start the shift at 11 pm, when tape lures start playing, but postponing the fieldwork at 4.00 am. Both CABS and BirdLife Cyprus observed that, rather strangely, the vast majority of the cases they reported to the ESBA police, when successfully solved, were solved only

at the end of the trapping season, when most of the profit had been made by the trapper. The same happened with the so-called “clearance operations”, namely the large collection of net-poles, supports and carpets, which the Bases organised in the middle and at the end of the trapping season, never at the

beginning⁵ (see photo on next page; all photos from CABS).

It is therefore not surprising that, by 2017, no improvement on the ground has been observed; trapping in the ESBA reached its

1 *The Killing*, BirdLife International, 2015

2 [http://www.komitee.de/sites/www.komitee.de/files/wiki/2016/02/Bird%20trapping%20in%20the%20ESBA%20Annual%20Report%202016%20\(en\).pdf](http://www.komitee.de/sites/www.komitee.de/files/wiki/2016/02/Bird%20trapping%20in%20the%20ESBA%20Annual%20Report%202016%20(en).pdf) and <http://www.komitee.de/sites/www.komitee.de/files/wiki/2016/02/Cyprus%20Field%20Report%20Winter%202016-17.pdf>

3 [http://www.komitee.de/sites/www.komitee.de/files/wiki/2016/02/Bird%20trapping%20in%20the%20ESBA%20Annual%20Report%202016%20\(en\).pdf](http://www.komitee.de/sites/www.komitee.de/files/wiki/2016/02/Bird%20trapping%20in%20the%20ESBA%20Annual%20Report%202016%20(en).pdf), p.19

4 <http://www.komitee.de/sites/www.komitee.de/files/wiki/2016/02/Cyprus%20Field%20Report%20Winter%202016-17.pdf>

5 After receiving numerous criticism from CABS, RSPB, and BirdLife Cyprus, in the last 2 years the Bases have started making clearing operations also at the beginning of the autumn trapping season.



peak in autumn 2016, whereas the number of prosecutions for bird trapping made by the ESBA police, and particularly by the special Anti-Poaching Unit, dropped to their minimum in 2015⁶. Patrols of trappers in autumn roam the ESBA and chase aggressively any suspicious car from their area. CABS volunteers, police officers and even normal tourists

Since CABS and BirdLife Cyprus had developed a database with the exact location of each known trapping site, we were puzzled to find out that the first patch chosen in December 2014 for the eradication did not include any trapping site. The second patch eradicated in July 2015 went close to 4 trapping sites, but did not wipe out any of them, just reduced two of them in size. After our protest and recommendation, the Bases decided to go straight to the core trapping area, but eventually, in January 2016, they eradicated the acacias in a third patch where no trapping sites were present. When confronted about the reasons of these poor choices, the Administration purely admitted that they agreed with the local communities (*i.e.* the trappers) where to eradicate the acacias. Since then no more acacias have been eradicated and, in 2017, the Bases were proud to announce⁸ the removal of water-pipes, done in what seemed like a skulking manner, in the night.

The number of prosecutions

To understand the blatant nature of trapping in the ESBA, the reader has to know that trapping starts in mid-August and continues until the end of February without interruption, with only sporadic activity in April and May. In autumn, most of the sites are active 4-5 days a week, whereas in winter we estimate an average of 2-3 days a week. For law enforcement agents though,

