

# The Anguillian, Feb 18th: Heartically Yours

Ijahnya Christian's article in *The Anguillian* of February 18, around the time of the Anguillian general election

The Sombrero issue is yet to be satisfactorily addressed in this election campaign. I believe that one of the reasons that Anguillians have not expressed strong positions either way regarding Sombrero is that the relevant information has neither been readily available, nor accessible in terms of the language used in documents made available for public scrutiny. This lack of transparency has not been unique to the processing of the Beal proposal but it has demonstrated how a lack of transparency can either undo the entire process or result in significantly higher costs than originally anticipated. I have never met Mr. Andy Beal so references to Beal in this article are not about the man but about his public representation. I do however, question the quality of advice he is receiving from his team and some of the reasons will become clear as you read on.

Just last week, the Anguilla National Trust completed a case study of the Beal proposal based on the information available to the organisation up to that time. Right on the heels of that and once again through e-mail and Internet sources, it has been disclosed that Beal has asked the UK Planning Inspectorate to postpone the review of the Environmental Impact Assessment while they try to work out the level of risk to third parties and the cost of third party liability insurance. This may all be in order but there was one surprise. Apparently, the Government of Anguilla has been funding the cost of this review and will be reimbursed by Beal. This raises several questions the first one being, how much is this review costing us and then whether this reimbursement is subject to the proposal being approved.

I believe that a fundamental flaw in the entire process stems from a seeming inability to appreciate value in terms other than economic value and an understanding of development that is synonymous with revenue generating potential. In fact the Sombrero case reminds me of the argument raised some years ago that the 6th Form at the Albena Lake-Hodge Comprehensive School should be abolished because someone thought it was not economically viable.

Apart from Sir Emile Gumbs and Mr. David Carty, I have not heard one politician say anything to indicate that he or she has an appreciation of the value of Sombrero's unique eco-system and biodiversity. If Sombrero has no value, then the sum being offered for the lease of the island is not bad at all though there seems to be consensus that it is a paltry sum compared to anticipated profits. But what if we thought that Sombrero did have some value?

According to an article written by Fred Pearce, recently published in the *New Scientist* magazine, and extracted from the magazines website on February 12th, there are serious differences in the findings of the scientists hired by Beal and those commissioned by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB). The article highlights the work of Mike Ivie, the entomologist on the team that conducted the Rapid Conservation Assessment of Sombrero in November 1999. In contrast to Beal's website claim that there are no endangered or endemic species on the island, Ivie discovered two more species of reptile and sixty-five more species of invertebrates. He believes that some of these species may, like the black lizard, be found nowhere but on Sombrero. The article goes further to share the views of Beal's spokesman David Spoede, who tried to defend their scientific claims by referring to the work done on Sombrero by Dr Ellen Censky. Dr Censky's angry retort included an apology for her language but she strongly contradicted the claim that the endemic lizard survived Hurricane Luis by climbing into the Sombrero lighthouse. Beal's point has been to try to establish that the company's presence on Sombrero would be good not just for the Anguillian economy but also for the lizards. The *New Scientist* cites Censky thus, Lizards did not climb into the lighthouse to survive the hurricane. The natural activity of the lizards in inclement weather is to go down into holes. I told them this was not a healthy population. Any intrusion on the island might be detrimental.

The view that Sombrero's ecosystem can be severely threatened by human activity is shared by Jim Stevenson of the RSPB who is quoted by *New Scientist* as follows; We are not opposed to rocket launch sites, but it is now clear that Sombrero is a very special place of global importance.

Beal has not yet produced the cost-benefit analysis but we are told that it will be an objective one. We have not yet been told if Anguillians or Anguillian agencies will be consulted in the process. The Anguilla National Trust has not yet been able to secure the UK expertise it has been seeking since June 1999, to conduct a feasibility study for alternative low-impact development on Sombrero if we think that we must make money from Sombrero. I do not know how long Beal will need to complete this part of the process but I know that eventually a Government of Anguilla signature will be needed to complete the process. Some of the deeds already done cannot be undone and some time ago, I was reassured by the then Minister of Finance that the Government of Anguilla had signed nothing that it could be sued for if the Beal proposal was not approved. I can only hope he was right since I am aware of at least two instances where the company has threatened to sue for purportedly libellous statements. You may notice that I have tried to be extremely careful in my language here as I would not like to be writing Heartically Yours from Her Majesties Prison.

We do not yet know the day, the hour, the cost or the nature of the decision to be made but two words of advice for the new Government of Anguilla. It is neither wise nor prudent to begin the development application process with the signing of agreements and in future we may need to require more than a prospective investor's dollars or the scientific credentials of his/her experts, we may also need character references. Of course, the would-be investor may require the same of us.

