



UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

Annual Report 2000/01

Chairman's Report on behalf of the Executive Committee

Overview

The Forum has had another successful year. The Forum's database is now live. It is being updated and added to by Forum officers and members, and can be accessed by the public – so please do use it.

Calpe 2000, an environmental conference sponsored by the Gibraltar government, and organised by the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society with support of the Forum, was considered by delegates to be an extremely productive gathering. Some key environmental priorities were identified. One important area which embraces many others concerns strategic environmental planning. OT representatives identified also the importance of expanding the ongoing dialogue with the UK Government to impress upon them the need for funding and technical assistance to ensure that UK's OTs can work towards achieving sustainable livelihoods through the environmental sector of their economies.

Funding continues to be a major challenge and restriction on the Forum. In order to keep the important work in helping OTs going, effective fund raising has to be achieved. A new 'Friends of the UK Overseas Territories' is a small step towards sustainable funding; other means still have to be devised and accomplished.

Forum officers have continued to maintain good relations with government, meeting at frequent intervals to raise and discuss issues of interest, concern and potential collaboration. Also they are continuing ongoing liaison and support to OT Member Organisations and Administrations to promote the co-ordinated conservation of the diverse and increasingly threatened plant and animal species, natural ecosystems and cultural heritage of the OTs.

A positive development during the year has been the increasing involvement of governments and NGOs in the Crown

Dependencies (Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man), which have several interests in common with the OTs. Links have been furthered also with the OTs of other states. For example, the Netherlands Antilles is interested in collaboration in the Forum's web-site, and colleagues in France are interested in exploring the model of the Forum.

This report covers the period from July 2000 to June 2001. Within each section below progress is reported and priorities highlighted for the coming year.

Relationships and links with Overseas Territories and OT NGOs

Calpe 2000, Linking the Fragments of Paradise, an environmental conference sponsored by the Government of Gibraltar, organised by the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society with support of the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, was held from 28 September to 1 October 2000 in Gibraltar. The conference was extremely valuable in drawing together an enthusiastic, committed and normally widely dispersed

group of people. The conference was deliberately participatory for all, rather than segregated into speakers and audience. The exchange of experience was a key factor in the success of the meeting, delegates finding that many challenges were common to all the countries in spite of geographical, socio-economic and cultural differences. Editing of the Proceedings is well advanced, with completion expected well within a year of the conference. The possibility of a further conference, possibly in late 2002, is being explored with colleagues in Bermuda.

Forum officers continue close working relationships with the officers and Council of the Turks and Caicos Islands National Trust as part of a 3-year programme of strategic planning and capacity development. Much time has been spent on future plans and proposals focusing on taking forward the results of the Darwin work, and the capacity development, to implement conservation management and involvement of the local communities in sustainable small businesses, especially in the major Ramsar site but also in other important areas. Strategic planning has



Opening of Calpe 2000

John Cortes GOHNS, Deputy Chief Minister Keith Azopardi and Mike Pienkowski UKOTCF

been undertaken also with the National Trusts and Governments of Montserrat and the Cayman Islands. Developing a National Trust for St. Helena has been progressing, with a steering committee and local action group being set up; Martin Drury will visit St. Helena later in 2001. Consultations on future needs, especially in relation to the UK's Environmental Charter, have been held by Forum officers with St Helena, Falkland Islands, British Virgin Islands,

Relations with UK Government and government agencies

In addition to very frequent informal contacts on particular issues, the Forum has continued to hold twice-yearly joint meetings with government; this it jointly chairs with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Forum has initiated discussions to make these meetings even more effective. On 11 July, at the invitation of FCO, the joint meeting was held in the



Opening ceremony of the Natural History Centre, Montserrat

L-R Stephen Macnamara, MNT Director; Colin Clubbe, RBG Kew; Sara Cross, UKOTCF; Anne-Marie Dewar, PS Natural Resources; H.E. Anthony Abbott, Governor; and Sarita Francis, MNT President.

Montserrat and Anguilla, and with many OTs at the Gibraltar conference. Topics have included also requests to help assess organisational development priorities and to explore other matters including future plans for additional protected areas.