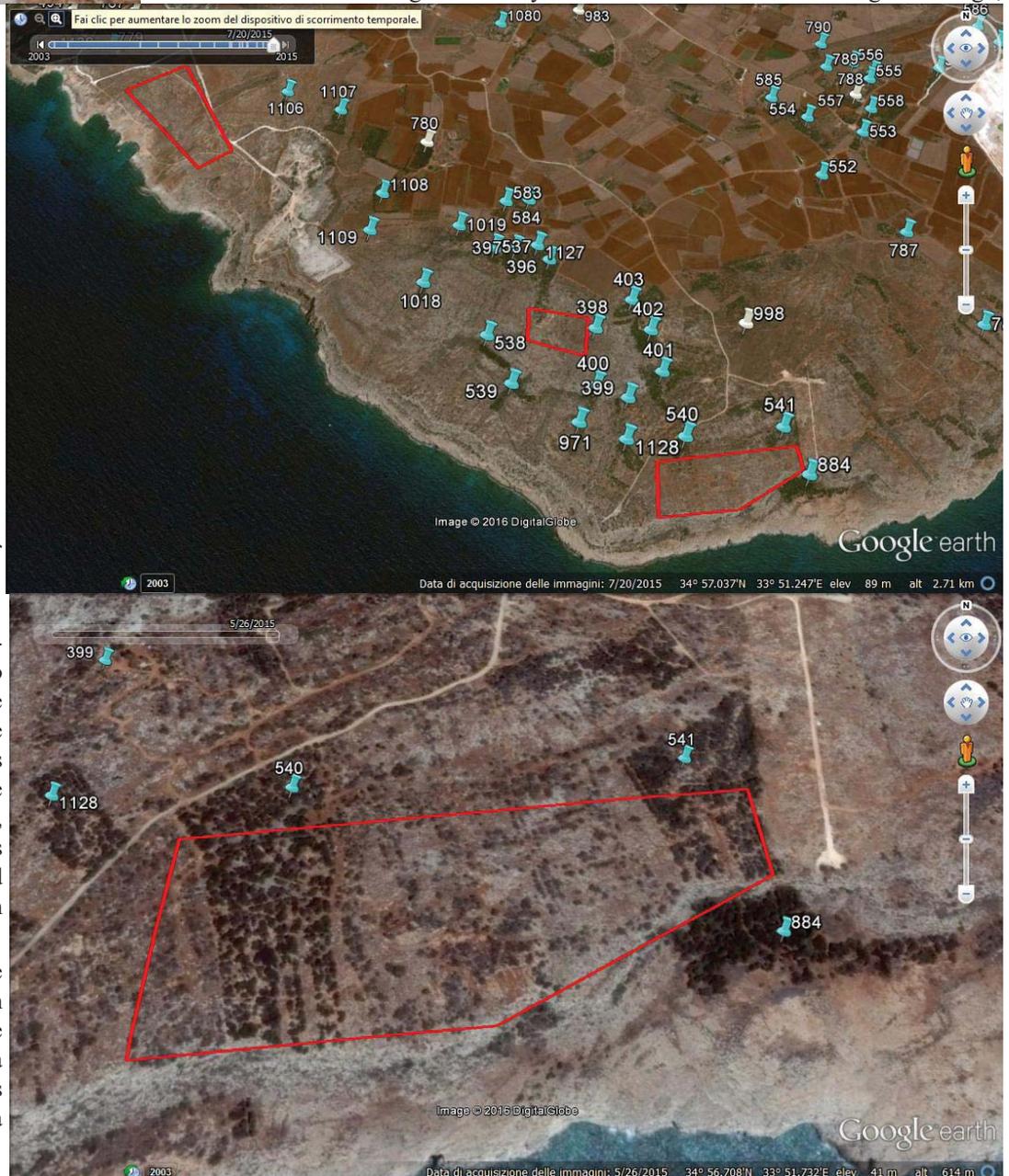
were repeatedly assaulted, the last incident being a grenade thrown at the Dhekelia police station in summer 2017.

It took time for all of us committed to tackling illegal bird-trapping to understand that what we were observing were not simple mistakes, but what seems to be part of a low-profile strategy undertaken by the Bases. In particular, three specific matters help shedding a clear light on this policy.

Acacia clearance

In the trapping hot-spot of Cape Pyla, the lack of native bushy vegetation has induced trappers to plant and grow non-native acacia bushes, in order to attract birds to the nets. These bushes have now invaded large portions of the Cape. The Bases Administration, under the pressure of environmental NGOs, agreed on eradicating the acacias from the newly established Special Area of Conservation (SAC)⁷.

In the pictures to the right, the points show the core of each trapping site, the red square the areas cleared of the acacia salina. The second picture shows the detail of the second acacia clearance.



6 Official Bird Trapping Poaching Stats - ESBA police
7 Special Area of Conservation

8 <http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/07/27/bases-remove-irrigation-pipes-used-bird-trappers/>

it is easy to locate an active trapping site, since most of them are equipped with tape lures running from 11 pm until 5 am. If we use our observations from 2016-2017, there were an average of 136 active trapping sites in the ESBA, where traps are set 95 days per year (45 in autumn and 40 in winter). Multiplying the number of days of activity per the number of trapping sites, we have an astounding 12,920 opportunities for law enforcement agents to catch red-handed a trapper in activity. Yet, every year the Base police catch from 20 to 47 people⁹. The lack of enforcement on the ground is easily observed by CABS volunteers who witness a steep decrease of tape-lures calling (*i.e.* trapping activity) as soon as the police start operating in the ESBA and trappers become aware of the activists' presence. In winter, when NGOs are not active on the ground, the number of prosecutions for trapping made by the ESBA police drops to 1-2 per month¹⁰, despite the high number of trappers in activity. To expose this situation, CABS organised, in January 2017, an operation called "The Long Night Raid", which aimed at "freezing the moment", showing how much activity was ongoing in the ESBA: sixteen CABS activists in 10 hours of night work managed to locate 115 active trapping sites and remove 274 nets, whereas the police had performed only one arrest in the previous 60 days.