16 February 2000.

# ANGUILLA

The Forum has been increasingly involved in Anguilla since a proposal to launch rockets from Sombrero Island was tabled by Texas millionaire, Andy Beal in 1998. We were first concerned over the lack of transparency in the planning process itself. Further alarm bells rang as biologists reacted to the less than adequate Environmental Assessment presented by ICF consultants. The biodiversity value of the island was badly understated.

We have acted in three ways:

- Drawing public attention to the issue in the UK and in the Caribbean Region.
- Presenting the conservation case to government in the UK and Anguilla
- Mounting an expedition composed of competent specialists to Sombrero to re-inforce the conservation case.

RSPB initially led on the issue on behalf of the Forum, but a host of other organisations have contributed to the cause, particularly FFI, WWF (UK) and of course, the Anguilla National Trust. A lot of support for the conservation case has come from the USA, particularly the American Bird Conservancy and the Ornithological Council.

The public consultation phase, organised by planners at the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, was to be concluded this Spring, but Beal Aerospace have called a halt to the proceedings, possibly to give them time to assemble a better case. Meanwhile, two other potential launch sites have been identified in Guyana and Florida. So what next? Nail-biting times indeed!

How do we stop this sort of thing happening again?

The root cause that allows so many damaging planning proposals in the Caribbean to become realised is public apathy. This may be due to a lack of knowledge or awareness, or a feeling of impotence due to the fact that planning matters are often decided in private.

The result of this apathy is that environmental issues are seldom aired, even at election time. Protected areas, where they exist, are often designated for



Caribbean buckeye butterfly - *Junonia evarete*

reasons of tourist potential, rather than biodiversity interest. The best sites do not get designated.

In the case of Anguilla, environment is definitely on the political agenda now. The Sombrero issue has sparked a lot of interest in Anguilla's biodiversity. Last year's hurricane season ended with massive flood damage caused by Hurricane Lenny, and exasperated by bad coastal zone management practices.

Forum members are active in working with the Anguilla National Trust to try and attack the root causes of run-away development:

- WWF (UK) has appointed a specialist to work in Anguilla on protected areas, with the aim of getting better protection for the most important sites. This is funded by the UK Darwin Initiative.
- FFI has carried out awareness and training programmes on the endemic iguana and snake, and carried out surveys of reptiles.
- RSPB is carrying out an Important Bird Areas Survey in order to re-inforce the protected areas programme. A public awareness programme, based on birds, hopes to increase support for nature for its own sake. This will include a series of publications such as identification cards, an annotated check-list of birds, and,

finally, a little pocket guide to the birds.

The "joined-up" approach being applied in Anguilla will hopefully provide a good model for the Forum's operations elsewhere.

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## FALKLANDS CONSERVATION

### Tourism Impact Project

There has been a dramatic increase in cruise ship passengers visiting the Falklands in recent years - 4,738 in 95/96 and 30,000 forecast for 1999/2000. Some of the larger vessels are not members of the International Association of Antarctic Tour Operators and do not have codes of practice or behaviour guidelines to adhere to. The Falkland Islands Development Corporation is funding Falklands Conservation to run a project to investigate management of visitors. It is hoped that the project may be extended for a further two years to enable the development of site specific guidelines and a booklet to ensure environmentally sensitive tourism in the islands.

**Examples of sensitive tourism management and good practice would be welcome.**

# Darwin Initiative Marine Turtle Research Project on Ascension Island

Between December and June, Ascension Island plays host to one of the largest breeding populations of green turtle *Chelonia mydas* in the Atlantic Ocean. Male and female turtles migrate many hundreds of kilometres across the Atlantic from the coast of South America to mate around Ascension. Following this, female turtles crawl ashore, dig nests in the sand and lay clutches of a hundred eggs or more before covering them over to be left in the heat of the sand to incubate.



Ascension Island green turtle *Chelonia mydas* returns to sea

December 1998 saw the start of the most comprehensive marine turtle monitoring and research endeavour undertaken on the Ascension Island population for over 20 years. Spanning the nesting seasons of both 1998/9 and 1999/2000, this project is the result of a partnership between the Ascension Island Administrator's Office and British scientists from the University of Wales, Swansea; a project funded by Darwin Initiative for the Survival of the Species.

The Darwin Initiative, launched at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, is a

scheme run by the UK Department of Environment, Transport and Regions. It is designed to help safeguard the world's biodiversity by enabling British expertise to assist countries around the world with conservation related issues. It is currently assisting a number of projects in the British Overseas Territories.

