



UKOTCF

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What with the announcement of new Marine Protected Areas, and the extension to the Falkland Islands of the UK's ratification to the Convention on Biological Diversity, it has been an exciting couple of months in the South Atlantic Territories!

While on the topic of international conventions and their commitments, I take this time to remind everybody about the review of progress, towards the 2001 Environment Charters, Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Goals, that UKOTCF completed earlier this year. We have received very positive feedback for this and even some updates which we have subsequently included in the report as well. We want this to be a continual process so that everybody remains up to date with the enormous conservation progress that is being made. We therefore hope that, if you have not done so already, you may find some time to have a look at the report which is available on our website (<http://www.ukotcf.org/charters/progress.htm>).

In our previous edition, we included a piece about explorer Stewart McPherson and his three years spent journeying to discover the natural and cultural heritage of each of the UKOTs. The *Britain's Treasure Islands* project produced a BBC series, a 704 page book and a set of mini-documentaries. From footage of humpback whales in British Antarctic Territory to great shearwaters flying around the shores of Tristan, this project reminds us of the incredible diversity of the Territories! UKOTCF was very pleased to be able to provide a great deal of help and input towards the text, images, video and launch of this project. The book is now available to buy from the UKOTCF website (www.ukotcf.org). Please remember that, by doing this, you contribute towards our conservation work without any additional costs to yourself. Later in this newsletter we discuss an extract of Stewart's book.

I hope you enjoy the rest of the Newsletter!

Sarah Barnsley (SOWG Secretary)



Cover of UKOTCF's Aichi Target and Environment Charter and SDG review, showing Ducie Island, Pitcairn Group (Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski)

Increase in UKOT Marine Protected Areas

September saw the announcement, by Foreign Office Minister Sir Alan Duncan, of the plan to increase the area of ocean included in Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) around the UK's Overseas Territories. Protected areas around St Helena and Pitcairn were announced, as was a commitment towards the designation of marine protection zones around Ascension and Tristan da Cunha by 2019 and 2020, respectively.

In addition, as stated on the Government website, £20 million will be provided to facilitate the 'implementation, management, surveillance and crucially the enforcement of these new Marine Protected Areas'. If properly managed, these provisions will go a long way towards implementing the UK Government's vision of a 'Blue Belt' around the Overseas Territories.

More information about the MPAs can be found on the Government website:

www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-set-to-protect-four-million-square-kilometres-of-ocean

Endemic Species Fact-file

South Georgia Pipit – has it been saved?

The only bird endemic to South Georgia, the South Georgia Pipit *Anthus antarcticus*, is a terrestrial species. Classified on the IUCN Red List as Near Threatened, the species appears dark brown with reddish-brown streaks on top, and white with brown streaks below. It has long pink legs, a length of approximately 16.5 cm and a wingspan of approximately 23 cm.

The population numbers approximately 3000 to 4000 pairs at present. Food sources consist primarily of invertebrates, including small insects and marine invertebrates from the tideline. The latter source is consumed particularly when the ground is covered in snow.



*South Georgia Pipit, with tiny food item from the water
(Photo by Dr Mike Pienkowski)*

The species breeds between mid-November and January or February, with 3-5 eggs in one clutch. Nests are built on the ground, consisting of dry grass and roots, and feather-lined. The species does not have many natural predators, but has been threatened in the past by introduced rodents. As the South Georgia Heritage Trust Habitat Restoration Project completed baiting for rats and mice in 2015, it is hoped that there are no longer any rats and mice left to disturb the pipits. The monitoring phase of the project will determine whether the eradication has been successful.

For more information about the South Georgia Pipit and the Habitat Restoration Project, visit:

www.arkive.org/south-georgia-pipit/anthus-antarcticus/ and <http://www.sght.org/habitat-restoration/>

South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

Toothfish Day

September 4 saw the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) celebrating Toothfish Day. This unique event signals the end of the Patagonian toothfish fishing season and has been made a national holiday. Celebrations included a reception and quiz held at Government House.



Patagonian Toothfish (Source: SAERI website)

The idea behind the creation of the celebration, was the acknowledgement of how important the toothfish fishery is to GSGSSI, in addition to the need to raise awareness of challenges surrounding sustainable ecosystem conservation and the prevention of illegal fishing.

GSGSSI certainly has cause for celebration, as it commences its 12th year of maintaining Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification. This demonstrates that the toothfish fishery meets high standards of sustainability, management and conservation. Improvements are continually being made, with changes in 2016 including 'more precautionary management of the stock' and 'streamlining and modernising fisheries law and regulation'.

More information can be seen on the GSGSSI website:

www.gov.gs/sgssi-mark-toothfish-day-4-september-2016/

SGSSI Stakeholder Meeting

UKOTCF Conservation Officer Sarah Barnsley attended the annual SGSSI Stakeholder meeting, which this year was held on 12 September at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office. After a welcome from SGSSI Commissioner Colin Roberts, an update of current issues was provided by the Head of the FCO's Polar Regions Department, Jane Rumble, who noted the huge amount of effort that had been put in by the team to make sure that SGSSI's Strategy 2016-2020 is being implemented.