In the year under review, the Forum has established contacts with the British Sovereign Base Areas Administration (SBAA) in Cyprus in an effort to end the illegal trapping of migratory songbirds, a traditional activity in Cyprus but one which has recently expanded to become a major commercial enterprise in one of the two areas under the control of the SBAA, possibly in response to more effective controls in the Republic of Cyprus. The SBAs are administered by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the recent White Paper confirms their status as Overseas Territories. The Forum will continue efforts to help the SBAA, in cooperation with the Republic, to take a more proactive role against the trappers.

splendid Locarno Room as part of the millennium open days, showing the general public government at work.

A major disappointment at the March meeting was the announcement that, due to redeployment of funds in the Department for International Development (DFID), the Global Environment Fund for Overseas Territories (OTGEF) would not be starting. This fund, announced in UK Government's White Paper on Overseas Territories in March 1999, had already been long delayed. It had been intended to make a small contribution to the funding gap in that UKOTs, as part of UK, are not eligible for the main funding mechanism for developing countries to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Global Environment Facility (to which UK makes major contributions). This serious gap remains, and it is difficult not to view this as a serious setback, especially because much scarce time in OTs and NGOs had been spent, at DFID request, preparing for this.

The other major funding initiative announced by the White Paper, the Environment Fund for Overseas Territories (EFOT), operated by FCO, has however been deployed effectively since

shortly after publication of the White Paper. The flexibility of operation of this fund has been a major factor in its successful implementation. It has funded a variety of projects which are already showing effective results. Project information, priorities for further work and other key information are being published on the Forum's website (itself supported by EFOT) as details become available.

The conference in Gibraltar, *Calpe 2000*, attracted a wide range of participants, including three ministers from Gibraltar, and others from other OTs. Representation included also a variety of small island states, NGOs, the Environment Policy Department of FCO and the UK Department of Environment, Transport & the Regions (DETR). Participants were keen to encourage representation at future meetings also of FCO's Overseas Territories Department (OTD) and the UK Dept for International Development (DFID).

Conservation Priorities

The Forum website became live in January 2001 and this is proving helpful to many of the OT partners. The Forum's Conservation Review continues to provide a strategic framework for priority projects. A number of the Territories have updated their conservation priorities. Work is in hand to add a module on Sites and Topics, to add to those on Projects, Funding Sources and General Information. Partners are being trained in data-entry, so that all can share in increasing the content and value of the database.

Visits to British Virgin Islands, Cayman, and Montserrat have been made to discuss the Environment Charter and ways of turning it into action. This work has been undertaken in parallel with FCO work on agreeing the umbrella statements. The Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) has been facilitating development of its own document of environmental principles, and the Forum considers that such a facilitated approach is also the way to make the UK/OT charter effective.

Darwin Initiative projects (under the programme of the UK Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) continue to flourish in Anguilla, Ascension, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, St Helena, and Turks and Caicos. UK member organisations, WWF, RSPB, FFI, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, CABI and the Forum itself are involved in these projects with the member organisations in the OTs.

The *Calpe 2000* conference identified a number of environmental priorities; one in particular was the importance of owning land in order to ensure long-term conservation. Those territories with National Trust type legislation have a helpful mechanism available for governments to enlist the resources of NGOs. Another priority is the need for the development of proper strategic planning, combined with open planning procedures and independent environmental

impact assessment. All are, of course, related to the concept of environmental charters.

The Working Group sections later in this Report address some specific issues.

Public Awareness and Publicity

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office was open to the public on selected days during the summer of 2000 to commemorate the millennium. The Overseas Territories Department's open day on 11 July attracted over four thousand people. The Forum had the opportunity to display all fifteen of its information and individual territory display boards and talk to the public on the work the Forum is doing both in the UK and the OTs.

The boards were deployed also at several other high-profile venues. The display boards for Ascension, St Helena and Falklands are exhibited permanently at RAF Brize Norton, the main airport serving these islands, to inform military and other visitors to these Territories. A 16-page booklet featuring all the Forum's display boards has been published and widely distributed. It is included also in the teachers' pack with the FCO's video *A Breath of Fresh Air*, based on the conference on the environment jointly organised by the FCO and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, held in London in July 1999.

The display board material is available also, as part of each Territory information page, on the Forum website: www.ukotcf.org. Resources have recently been obtained for the production of display boards for the remaining Territories.

Two editions of *Forum News* have been published, in February and June 2001. These are available also on the web-site in pdf format for easy access. Funding is being sought so that the printed version can join the web-edition in colour. Written contributions from Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies have been forthcoming, and *Forum News* remains a means for the Territories to air their views.