The major aims of the project include:

- Assessing the current size of the Ascension Island green turtle population,
- Analysing the reproductive output of individual turtles,
- Assessing the sex ratio of hatchlings
- Identification of the feeding grounds of the turtles through the use of satellite transmitters.

Great steps have been taken towards all of these scientific aims, resulting in a number of scientific publications to date (see footnote\*) as well as others in preparation and under review. Work being carried out by the Swansea-based researchers and specially trained turtle wardens paid by the Darwin Initiative. Additionally, the level of community involvement attained (both by individuals and organisations) has greatly surpassed expectations. There is a tremendous will on the Island to undertake any steps necessary better to understand and protect the turtles.

Educational activities have included school visits, field trips for youth groups, production of press articles including *The Ascension Islander*, *The Times*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Independent* and *New Scientist* and posters. Foreign and Commonwealth Office sponsored leaflets and a project web site: <http://www.seaturtle.org/mtrg/projects/ascension/> Also a set of stamps and first day cover dedicated to the project will soon be issued.

Readers can find out more about the project by contacting the Project Officer Darwin Initiative Turtle Project or assessing the project's the web site.



Cubs and Scouts learn about marine turtle biology in situ.

\*Scientific Publications to date:

Luschi P, Hays GC, Del Seppia C, Marsh R, Papi F (1998). The navigational feats of green sea turtles migrating from Ascension Island investigated by satellite telemetry. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* 265: 2279-2284

Hays GC, Godley BJ, Broderick AC (1999). The long term thermal conditions on the nesting beaches of green turtles on Ascension Island. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 185: 297-299.

Hays GC, Luschi P, Papi F, del Seppia C, Marsh R (1999). Changes in behaviour during the interesting period and postnesting migration for Ascension Island green turtles. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 189: 263-273.

Hays GC, Adams CR, Broderick AC, Godley BJ, Lucas DJ, Metcalfe JD, Prior AA (in press). The diving behaviour of green turtles at Ascension island. *Animal Behaviour*.

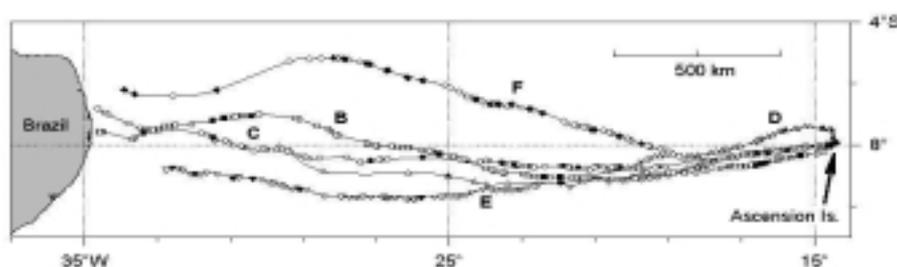
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Satellite tracking of turtles to their foraging grounds in Brazil

# St Helena: Environmental Awareness Year: Involvement by the Schools

The Agricultural and Natural Resources Department (ANRD) holds an annual farmers competition each year which requires entrants to show excellence over the year, not just on the day. In an effort to get school children to take part we introduced the schools environmental competition. All the schools were invited to submit an environmental project backed by a simple questionnaire: name of the project; who has been involved and how; how was the project decided; how is it to be sustained; what has been learnt from it; what are the benefits; who benefits; and what will you do with the prize if you win it.

Prizes were £100 first and £50 second . Mrs Patsy Flagg and Ms Rita Nicholls were judges.

The winner was Longwood First School for the enhancement of Longwood Avenue.



Longwood Avenue

We intend to hold the competition again this year.

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## St. Helena's School Activities

Summary by Dorothy Evans

As expected, the St Helena Environmental Awareness Year has reached out to, and involved, people in all parts of the Island, including the schools. All the schools have been keen to help their students become interested and involved in securing the future in terms of preserving their unique environment.

Heather George, Head Teacher of Harford Middle School, reported that her school is cleaning up the surrounding area of the school and planting additional shrubs and flowers. Plans to set up a wild life pond and an amenities area enhanced by grass, trees and benches and to make their

the First School block. They are hoping to be able to afford to enclose the area, to preserve the endemics already planted there. They, too, have involved the whole school in an Environmental Walk through Arno's Vale.

Meanwhile, Muriel Leo, Head of the Jamestown First School, reported that all the children had been given a tree to take home to plant to help beautify their home environment. Parents have co-operated fully and the trees are progressing well.

Joyce Harris, Head of Half Tree Hollow School, described their activities. All the Nursery, Reception and Year 1 pupils had been involved in a sponsored walk to the Clifford Arboretum. The parents have undertaken to clean up and landscape the area in front of the main building. Years 2 and 3 pupils are involved in a Sponsored Clean-up of the area.