SAFETY: The grenade thrown at the Dhekelia police station is just the tip of a series of episodes of violence which remained

⁹ The number of successful operations leading to a prosecution is therefore even lower, considering that often more than one person operate a trapping site. For comparison the Anti Poaching Unit of the Italian Forest Police catches red-handed 90-110 trappers during a 25 days Bird Protection Camp in the Alps

¹⁰ Official Bird Trapping Poaching Stats - ESBA police

unpunished in the ESBA. In autumn 2014, a police officer was apprehended by trappers in Agios Nikolaos, threatened and robbed. The trappers took the police-car he was driving and went to the police station, where they took and stole his own car. To the best of our knowledge, nobody was ever arrested for the robbery. One year before in autumn 2013, during a joint operation, two CABS volunteers were beaten up with an iron pole in front of an ESBA police officer, who did not stop the assaulter but instead called his colleagues for backup. When they arrived on the spot, the trapper left with a slow-moving field-motorbike, but the police did not manage to catch him although they were driving a pick-up truck. Nor did they investigate the owner of the hut where he came from. Finally, in February 2017, during a joint investigation, a car rammed our vehicle and chased us for 10 minutes, in front of the police car. The officers did not intervene to stop the assault. The car's owner was summoned to the police station, but no case was initiated against him.

In the light of this analysis, we cannot but underline that the Base police and administration do not make any mystery anymore of their ruinous policy. On one hand, they write in their police station "bird trapping is our top priority" but, on the other hand, the Chief Constable Chris Eyre stated in a press release: "We are walking a fine line: we are trying to respect everybody. The local community would like us to do less and the environmentalists more. Both are trying to move the line in different directions."¹¹ Maybe they should just implement the law and stop respecting lawbreakers.

¹¹ <http://cyprus-mail.com/2017/04/03/british-bases-step-fight-songbird-poaching/>

Developments in the British Indian Ocean Territory

Chagos Information Portal

The Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) has developed and launched the Chagos Information Portal (ChIP) to provide various scientific resources, datasets and information on the Chagos Archipelago. Funded by the John Ellerman Foundation, ChIP includes compilations for the Birds of Chagos and for the Corals of Chagos. An interactive map allows visitors to the platform to discover the different islands of the British Indian Ocean Territory. The portal can be accessed here: <http://chagosinformationportal.org/>



One of the images from the new portal: seafan at 25m depth at Ile Fouquet, Peros Banhos Atoll, BIOT. Photo: Anne Sheppard

Urgent Chagos Expedition

April 2017 saw a team of researchers carry out a two-week expedition to the Chagos Archipelago, to investigate the success of the Chagos Conservation Trust's rat eradication project and to carry out an assessment of the corals following last year's bleaching event. Professor John Turner from Bangor University and CCT Trustee was team leader and joined also by CCT Trustee Pete Carr.

Healthy corals have microalgae living within them that enable them to photosynthesize. Coral bleaching is caused by warm sea temperatures which lead to corals expelling these microalgae, which can result in the death of the coral and leaving behind a white coral skeleton. The expedition team discovered that nearly all corals around the 3 atolls that were surveyed had sadly died above 15m depth. Corals at a greater depth were found to be surviving and will hopefully provide for new generations of coral and allow the reefs to recover. Funded by the Bertarelli Foundation, Professor Turner and his team have received a grant that will allow them to carry out further investigations into coral bleaching and its impacts and the recovery potential of the reefs.

Positive news from the expedition is that Chagos Conservation Trust's invasive black rat eradication project on Ile Vache Marine was found to be successful. Trustee Pete Carr and biodiversity restoration specialist, Dr Grant Harper, found no evidence of black rats during the expedition and, indeed, found increased seabird numbers. Congratulations to CCT on this conservation success story!

For more information visit <http://chagos-trust.org/news/news-first-successful-invasive-rat-eradication-in-the-chagos-archipelago> and www.bangor.ac.uk/doctors-school/news/urgency-scientific-expedition-to-assess-climate-induced-death-of-coral-reefs-32202

Changes at UKOTCF

New Council Member: Victor Brownless



Victor worked in both the public and private sectors in the UK over almost 30 years. After initially training as a Chartered Public Finance Accountant with the National Audit Office and then with PwC in London he held a number of senior roles in local government - for example as Chief Executive of the former Armagh City & District Council