Articles have appeared also in the magazines of the Forum's member organisations, and Forum officers joined colleagues of such organisations at their stands at meetings, such as the RSPB members' conference.

Information Management

The database part of the Forum website is now live to users at www.ukotcf.org. The first modules concerning conservation priorities, information sources, funding sources and projects are available for use by the general public. Material on these topics is being added progressively. The Forum's web-site receives an average of about 200 "hits" per day, this equating to about 30 separate visits per day. Visits tend to be quite long in comparison to many web-sites, at an average of about 6 minutes.

Total number of different visitors per month has increased during the year from about 400 to about 600, and the percentage of repeat visitors within a month increased from about 15% to 25%. (As with all web-usage figures, these are based on standard assumptions.)

Further funding for a sites and topics module was received from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and work is in progress to implement this. The sites database will aid site conservation, decision-making, public participation and reporting for international commitments. The database has been designed so that Forum members, once provided with



Frigate Bird Fregata magnificens

training and passwords, can access the database for input and correction. Additions and alterations will be available to the general public only after verification by the Forum. A number of people took the opportunity to receive training in entering information at the *Calpe* Conference as well as at other Forum meetings and by individual arrangement.

Working Groups

Working Groups have met on a regular basis. Their reports are given below. An initiative to formulate a European Working Group was made during the conference in Gibraltar. Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS) agreed to coordinate a questionnaire amongst the relevant OTs and Crown Dependencies regarding their individual situations.

Progress on this development will be guided by the speed at which the interested parties themselves are able to resource this proposal.

Organisational Development

Fund-raising continues to be a challenging aspect of the Forum's development. Data management and further development of the web database, as well as other support for the Territories, are dependent on successful funding. Only 10% of the Forum's annual income is obtained from subscriptions from the UK member organisations. The majority of the remaining income is obtained from project funding, with some further support from donations both in cash and kind, as well as major contributions of time of some individuals. The Forum is grateful for this project support and looks to expanding it. However, it is conscious of the narrow and variable funding base that this represents, and recognises that it needs urgently to secure other funding sources. Corporate sponsorship is still being sought, as are donations from Charitable Trusts. Many individuals have expressed interest in supporting the Forum, and a new category of 'Friends of the UK Overseas Territories' has been developed in response to this demand. The Forum is grateful to its newest recruit to the Executive Committee, Dace McCoy Ground, for work on designing leaflets and strategies in relation to these initiatives. However, it is important for all to pool ideas and effort here, and officers would like to hear from those in the Forum network who could identify funding opportunities and contacts. Help in distributing the Friends leaflets, particularly among member organisations, is being sought, as well as assistance in identifying commercial contacts.

Acknowledgements

For the success it achieves, the Forum depends on the voluntary efforts of its member organisations in UK and the Overseas Territories, as well as its wider network. The Forum would like to thank the following, in addition to its Member Organisations and other volunteers, for support via contracts, grants, donations in funds or kind, or in other ways during the year.

Bermuda Ministry of Environment, Development & Opportunity
British Airways Assisting Conservation Department of the Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Darwin Initiative)
Foreign & Commonwealth Office
Loke Wan Tho Memorial Foundation
Montserrat National Trust
National Trust of the Cayman Islands and anonymous donors.

Report of the UKOTCF South Atlantic Working Group

The Group met three times under the Chairmanship of David Taylor and once, in his absence, under Ann Brown. Dorothy Evans was Secretary for all meetings. She has now asked to retire from this role; the Group is most grateful to her for all her hard work.

The Group has again tried both to keep abreast of developments in the Territories, and to support colleagues in the Territories trying to sustain biodiversity and to resist policies and tendencies which threaten it. The momentum of regular reporting from overseas has been maintained, ensuring that the nucleus of regular UK participants (which includes representatives from BANC, Falklands Conservation, RBG Kew, RSPB, WWF and the Zoological Society of London) is well-informed. Ann Brown visited the Falklands and Dorothy Evans, St. Helena.

Sadly we have lost Cathy Hopkins who has returned to St. Helena but she has been replaced by the new St Helena Government Representative, Kedell Worboys. We have been strengthened by the addition of Martin Drury who has joined the Group in anticipation of his impending association with St Helena for the Forum.