The pupils of St Paul's First School are also very active. Their Head, Mrs Marilyn Roberts reported that Year 1 went to the Nature Trail, Year 2 went on an educational visit to Diana's Peak and Year 3 is involved in gardening sessions at the school. All year groups did an observational exercise on a chosen environment in different districts, followed by a litter clean-up. They also hope to be able to create a terraced area, with a stone wall enclosing a flower-bed with endemic plants, to be looked after by pupils in their gardening sessions.

Longwood First School, in connection with its hosting of the Commonwealth Day, has been involved in the enhancement of Longwood Avenue planting flowering perennials along the avenue. They had three objectives in mind - to mark the School's fiftieth anniversary, to contribute to the Island's Environmental Awareness Year, and to add some beauty and colour to Longwood Avenue.

The involvement of so many of the children of the Island in the ways described will, without doubt, have long-term benefits in terms of their interest in and appreciation of their environment and their willingness to become involved in caring for it. This augurs well for the future and the teachers are to be congratulated on their encouragement and good efforts.

entrance more attractive are in progress.

They also invited a member of the Island Conservation Group to organise a walk with students and staff.

Alice Greentree, Head Teacher of St Paul's Middle School, described their plans to create the "Gosse Arboretum", in the area behind

## THE BIOTA OF BIOT: WHAT'S GOING ON?

One of the challenges facing those interested in the ecology of the Chagos Archipelago stems from the rarity of visits by people qualified to report changes as they occur. Arguably, that is a price worth paying for the conservation resulting from the simple fact of restricted access. And yet, if no-one knows what is really happening, it becomes that much more difficult to take timely and sensible decisions.

A case in point was their severe coral mortality, suspected from satellite measurements of oceanic temperature changes as they occurred in 1998, but only confirmed by direct observations in 1999. Now the gloom occasioned by Dr Charles Sheppard's report has lifted somewhat. He could examine only what was visible from the surface - the first 10 metres of so, however a team of experienced divers recently looked at the reefs within and outside the island of Diego Garcia. There at least, it now seems that, as the depth of water increases, so does the health of the stony corals. Below 27 metres - a habitat with less diversity and abundance, of course - very little damage was observed. This situation is much better than in the Maldives. However, hardly anything is known about the state of the corals below 10 metres in the northerly parts of the Chagos, much closer to the Maldives. Someone needs to assess the damage there too and set a benchmark for the measurement of coral recovery and of the consequences of coral mortality for the wider community of reef fauna, especially the fish populations. The first hints of what may be another ocean warming event makes an assessment all the more urgent.

As regards the commercial fisheries, the BIOT Government has helpfully provided the data to make possible a more informed dialogue about the scope and sustainability of current operations. It is a bit early to draw long-term conclusions from figures which probably need to be examined in a regional

context. Meanwhile, there remains a strong case for the introduction of Marine Protected Areas applicable to commercial as well as recreational fishing. At the same time, it is a pleasure to report the introduction of a ban on steel traces for in-shore fishing. This should lead to a reduction in shark mortality, one of the matters on which the Friends of the Chagos earlier expressed special concern.

The Friends' AGM, held at the headquarters of the Linnean Society in October, was well attended and provided the opportunity for a number of conservation issues to be aired, as well as for an historically interesting slide show. The scene was set for continued dialogue over ways to secure the practical benefits potentially resulting from the BIOT Government's increasingly comprehensive environmental legislation. One example, cited at the meeting, was the banning of coral exports, even when the samples were dead on collection. The details of this and other measures are regularly reported in the Friend's newsletter *Chagos News*.

**Nigel Wenban-Smith**  
Chairman, Friends of the Chagos  
British Indian Ocean Territory  
Working Group

## STRING OF PEARLS

An invitation to view Britain's treasured buildings along the River Thames. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) will open on twelve days this summer to reveal the work of the modern FCO and offer privileged access to its fine interiors. The FCO grade I listed building was designed by George Gilbert Scott and completed in 1875 to house the Foreign Office, India Office, Colonial Office and Home Office. Special displays featuring the work of the Overseas Territories will take place on 6 June and 11 July. Open to the public from 10 am to 5 pm. The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum and the FCO will meet on 11 July in the Locarno Suite, where it is envisaged that the general public may view the meeting in progress.



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Photographs courtesy of Michael Gore FRPS, Fred Burton, Mike Pienkowski, John Cortes, Charles & Anne Sheppard.  
Produced by KopyRite Tel: 01608 646566

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