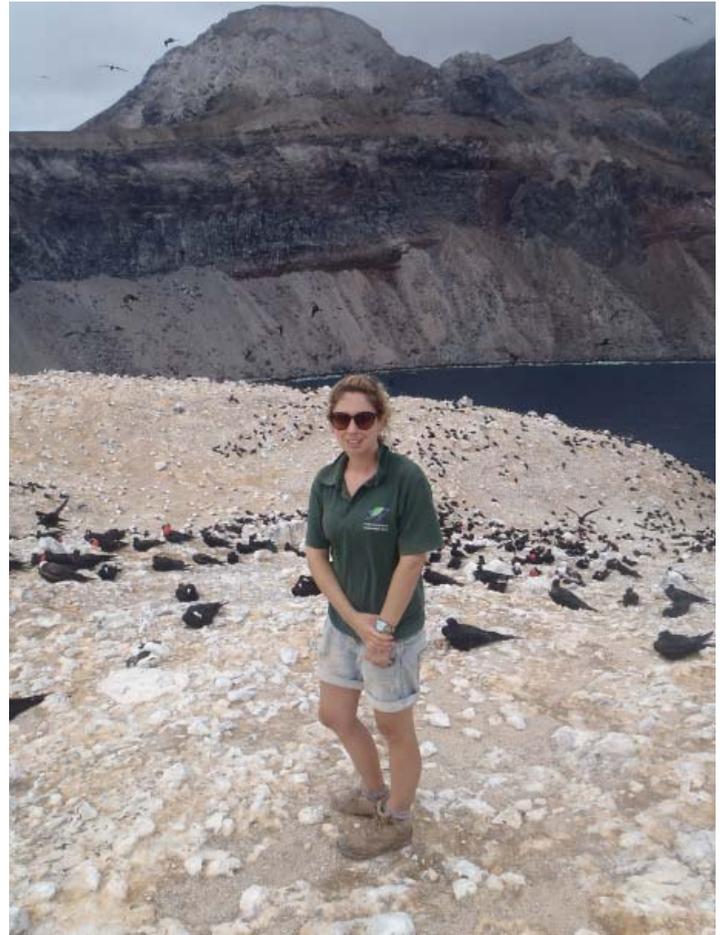
in Northern Ireland (2001-2007) and Chief Executive of Telford & Wrekin Council in the West Midlands of England (2009-2011). For a number of years he owned and managed his own consulting firm, working as advisor to a range of private sector companies supplying services to the public sector.

From September 2014 to May 2017, Victor served as Chief Executive and Head of the Civil Service for the government of the island of Alderney - a Crown Dependency in the Channel Islands and part of the Bailiwick of Guernsey. In this role he worked closely with the local environmental conservation charity – the Alderney Wildlife Trust (AWT) – and acted as Chair of the Board for the *Living Islands* project - a partnership comprising the AWT, the local heritage society (Alderney Society) and government. The project was jointly funded by the Alderney government (the States of Alderney) and the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts and made significant progress in promoting Alderney’s stunning wildlife and history to new audiences. At its heart was a recognition of the key roles for the island’s significant environmental and heritage assets in growing the tourism industry and a commitment to prove that environmental conservation can go hand in hand with local economic regeneration.

The success of Alderney’s *Living Islands* initiative led to Victor and his colleague Roland Gauvain (Director of the Alderney Wildlife Trust) presenting it as a case study for other jurisdictions at the UKOTCF Conference in Gibraltar in July 2015. Victor was also invited by Dr John Cortés (Gibraltar’s Environment Minister) to attend and participate in the first meeting of environment ministers, and equivalents, from the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies at the close of the conference. Victor continued his association with the Forum and hosted the second Ministerial meeting in Alderney in April 2017, which he co-chaired with Dr Cortés.

Victor is passionate about knowledge sharing and mutual co-operation between the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. At the April 2017 meeting in Alderney, the various 11 jurisdictions represented agreed unanimously to progress work in this regard. Whilst Victor is relocating to the USA with his American born wife and their son, he hopes to continue making a contribution to this work and to supporting the Forum generally.

Dr Nicola Weber



Nicola joined UKOTCF in March as part-time Conservation Officer. At the end of May, she took over from Sarah Barnsley as Secretary of the Southern Oceans Working Group.

Nicola holds a BSc in Marine and Environmental Biology from the University of St Andrews and an MSc in Biodiversity and Conservation from the University of Exeter. In 2011, she completed her PhD, which examined social interactions of the European badger and their implications for the transmission of bovine tuberculosis. Immediately following this, she moved to Ascension Island with her husband to study the green sea turtle population there, with Ascension being the second largest green turtle nesting rookery in the South Atlantic. They stayed there for 5 years; taking over the running of the Ascension Island Conservation Department in 2013. During this time, they implemented a number of changes, including the creation and implementation of the first Biodiversity Action Plan for the Island, Protected Areas and Wildlife Protection legislation, and a vibrant marine conservation and research programme. They left at the start of 2017 to raise their young family in the UK for a while, but are still actively involved in work on Ascension Island through Darwin Plus and BEST grants.

Nicola is very happy to have the role of Conservation Officer for the UKOTCF and to remain involved with the Southern Oceans UKOTs, and is also excited to expand her involvement with and knowledge of the other UKOTs, in particular those in the Caribbean where she has previously worked on sea turtle conservation programmes. She participated in UKOTCF’s project visit to Montserrat in June, and continues to work on this project. You can view more about her research here: www.researchgate.net/profile/Nicola_Weber

Dr Wylie Horn



Wylie was appointed in March 2017 as part-time Conservation and Information Officer for UKOTCF.

After graduating with a BSc in Ecological Science from Edinburgh University, Wylie worked as an RSPB warden for several years in Strathspey, Shetland, and the Somerset Levels. Following that, he worked on the *Seabirds and Sandeels* project for the Applied Ornithology Unit at Glasgow University, studying the breeding failure of surface-feeding seabirds in the Shetland Islands. This led to him to studying for a PhD, looking at the feeding behaviour of breeding arctic and common terns on Coquet Island, Northumberland, UK.