Becky Ingham and Debbie Summers from the Falklands and Isabel Peters and Stedson Stroud from St Helena, the latter studying the boxwood at Kew, were all in the United Kingdom and at Gibraltar in 2000 and met SAWG members. All made presentations in Gibraltar where there was also a short presentation about the Group's work. Norman Glass from Tristan visited in 2001.

In the South Atlantic the past year has been a mixture of satisfactory progress in some areas and a frustrating lack of it in others. There have been alarms and excursions and one spectacularly good piece of news, in Ascension. In all this members of the Group have played roles of varying influence and effectiveness, sometimes centre stage, sometimes more marginal, but none the less useful for that.

The Falkland Islands were, as ever, well served by Falklands Conservation with its unique combination of Trustees in the Islands and in the United Kingdom. Two unattractive events marred the Falklands' generally good record in conservation matters.

A fire on South Jason Island, a Crown-owned nature reserve, in January started inadvertently by an army team exploding ordinance from a crashed Argentine military aircraft from 1982 was at first thought to have destroyed both albatross and penguin colonies but subsequently found to have done less damage than early reports indicated. Nevertheless, despite assurances by the

military, the event left the Group uneasy about the control arrangements for such expeditions and we have been pursuing this issue with the Governor.

In September 2000 a Falklands registered fishing vessel, the *Mila*, was found to have been involved in illegal fishing in Australian Antarctic waters. The owners and captain were fined heavily in the Falklands and the valuable catch confiscated and sold.

Conservation work in the Islands takes a number of forms. There is work year in year out to establish the status of bird populations as a basis for policy, of which the Penguin Census and the Seabirds At Sea Survey are examples. There are working groups in which Falklands Conservation and the local Government collaborate to devise appropriate



Silvery Buttercup *Hamadryas argentea*.
New populations of this scarce endemic have been located in the Falkland Islands

strategies, such as the Working Party to produce a national Plan of Action to protect the albatross population and the Environment Committee at present focusing on the implications for the Falklands of the Convention on Biological Diversity. There are specific practical activities such as the rat eradication project, the creation of a National Herbarium and the production a Falkland Islands Site Guide. With all these there has been persistent but tactful lobbying to hasten the establishment of Ramsar sites and successful pressure to persuade the Falkland Islands Government to drop their misleadingly named Conservation Levy on cruise ship passengers in favour of a

Passenger Tax. In both these matters the Group has played a supporting role.

At present SAWG has some involvement with South Georgia, such as when the Forum commented on the draft management plan. An interesting presentation was received from a group based at Dundee University who are making a CD ROM about South Georgia. The Forum is increasing its level of awareness of South Georgia, and is currently preparing to add South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands and British Antarctic Territory to its series of display boards, also reproduced in booklet and web form.

In St Helena the arrangements to take forward the creation of a National Trust have progressed well, with the Forum collaborating to make wider expertise available. A local Steering Committee of the interests involved has been set up with a smaller action group to deal with day-to-day matters. Rebecca Cairns-Wicks has left her Government post as Environmental Co-ordinator to spend more time with her family but is a member of both groups in a voluntary capacity. Isabel Peters is now Environmental Co-ordinator. Martin Drury plans to be in St. Helena in November, as part of the Forum's contribution. In the meantime a considerable amount of preparatory work is being done elsewhere and coordinated by the Forum.

Plans for the National Trust apart, St. Helenians have continued to exhibit enthusiasm to take forward conservation matters generally. The Millennium Forest grows apace. The Darwin-funded Wirebird Project under Dr. Neil McCulloch has been completed including research on the likely effect of an airport on the habitat. The creation of a second artificial reef using abandoned cars is planned. Ken Webster of WWF reported to SAWG on educational work which he had done with secondary school children.

In the meantime there is impatience at the lack of progress on the Environmental Charter. The Forum is now in dialogue with St. Helena as to whether they would be in a position to begin to develop an action plan to implement the statement of principles which the FCO has produced. The Forum should be able to assist over this. Also relevant to this, consideration is in progress on another possible Darwin application to support species and habitat management.