Presentations were then given by James Jansen (FCO), Dr Jennifer Lee (SGSSI Environment Officer) and Dr Paul Brewin (SGSSI Marine Environment and Fisheries Manager) to update stakeholders as to the progress made over approximately a year since the launch of the strategy.

James Jansen noted the valuable feedback that had been received from a variety of stakeholders, the progress made through the extending to SGSSI of UK's ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity, and that a new delivery plan and action plans were being developed for ACAP (Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels). Dr Lee reported the increase in SGSSI's environmental global reach, for example through the revamping of the website, as well as to the improvements being made in terms of Environmental Impact Assessment, and exciting new research, for example that initiated by a PhD student looking at fungal biodiversity and the impact of herbicides.

After a lively discussion session, a final presentation was given by Russell Gibb and Daniel McCurdy on the 'Geometria' project which, using laser-scanning and surveying, allows for improvements in the management and conservation planning of South Georgia's whaling stations. Following this, everyone had the chance to unwind at a much appreciated drinks reception!

All of the presentations can be found on the GSGSSI website: www.gov.gs/docsarchive/gsgssi/#tab-5

More information on the Geometria Project can be found via the following link: <http://www.geometria.co.nz/>

Falkland Islands

SAERI Update – August 2016

The table below provides an update from the South Atlantic Research Institute as to their projects in the Falkland Islands.

Project	Update
The 'Gap' project	<p>In July, as part of the GAP project, consultation meetings have been held at the Natural History Museum in the UK to finalise the first phase of the benthic taxonomic voucher specimen collection and development of the online identification portal. These will be used to enhance accuracy and efficiency of future benthic surveys undertaken by hydrocarbon exploration and development activities as well as scientific research.</p> <p>Also in July, a workshop was held in the Falkland Islands with local and international experts in the ecology of Falkland Islands marine higher predators, spatial analysis and hydrocarbon industry operations to examine data and methods for determining the at-sea distribution and overlap of these animals with proposed hydrocarbon activities in order to assess potential risk or vulnerability to these activities. Outputs will be used to inform upcoming EIAs and provide a foundation for future environmental management, mitigation and monitoring guidelines.</p> <p>For more information see: www.south-atlantic-research.org/research/current-research/the-gap-project</p>
Marine Spatial Planning (MSP)	<p>The Darwin Plus project looking at Marine Spatial Planning for the Falkland Islands came to an end in June this year. For more information on the outputs of the project please visit the website: www.south-atlantic-research.org/research/current-research/marine-spatial-planning</p> <p>Some follow-up work will be conducted over the next few months, funded by the Falkland Islands Government.</p>
New project - Dolphins of the kelp: Data priorities for Falkland's inshore cetaceans	<p>This new Darwin Plus project is looking to establish baseline data on the abundance, distribution, natural history and genetic diversity of the Falklands inshore cetacean populations to provide a scientific basis for conservation and ecosystem-based marine management initiatives.</p> <p>The project manager will be joining SAERI in October. For more information see: www.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/DPLUS042/</p>

The following table includes SAERI’s more general projects:

Project	Update
EU BEST III	<p>As part of the BEST III Initiative, the South Atlantic hub has created an Ecosystem Profile which has been out for review and which will be finalised before the end of the year. Work is now underway to develop a complementary Regional Investment Strategy for four of the South Atlantic Overseas Territories – Ascension Island, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha and the Falkland Islands. For more information please visit the website:</p> <p>www.south-atlantic-research.org/research/current-research/best-iii</p>
EU BEST 2.0	<p>With the closing of the call for Medium Grants in July, work is now underway to assess eligible applications. Successful applicants will be notified in November.</p>
IMS-GIS	<p>The IMS-GIS data centre is continuing in supporting local communities in the South Atlantic UKOTs to gain skills and knowledge in GIS and data management. Training is being delivered in Tristan da Cunha between August and October 2016.</p> <p>The data repository maintained by the centre has seen a further increment of the number of datasets documented through the help of the data providers. The centre provided support for consultancy works and research projects carried out in SAERI.</p> <p>For more information or to access the metadata catalogue for the South Atlantic, please visit the website: www.south-atlantic-research.org/ims-gis</p>

Tristan da Cunha

Wildlife Sightings

The Tristan da Cunha website regularly provides updates and photos of wildlife spotted in the Territory. We provide a few examples of recent sightings here:



Northern Rockhopper Penguin on the steps to Runaway beach (Source: The Tristan da Cunha website, photo by Dawn Repetto)



Sunfish caught by Joe, Keith, Grant and Jason Green on 2 June 2016 (Source: The Tristan da Cunha website, photo by Carlene Glass-Green)



Sea elephant on Flat Rocks, 13 July 2016 (Source: The Tristan da Cunha website, photo taken by Shane Green)

St Helena

Governor Visits National Trust Sites

On 16 September, the Saint Helena National Trust (SHNT) welcomed Governor Lisa Phillips. Lisa Phillips had the opportunity to meet SHNT staff, and also to view some of the Trust's research projects.