He worked as a film library researcher for Oxford Scientific Films in the mid-nineties, and then in a variety of IT roles at the University of Oxford for 19 years, supporting a very wide range of IT services for the collegiate University. In 2013 he formed his own IT consultancy.

Avishka Sendanayake

Aviska joined UKOTCF in March as a voluntary Environment Assistant.



Coming from an island state in the Indian Ocean, Avishka left Sri Lanka in 2012 to study abroad, which led her to study her BSc in Sustainable Development at Kingston University. She has a keen interest in wildlife, conservation and all sustainability issues. This interest has led her to read for an MSc in Climate Change and Sustainability at Brunel University, where she is involved in various volunteering activities and salsa dancing.

She has been involved in volunteering activities throughout her time at

University since 2012. She was a regular volunteer for the *Riverfly Monitoring Partnership* that was working with the Kingston University Biodiversity Action Group. She is currently a volunteer for the Hillingdon Group of the London Wildlife Trust and she is also a volunteer nursery gardener at Osterley Park.

She was an International student ambassador in Kingston University for one year, and was also an ambassador for the *Low Carbon Entrepreneur Competition* organized by the Mayor of London. She attended and participated at the COP 22 of the United Nations Conference for Climate Change in 2016 which was held in Marrakech, Morocco. During this experience, Avishka, who was a member of the Angola Delegation, was involved in the discussion with the Least Developed Countries regarding their mitigation plans against Climate Change.

Conservation has always been a strong passion of hers, which is why she chose to study conservation modules during her undergraduate and her postgraduate studies. Furthermore she completed her dissertation on coral reef conservation in Sri Lanka, which is a personal passion of hers.

Eleanor Comley

El joined UKOTCF in March as a voluntary Conservation Assistant, and is fulfilling the role of Assistant Secretary of the Wider Caribbean Working Group

El holds a BSc in Biology from the University of Sheffield and is a Volunteer Learning Assistant Intern for the RSPB. El enjoys sharing her love for nature with those around her, which has led to a number of



Science Communication roles in such projects as the RSPB's *Big Schools' Birdwatch* and the University of Sheffield's Outreach programmes. She also teaches physical outdoor activities through her employment as an Activity Instructor in Sheffield.

El is interested in wildlife conservation, specifically tackling poaching through practical conservation methods and wildlife protection laws.

In 2016, El participated in research for Carnivore Research Malawi and African Bat Conservation, where she gathered spatial and behavioural data on spotted hyenas and identified the bat species present in the city of Lilongwe and Liwonde National Park. While working in remote villages to improve the perception of carnivores, she gained an appreciation for the complexity of the issues that surround protecting wildlife whilst also respecting cultural beliefs. El hopes to start tackling some of these problems through her Master's degree and aims to focus on community engagement techniques.

As a Conservation Assistant for the UKOTCF, El is responsible for creating some of the online Virtual Tours of the Overseas Territories and also acts as Assistant Secretary Wider Caribbean Working Group. In her spare time, she volunteers for the *Moors for the Future Partnership* in the Peak District and is a Cub Leader for the Scout Association.

UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee reports on the environmental consequences of UK's exit from the European Union

In the wake of the EU referendum, the UK Parliament's House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) launched several inquiries, as well as revisiting subjects that it had covered previously, and which were likely to be impacted by the Government's response to the result. UKOTCF was amongst those giving evidence to these. UKOTCF alerted its Members and associate organisations to these and encouraged them to submit their own responses as well as provide input into UKOTCF's. In 2017, the Committee's reports were published.

Committee Inquiry into the *Future of the Environment after the EU Referendum*

In September 2016, a submission was made to this Inquiry. Although EAC's report concentrates on the impact on GB and NI, there are some references to UKOTs, which are pleasing to see.

The Committee drew on the submission from UKOTCF noting:

"43. The UK Government must also address concerns relating to the natural environment in UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs). The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum explained that support would be needed to help Gibraltar retain existing environmental law in its own legislation, and to ensure it became a party to international conservation frameworks outside the EU umbrella. The UK government has consistently said that UKOTs

meet their obligations to the Bern convention through the EU Birds and Habitats Directives without them needing to be party to it, however these Directives themselves will probably not apply to the UK when it leaves the EU. The domestic legislation transposing them into UK law will be retained through the Great Repeal Bill but this will not apply to Gibraltar. The Forum therefore continued:

UK's ratification includes the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas, the Isle of Man and Jersey. As long ago as 1996, in UK Dependent Territories: a Conservation Review (part-funded by UK Government's Darwin Initiative), UKOTCF (at the request of Gibraltar partners) called on the UK Government to include Gibraltar in its ratification of the Bern Convention and assist in its implementation.

The Forum also called on the UK Government to increase Defra resources in order to support territories and Crown Dependencies in designating and managing Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.