SAWG's principal concerns over Ascension have been the financing of the Island's immediate environmental needs and the overall future of the Island. Both subjects have been long debated. Till the spring there was pessimism over the first and uncertainty about

the second. The announcement at the end of March that the FCO Environmental Policy Department was in a position to allocate £500,000 to fund the current environmental needs of the Island on the basis of a grant to be controlled jointly by the Administrator and RSPB was wonderful news. The two-year project to be implemented by the RSPB and the island's administration will effectively restore Ascension

commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

The paper presented by the FCO's Overseas Territories Department to SAWG at their March meeting *Arrangements for the Public Services on Ascension from 1 April 2001* setting out the way ahead for Ascension when the Ascension Island Services Joint Venture Agreement ceases to operate was also most

developments.

Tristan da Cunha and its islands continue to be a field for substantial scientific activity in which the Tristanians increasingly participate. The Inaccessible Management Plan devised by Dr Peter Ryan and Jimmy Glass has been accepted by the Tristan Island Council. Dr Ryan has also conducted a major survey of the yellow-nosed albatross on Nightingale Island. SAWG listened to a very interesting presentation about Gough Island (already known to us through the effective *Sagina procumbens* eradication programme in 2000) by Dr Alex Jones who has been conducting research into invertebrate species there. There is now quite a lot of information available to us about these various small islands but this sort of presentation helps to make it come alive for those of us, the majority, who have never been that far South.

The effects of long-line fishing continue to be of concern to the Tristan Administration though the crayfish quota has been strictly controlled.



Visit to Ascension Island by Alistair Gammell, RSPB International Director, Jim Stevenson and Dieter Hoffmann, RSPB Global Programmes

as a seabird habitat by the reduction of invasive plants and the eradication of feral cats and rats. Environment Policy Department, Iain Orr, and the Director of Global Programmes at FCO are to be congratulated on securing funding for this important project in fulfilling UK's

welcome. It means in effect that Ascension is to become a normal small Overseas Territory with local taxation to support the provision of government services. It is as yet unclear what the precise implications will be, and SAWG will want to monitor



*Gough Flightless Moth
Dimorphnoctua goughensis*

Report of the UKOTCF British Indian Ocean Territory Working Group

The **possible resettlement of the northern atolls** of the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) provided the most important focus for the work of the Friends of the Chagos. In October, the High Court struck down the legislation under which the former inhabitants of the islands, the Ilois, were forbidden to return. The BIOT Government's initial study of the feasibility of resettlement, produced in July, became the starting point for much more detailed studies that are gathering momentum. At the time of writing it is unclear whether prospective climatic changes will make resettlement sustainable in the longer run or whether sufficient economic activities can be generated to support a community of viable size. The certainty is that the fragile ecosystem of the archipelago will require extremely strict protection if the very basis for human activity there is not to be destroyed.

During the year under review the Friends of the Chagos sought assurances that respect for the ecology of the area would underlie any activities connected with resettlement. To date, the responses have been vague. A particularly worrying development was the decision not to proceed with the publicly announced **designation of a Ramsar site** covering a substantial area of the northern atolls. This is being contested vigorously through the Forum. Nor has any progress been made over the preparation of a **Management Plan** for the area, which would allow specific ecological issues to be identified ahead of the preparation of schemes for human enterprise.

More encouragingly, Drs Sheppard and Spalding undertook, with funding and practical assistance from the BIOT Government, a survey of the **after-effects of the 1998 oceanic warming incident**. Although the damage was as bad as initially assessed – 80-90% coral mortality – there are signs of re-growth. Moreover, the fish populations appear to be relatively unharmed, and there are also signs of recovery of the shark population, which can reasonably be ascribed to the government's stricter protection measures. However, the survey also drew attention to the extreme vulnerability of the bare coral substrate to invasion by large algae in the event of any significant increase in nutrient levels, such as would accompany many types of human activity. The result would be irreversible change to the coral ecosystem.

During the year, Dr Sheppard produced for the Friends of the Chagos a **CD library** of photographs and accompanying text concerning the history and ecology of the Chagos Archipelago. Copies are available from the Friends of the Chagos.

Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

WCWG met four times during the year, as well as with fuller representation from Overseas Territories' member organisations at *Calpe 2000*, in Gibraltar. At future such conferences, a meeting of the Group should be included. The Group's widespread representatives now use an email list-server, set up by our Secretary, to keep in contact.

Referring back to last year's Report, it is good to note that a main environmental threat, the proposed rocket launch site on Sombrero Island, Anguilla, has been withdrawn. This may be partly the result of representations made, and information provided, by RSPB and other members of the Forum network.