Furthermore, linked to their recommendations the EAC noted:

"Membership of the EU has provided a common framework within which the devolved nations have been able to develop their own environmental policies. References to the EU will need to be removed from devolved legislation, and the Government

Managing the Protected Areas

- Upper Rock Nature Reserve Management Plan
- Gibraltar Biodiversity Action Plan
- Gibraltar Nature Reserve Management Plan
- Southern Waters of Gibraltar Management Plan



Gibraltar's Protected Sites

There are two Special Areas of Conservation/Special Protected Areas in Gibraltar.

- Rock of Gibraltar SAC/SPA
- Southern Waters of Gibraltar SAC/SPA



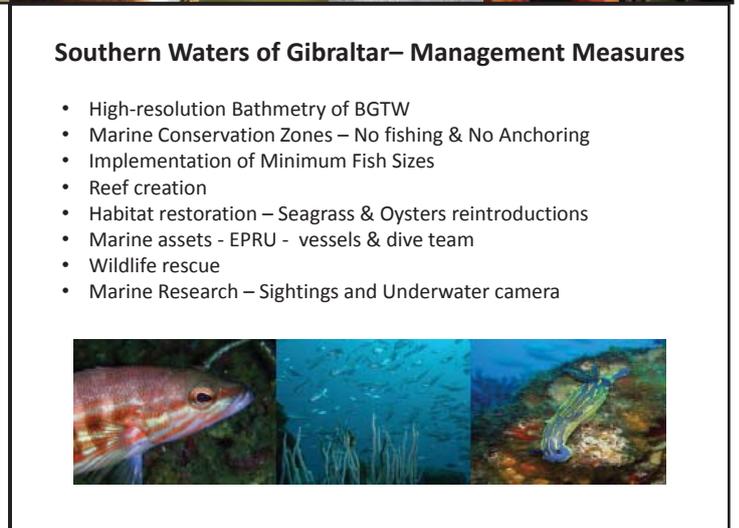
Gibraltar Nature Reserve – Management Measures

- Habitat management – Alien species, habitat succession and diversity, increasing recreation and tourism value
- Reintroductions – re-wilding the reserve
- Scientific Research



Southern Waters of Gibraltar– Management Measures

- High-resolution Bathymetry of BGTW
- Marine Conservation Zones – No fishing & No Anchoring
- Implementation of Minimum Fish Sizes
- Reef creation
- Habitat restoration – Seagrass & Oysters reintroductions
- Marine assets - EPRU - vessels & dive team
- Wildlife rescue
- Marine Research – Sightings and Underwater camera



Most UKOTs and CDs are being affected in some ways by Brexit, but none more than Gibraltar, which is the only one of them actually in the EU – but it will have (very reluctantly) to leave when UK does. Gibraltar has based its conservation strategy on EU legislation, making effective use of this, including by designation of large protected areas (exceeding internationally agreed Aichi Targets in national proportion of areas under protection).

Some of the species, ecosystems and measures are summarised in these extracts from a presentation by HM Government of Gibraltar



Left: Spanish Government armed vessel intervenes in fishing activity inside British Gibraltar Territorial Waters; while both countries are in the EU, there is some means of limiting such illegal threats to conservation. Centre: Gibraltar MPA underwater video (accessible on <http://www.thinkinggreen.gov.gi/underwater-camera>), with (on the right) the view while an octopus embraced the camera. Photos: HM Government of Gibraltar

must substitute a new common framework. The Government must ensure that the status of EU environmental legislation in the UK Overseas Territories is understood and action taken to preserve protections where necessary.”

The full report can be seen at: www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvaud/599/59902.htm .

Inquiry into Marine Protected Areas revisited

In October 2016, written evidence was submitted on MPAs. The material used to draft a response came largely from the marine session at the Gibraltar conference in July 2015 (see *Forum News* 44) and the *Review of progress in meeting Commitments under the Environment Charter, Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Goals* (www.ukotcf.org/charters/progress.htm).

The EAC invited UKOTCF to provide oral evidence in its session, held 10 January 2017, alongside the Blue Marine Foundation and the Pew Trusts (see *Forum News* 45: 22-23). The full recording of the session, together with the session held on 26 January, involving Rt Hon Baroness Anelay of St Johns, Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Dr Thérèse Coffey, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Life Opportunities, DEFRA is available to view at www.parliament.uk and <http://parliamentlive.tv/Event/Index/ea5de59c-f449-4573-a97f-e8100e06ef23>. Following this, additional written evidence was submitted, and this has also now been published online.

In those parts of its report (<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvaud/597/597.pdf>) relating to Overseas Territories, EAC frequently cited evidence from UKOTCF. The Committee’s conclusions include:

56. *To gain support for the MPA network, the Government must ensure that it consults more effectively and transparently with Governments and local communities in the Overseas Territories. It should ensure that any concerns of the UKOTs are given due consideration before designating MPAs in their waters.*

60. *Designation of an MPA is only the first step. MPAs will only be effective if they are properly resourced, managed, monitored and enforced. Many UKOTs lack the necessary resources to effectively manage their MPAs.*

61. *The Government must provide support to the UKOTs to help them properly detect and deter illegal activities. The Government must explore ways of strengthening surveillance and monitoring, to help detect illegal fishing activities in resource-poor UKOTs.*

67. *A lack of funding in the UKOTs hampers the ability to effectively manage and enforce designated MPAs. We welcome the Government’s commitment of £20 million over the next four years to support the implementation, management, surveillance, monitoring and enforcement of MPAs in the UKOTs. However, we are concerned about the loss of EU BEST funding which currently provides approximately 1/3 of all environmental project funding in the UKOTs.*

68. *We recommend that the Government commits to replacing BEST funding after we leave the European Union. The UK Government should explore and promote opportunities for the UKOTs to access funding sources from environmental initiatives, NGOs, conservation groups and charities for environmental projects in the UKOTs. This should be used as an additional source of funding for projects in the UKOTs and not be utilised as an excuse to replace any existing sources of funding. This would help the Government contribute to achieving the Global Goal 14 ‘Life Below Water’.*

70. *The UK Government must assess the likely impact of leaving the EU on Gibraltar’s Marine Protected Areas. In response to this report, it must set out what additional support it intends to provide to Government of Gibraltar to prevent incursions in their territorial waters. It must set out in the Great Repeal Bill and any new Fisheries or Environmental Protection Act how the funding, monitoring and evaluation of Gibraltar’s MPAs will proceed to minimise any future difficulties with Spain over management measures.*

Inquiry on Sustainable Development Goals in the UK

Again, all submissions, including UKOTCF’s, can be seen on the EAC page. EAC’s report (<https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmenvaud/596/596.pdf>) refers to the overall situation, rather than addressing UKOTs specifically. Nevertheless, especially because it addresses in part the approach to UK Government spending overseas (especially, but not exclusively, by DFID), it is very relevant to UKOTs. The criticism of lack of awareness-raising has resonance with UK Government’s removal of eligibility of grant-funding in UKOTs of environmental education and awareness-raising measures. Some key points in the report are:

From the Summary:

By adopting Agenda 2030 the Government has committed itself to implementing the Sustainable Development Goals - or the Global Goals - in the UK as well as overseas. However, the Government’s doughnut-shaped approach - which is to see the Goals as something for the UK to help other countries do, rather

than drawing on other countries' experiences in implementing the goals here at home - suggests that it has little interest in, or enthusiasm for, maximising the opportunities and benefits presented by the Goals. Successful implementation would not only encourage greater cross-departmental collaboration and policy coherence in Government, it would bring economic, social and environmental benefits to the UK...

Raising awareness and encouraging engagement with the Global Goals will increase the number of people and organisations able to contribute towards meeting the Goals. But today few people in the UK know about them...

40. Progress on developing measurement frameworks for the Goals is too slow. We recognise the progress of the Office of National Statistics to date and commend its efforts to engage with stakeholders and draw on non-official data sources as a way to fill the "data gap". However, it is now almost two years since the Government adopted the Goals. During that time we have seen delays from both the Government and the ONS. Delays to the ONS's work means delays to the UK's achievement of the Goals. We are concerned about the amount of time it is taking to develop the national indicators given the ONS "contributed directly" to the development of the global indicators between March 2015 and March 2016. It should be a priority for the ONS to establish an early baseline from which we can judge the Government's future performance against the roadmap it sets out. Perfection should not be the enemy of the good, so we recommend that the ONS focus its efforts on ensuring it meets its autumn 2017 deadline to report on the Goals to the United Nations. The ONS requires secure and sustained funding to carry out its job in relation to the Goals, and the Government should set out how much funding the ONS will receive at the start of every Parliament.

41. However, we are concerned that the Government appears to have changed its mind about the ONS developing a set of national indicators. This suggests an attempt to bury data which will be seen by the public - and us - as going against the spirit of the Goals. This would undermine UK leadership on the Goals. If this is the case then two years of work by the ONS will have been wasted by the Government. It means there will be no aggregate scorecard or baseline against which to measure progress towards the Goals. This will harm public accountability and moves the country away from achieving the Goals. We can see that integrating the indicators into the Government's Single Departmental Plans will ensure they are taken seriously by individual departments. But the move risks reducing the level of engagement and participation from non-government bodies and it increases the temptation for the Government to cherry-pick indicators and focus on areas where it is performing well. It is also not clear how well equipped Government departments are to ensure proper data disaggregation and therefore focus on the hardest to reach groups in society. The Government must clarify urgently in its response to this report whether the ONS will report on national progress towards the Global Goals. It must also ensure a timely and transparent release of information that monitors progress against the indicators. We expect these to be produced and managed in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics to ensure confidence in their implementation.