We have had less success in trying to persuade the Cayman Islands Government to place the environmental tax, levied on all visitors to the Islands, on a proper footing so that it is used for the purpose intended, i.e. to purchase environmentally critical land, particularly the central mangrove wetland. To date the funds collected, approximately US\$10 million have gone into general revenue and been used for a variety of purposes many of them only loosely linked to the environment.

The following are key developments in each of the Territories covered by the Group.

Anguilla

RSPB has been working with the Anguilla National Trust (ANT) for a number of years and arranged for staff to make three sabbatical visits this year, to identify potential conservation-based tourism opportunities and to provide a baseline bird count to help determine trends in the numbers and distribution of birds on Anguilla and its outer islands. Although one of the smallest island groups in the West Indies, Anguilla holds 10% of the West Indian masked booby and bridled tern populations, almost all of the West Indies common terns and 30% of the brown boobies.

Three of the islands (Dog Island, Prickly Pear East and Sombrero) qualify as Important Bird Areas under Birdlife International criteria. All three islands have been the subject of recent development proposals and are currently without protection. Coloured bird identification cards and field checklists have been produced which should encourage more interest in the islands' birds among local people and tourists.

The Forum's Co-ordinator visited Anguilla to discuss future needs.

Bermuda

The Darwin Biodiversity Strategy and Action Planning Project, initiated in April 2000, held two planning workshops facilitated by Fauna and Flora International. Participation by private sector, clergy, and the Bermuda Government allowed the overall strategy to be developed and working groups established to draft specific action plans.

Two RSPB staff spent three weeks with retired Conservation Officer David Wingate helping transfer his bird records into the Bermuda Biodiversity database. To date 8,000 records comprising 32,000 entries have been entered which, coupled with the 25,000 records of Bermuda Audubon Society President Andrew Dobson, make for a comprehensive database on Bermuda's birds. The Bermuda Biodiversity database now has 5,024 species listed, 3,747 bibliographic records, and 13,530 slides. David's unique cahow data remain to be analysed. Newly appointed Conservation Officer Jeremy Madeiros is expanding the cahow work to incorporate monitoring techniques gained during his recent trip to study Gould's Petrel in Australia. Eventual translocation of birds to nearby islands is a real possibility.

The Bermuda Audubon Society has been involved in conservation projects including

research and conservation efforts on Bermuda's endangered species, with over 40 ongoing projects, including work on the endemic Bermuda Skink, the Longtail tropicbird, marine turtles, the cave fauna, and the endemic snail population. Additionally, public participation in projects such as REEF, in which local recreational divers are engaged in fish data collection, is growing. The Marine Moorings initiative, which received seed funding through the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office will see the establishment of permanent moorings at 35 sites, 29 of which have been declared protected.

The Forum's Chairman visited Bermuda in June to work with colleagues in Bermuda Ministry of Environment, Development & Opportunity, Bermuda Audubon Society, Bermuda National Trust and Bermuda Zoological Society, to discuss various items but primarily the possible conference, tentatively timed for late 2002.

British Virgin Islands

Excellent progress is being made on the Darwin Initiative Project. The national park on Virgin Gorda has revealed several plants previously thought to occur only in the US Virgin Islands, and work on Anegada has produced three species previously known only from Puerto Rico. Four successful workshops have been completed with representatives from Government departments and from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Fauna and Flora International (both member organisations of the Forum); the Open University, UK; and Smithsonian Institute, Washington DC, USA. Now in its fourth year, the Anegada Rock Iguana Rehabilitation Project, raises juveniles in captivity until they are less vulnerable from feral animals on Anegada. It has 56 juveniles within the facility, which the BVI National Parks Trust is

landscaping so as to grow more local plants to augment the supply of food for the iguanas. The West Indian Iguana Specialist Group will be locating nesting sites in the wild with a view to capturing juveniles when they hatch for rearing at the facility.

The Forum Chairman and Director for Development called briefly in BVI to discuss needs for the Environmental Charter with the Ministry of Natural Resources and the BVI National Parks Trust.



Frances Marks, Forum Coordinator; and Ijahnya Christian Executive Director of the Anguilla National Trust

public awareness programmes for bluebird nest boxes and 'igloos' for tropicbirds. Working parties have concentrated on the culling of invasive species of flora. The Society has been lobbying government for the control of feral cats and other animals; the banning of helium balloons (which pose a danger to wildlife, particularly turtles); and opposing the development of Quarry Hill woodland.

The Bermuda Biodiversity Project at the Bermuda Zoological Society continues to focus

Cayman Islands

There are three major concerns: the future of the Central Mangrove Wetland and its stalled designation as a Ramsar site; the use to which the environmental tax has been put and the need for the Environment Fund to be managed so that the money raised by the tax is used for the purpose intended; and shortcomings in meeting obligations under international conventions concerning the environment. On a positive note, the National Trust for the Cayman Islands has acquired further land better to protect the Ramsar



Wild young Grand Cayman Rock Iguana *Cyclura nubila*

site on Little Cayman which supports the largest colony of red-footed boobies in the region, and is also making significant progress in restoring wild populations of the endangered Grand Cayman Iguana, assisted by a grant from Foreign and Commonwealth Office Environment Fund for the Overseas Territories. The Cayman Islands Department of Environment is also progressing with draft legislation to implement the SPAW Protocol of the Cartagena Convention. A major study of fill and aggregate sources and demand commissioned by the Cayman Islands Government is nearing completion and offers hope of a more sensitive approach to quarrying, mining and dredging which have hitherto inflicted severe environmental impacts on all three islands.

A joint operation of the Cayman Islands National Trust, Cayman Government Departments, and volunteers including a local security firm, resulted in the confiscation of a large haul of CITES protected species and the successful prosecution of three German wildlife smugglers.

Montserrat

The Forum Director for Development and partner organisation, RBG Kew, visited Montserrat in January, at the request of Montserrat National Trust, for preliminary strategic planning for the organisation which is resurrecting itself in the wake of the volcano. The Trust opened its new Natural History Centre this year, and is developing a 2-acre botanic garden at its headquarters in Olveston. The visit established priorities for environmental

programmes, and developed a proposal to FCO for a 2-week workshop in May. The workshop attracted specialists from other Caribbean islands and the UK; topics included developing botanic gardens, propagation, beekeeping, recycling and composting. The botanic garden will focus on plants important to Montserrat, including threatened endemics, as well as plants with medicinal or cultural uses. A programme of meetings with the Trust's Executive Committee was initiated to prepare the Trust for development and expansion. Forum representatives attended meetings also with Government Ministers and Department heads to discuss progress being made with the UK and OECS Environmental Charters, and on how Montserrat hopes to meet nature-tourism needs in the future, including collaborative projects between the National Trust and Forestry and Tourism Departments to establish trails.

By late 1997 around 60% of the island's hill forest had been destroyed by pyroclastic flows. Initial censuses in 1997 suggested that the Montserrat oriole, the island's only endemic bird, was still fairly common but confined to the Centre Hills. Subsequent monitoring indicated a rapid decline of 50% in three years, following a drop of at least 60% between 1995 and 1997. With perhaps 100-200 pairs left in the wild and three pairs in captivity at Jersey Zoo for a breeding programme, the species is listed in the new global Red Data Book as critically endangered. The Montserrat Ministry of Agriculture, Housing, Land and the Environment is researching with the RSPB the cause of the decline and possible *in-situ* conservation measures. Initial indications are that the oriole is suffering from extensive



View of the future Montserrat Botanic Gardens

predation from rats and thrashers (birds) and that ash falls have resulted in a reduction in the numbers of invertebrates thus reducing the orioles' food supply.

Turks and Caicos Islands

The progress of the Turks and Caicos Islands National Trust (TCNT) was recognised at its second annual general meeting under new management; both the Governor and the Chief Minister spoke warmly about TCNT – and the Trust thanked the Forum and its member organisations for support which has helped the Trust on to this successful path. The Forum assisted with a staff development workshop in August, further staff training and working with the Executive Committee to plan future strategic actions in November, and a full-day Trust Council workshop, meetings with the Governor, the Ministry of Finance and the Investment agency, as well as the more environmental departments in March, as part of work on future plans. These focused on taking forward the results of the Darwin work (and the capacity development) to implement conservation management and involvement of the local communities in sustainable small businesses, especially in the major Ramsar site but also in other important terrestrial, wetland and historical areas.