The Executive Committee of IUCN National Committee for the UK after its meeting in July at the Natural History Museum, pictured in front of NHM's brand-new display of 'Hope', the blue whale: from left at back: Chris Mahon (Chief Executive IUCN-NCUK), Stephen Grady (Joint Nature Conservation Committee), Sue Stolton (World Commission on Protected Areas), Ben Connor (British Ecological Society); front: Andrew Callender (Royal Society for Protection of Birds), Stuart Brooks (Scottish Environment Link; Chairman IUCN-NCUK), Martin Spray (Wildfowl and Wetland Trust [and UKOTCF Council]), Mike Pienkowski (UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum), Jonathan Hughes (The Wildlife Trusts).

Positive reports were delivered on progress with the NCUK's projects, notably the success of the 'Peatland Programme', both nationally and internationally, and its secured funding for the next 4 years. The NCUK is particularly interested in exploring how it can assist in progressing the reporting of domestic UK activity in meeting the CBD Aichi Targets and the UN Sustainable Development Goals, as part of its ongoing work programme 2017-20. This would complement UKOTCF's 2016 [Review of performance by 2016 of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies in implementing the 2001 Environment Charters or their equivalents and moving towards the Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Targets](#). IUCN Regional Councillor Jonathan Hughes gave a presentation on the 3rd World Forum on Natural Capital which will take place in Edinburgh in

November.

Inter-Island Environment Meeting in Sark



Left: Sark from the air, as a flight approaches Guernsey, from where there is a ferry link to Sark.

Right: Island Hall, the venue of the meeting.

Photos on this page: Dr Mike Pienkowski



21-22 September 2017 saw the Channel Island of Sark host the annual Inter-Island Environment Meeting for the first time. This marked the 10th anniversary of the designation of Sark's Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands: Gouliot Caves. UKOTCF's Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski, had advised Sark in that process, partly within UKOTCF's *Review of existing and potential Ramsar sites in UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies*, and so was delighted to represent UKOTCF at this IIEM.

The Inter-Island Environment Meetings are now 17 years old, having started in 2000, in Guernsey, and then hosted by Jersey, Alderney and Exeter, and now for the first time in Sark.

UKOTCF, the Isle of Man, the UK and France have been involved to different extents over the years and many different themes have been covered. The meetings were strongly encouraged by the late Charles David (former President of La Société Guernesiaise) a keen advocate of communication, sharing of skills, knowledge and experience. This year the broad theme was Habitat Management.

The meeting was held at the Island Hall, opened in 2005; since then, it has been at the heart of much of island life. The main hall is a beautiful, wooden-vaulted room reaching the full height of the building.

During the meeting there was a display of posters in the entrance lobby adjacent to the registration area, with a competition display by Sark School (*examined by a voter below*).



The meeting was opened (*photo below*) by the President of the Société Sercquaise and Seigneur (senior officer) of Sark, Christopher Beaumont – who made a point of searching out UKOTCF's representative before the meeting, for an update so that, during the opening, he could send the meeting's heartfelt thoughts and good wishes for rebuilding and also restoring environmental measures to all those suffering from the hurricanes in Caribbean UKOTs (see pages 16-19).

Talks included:



The benefits of having an Accredited Bird Observatory (Paul Veron) and joint working between government and NGOs to maximise benefits by jointly managing the heritage and natural landscape of Alderney (Roland Gauvain);

The relationship between marine invasive species and habitats: management implications for Channel Islands (Paul Chambers);

UK updates on land use and habitat management, and island restoration programmes (Paul Buckley and Nick Bruce-White);

Habitat Management – Use of cattle etc (Julia Henney);

Habitat Management with bees in mind (Julia Pigott and Martin Hoggard);

Isle of Wight's UNESCO Biosphere Reserve (Richard Grogan);

Management and control of Hottentot Fig in Jersey (John Pinel);

Sarkwatch (Katie Knight);

Using Webcams in Education including Sark (Vic Froome);

Habitat Management for Bats 'Thinking Beyond the Roost' (Piers Sangan and Ana Binet);

Return of the Crawfish (Sue Daly);

Managing a whelk fishery for ecology and economics or Why whelks are to the sea as urinals are to office buildings (Francis Binney);

Le Guet Pine Forest at Cobo, Rejuvenation project (Vic Froome); and Project Sunflower, a new initiative for Sark (Sue Daly).

About 70 people participated, and divided between four field-trips on the Saturday afternoon: The intrepid donned wet-suits to swim into Gouliot Caves with *Adventure Sark*, while 3 walks tackled: Eperquerie Landing rock pool ramble, led by Katie Knight; or Creux Belet wet valley walk, led by Richard Axton; or Gouliot Headland, led by Jan Guy with local botanist Susan Synnott.

The Cider Barn hosted exhibitions on: Coastal erosion and its management; and Habitat change on Sark; whilst the Heritage Room held a Ramsar 10th anniversary exhibition.

A Ramsar Group meeting was held at the Island Hall, and those not needing sleep undertook stargazing with Sark Astronomy Society, taking advantage of Sark's status as the world's first *Dark Skies Island*.



Richard Axton's field trip members view wildlife, scenery and Sark's unique historic built features.