The Darwin Initiative Project on "Developing biodiversity management around the Ramsar site in the Turks and Caicos Islands" is jointly led by TCNT, CABI and the Forum. The locally based Project Committee met in August; it was clear that local residents were concerned about, and alert to, issues relating to their environment. The government is transferring a disused school to the Trust to act as an environmental centre on Middle Caicos; the Trust is seeking funds to allow repair and implementation. In November, specialists on plants, reptiles, amphibians and birds visited, and major ground-truthing was done to classify vegetation types with the help of remote sensing. At the request of UK & TCI Governments, the opportunity was taken to start work on producing an accurate map of the Ramsar site. Further

biodiversity surveys were undertaken in January 2001 (insects, bats and plants) and April 2001 (birds). Whilst the importance of the wetlands is increasingly well known, it is now clear that the dry woodlands too are of international importance, for example as vital wintering areas for some rare North American breeding bird populations.

FCO support for the first phase of work at historic Cheshire Hall was confirmed in November. This will provide the Trust with a base at a major historic site central to the main areas of public access – invaluable in terms of opportunities for mass public awareness about the TCI environment.

Report of UKOTCF Pitcairn Working Group

While Pitcairn has attracted worldwide attention through the year, not least because of the major development proposals mentioned below, it has proved difficult to make significant progress with conservation initiatives, especially as DFID failed to implement the Global Environment Programme for Overseas Territories, under which DFID had indicated that Pitcairn could expect support.

Tourist developments. When the Group's chairman visited Pitcairn in November 2000, there were early rumours that a consortium of New Zealand businessmen, Wellesley Pacific, were proposing a major NZ\$ 50 million development. This proposal was discussed between representatives of the consortium and the Islanders in late February 2001. Then the Islanders voted to ask the Governor to continue negotiations with Wellesley Pacific. In brief, the proposal suggests an airstrip and small hotel on Pitcairn, a small tourist lodge on Henderson (euphemistically titled an environment protection facility), and possibly the development of a pearl fishery on Ducie. Finally, and most dramatically, there would be a hotel, golf course, 1700m airstrip and associated terminal on Oeno, currently an intensely beautiful atoll used as an occasional holiday resort by the Islanders and as a breeding station by thousands of seabirds. While the proposals for Pitcairn itself could potentially bring much-needed improvements in communications and increased opportunities for earning a livelihood to the people, the environmental implications for the other pristine islands are awful. It is no surprise that conservation NGOs across the world are expressing their concern to the British Government in London that such developments could even be considered given the World Heritage status of Henderson and the scale of threat to Oeno, which would effectively industrialise the whole pristine island. It is also of concern that the management plan required of UK Government in view of its designation of Henderson Island as A World Heritage Site has not progressed from a 10-year old draft.

Rat eradication. While Oeno and Ducie remain free of rats following the successful eradication projects, the situation on Pitcairn is bad. Rats are present in such high numbers that the Governor, visiting the island in September 2000, was sufficiently alarmed to write to DFID to seek funding for a third eradication attempt. This request has been noted positively, and more detailed proposals are now being invited from consultants who might undertake the work, possibly combining the rat project with eradicating fruitflies and mosquitoes. It is important that the proposals should indicate how a third attempt will use the lessons of the first two unsuccessful attempts to increase the chances of success.

Plant conservation. The small nursery established by Jay Warren, Conservation Officer, is being maintained. However the Conservation Officer needs support to enable him to spend more time on and enlarge the facility. This will enable him to enhance populations of the rarest plant species and to replace some of Pitcairn's alien vegetation by native flora. It had been hoped that the Overseas Territories Global Environment Programme, announced by UK Government in the 1999 White Paper, might fund this work (see above).

Road construction. The rebuilding and surfacing of the road leading up the Hill of Difficulty from Bounty Bay to Adamstown on Pitcairn was scheduled to begin in early 2001. £500,000 earmarked for this project by DFID was then abruptly withdrawn. The only possible advantage of this delay is that it may allow Dr Steve Waldren of Trinity College, Dublin, who hopes to continue his botanical work on the island in the summer of 2001, to assess more carefully the environmental implications of the road project.

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Photographs courtesy of Dr M Brooke, Sara Cross, Michael Gore FRPS, Dr A G Jones, Frances Marks, Jim McAdam and Jim Stevenson RSPB

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