During her time with the SHNT, the Governor planted a gumwood in the Millennium Forest, and learnt about some of the island's endemic species. Lisa Phillips' visit ended with the announcement that the SHNT and the Landscape & Ecology Mitigation Programme (LEMP) had been licensed to provide endemic plants for a District Clean-up.

For more updates from St Helena, visit

www.sainthelena.gov.sh/governor-lisa-phillips-visits-st-helena-national-trust-sites/



Governor Lisa Phillips with a member of staff from the SHNT (Source: St Helena Government Website)

Ascension Island

Ascension Explorers and Invertebrate Identification



The summer months have been busy on Ascension Island, with the Conservation Department holding summer activities for children to enjoy during their holidays. The idea behind these is to encourage a greater awareness of the island's incredible fauna and flora. Many photos of the children enjoying the 'Ascension Explorers' activities can be found on the Conservation Department Facebook page which can be accessed via the following link:www.facebook.com/AscensionIslandConservation/?ref=page_internal

Ascension Explorers on an excursion (Source: Ascension Island Conservation Facebook page)

David and Terrestrial Conservation Officers from the Conservation Department (Source: Ascension Island Conservation Facebook page)

The Conservation Department Facebook page has also a nice selection of photos from invertebrate specialist David Pryce's visit to the island. David provided the team with training in collection and identification methodology, in addition to expanding the invertebrate reference collection. The skills David provided are useful for gathering data on Ascension's native and endemic species, and also for detecting new species when carrying out biosecurity monitoring.



Ascension's Turtle Craters



Turtles returning to the sea among dozens of tracks made during the previous night (Photo Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF)

An extract of Stewart McPherson's recently published book *Britain's Treasure Islands: A Journey to the UK Overseas Territories* has recently been posted on the i News online news channel. Providing an account of green turtle activity on Ascension Island, the extract details each step of the journey: from the females which return to the island each year to dig their nests and lay eggs, to the challenges faced by the hatchlings as they return to the sea.

Stewart provides an intricate description of the nest-building process which leaves Ascension's beaches "strangely pitted with thousands of small craters". An approximate 5000 turtles visiting the island on a yearly basis, makes Ascension a key breeding ground. Stewart explains that "each clutch of eggs hatches six to eight weeks after being laid. When ready to hatch, the buried eggs rupture almost simultaneously." He

goes on to note the "urgency" of their journey to the sea and that "it is the circle of life" that "within the first few hours, a large proportion may be eaten".

Stewart describes also the threat that the abundant turtle population faced with the arrival of the colonial travellers in the 1700s and 1800s. The hunting of turtles steadily increased, and some were even kept in constructed "turtle ponds" to guarantee a continuous supply of meat. Unfortunately, these actions led to a huge decline in the population by the 1860s.

More recent times tell a happier tale. 1901 saw a change in attitude, with restrictions imposed upon turtle harvesting. The population has increased dramatically over the last 60 years, and the turtles remain protected.

The dedicated work of the Ascension Island Government Conservation Department team is also noted in Stewart's account. During nesting season, the team count the turtle tracks to monitor the number of visits, and therefore the recovery of the species.

If you are interested in reading Stewart McPherson's full extract, visit i News via the following link:

<https://inews.co.uk/explainers/iq/turtles-ascension-island-nesting-laying-eggs-crying-tears/>

Should you be interested in buying the book, you can do so via UKOTCF at www.ukotcf.org/treasureislands/. By doing this you provide a contribution to UKOTCF's conservation work with no additional cost to yourself.

British Indian Ocean Territory

Chagos Coral Mortality Event

2016 saw a widespread coral mortality event on the reefs of the Chagos Archipelago. This is the second time that an event of this nature has been recorded, with the first having been in 1998. The research programme that ensued, following that initial large-scale mortality, ultimately helped lead to the creation of the Chagos Marine Reserve. The results demonstrated that the corals did recover after 1998.

A diving survey was carried out in 2001. Through this, quantitative data on elements such as adult coral mortality and the abundance of juvenile corals were gathered. Unfortunately, the measurements of total coral cover suggested that there had been no improvements since initial snorkelling surveys carried out in 1999. However, data from a different team member were much more hopeful! These indicated that juvenile coral numbers were very high, particularly those of spawners. These are species that release their gametes into the water, for fertilisation and then dispersal to take place. It was suspected at the time that the coral composition of the shallow water community could change, which it did.

Research led also to the prediction that coral recovery would need to occur quickly to avoid disaster into the long-term. Luckily, this is also what happened. The entire picture of the 2016 mortality event is not yet known. However, it is hoped that by the end of the year, following the cooling of water temperatures, that the picture will be clearer.

Nevertheless, as stated in *Chagos News*, one lesson that was certainly learnt from the earlier mortality occurrence, was that 'the almost complete lack of other local impacts on the reefs enabled reefs here to bounce back faster and more completely than was the case in most of the tropics.'

For more information about the Chagos coral research, read the article from the Chagos Conservation Trust's Newsletter, *Chagos News*, which can be seen here:

<http://chagos-trust.org/sites/default/files/images/Chagos%20News%2048%20FINAL.pdf>

Pitcairn

Sustainable Marine & Fisheries Management Plan

At the most recent meeting of the Pitcairn Environment Group, in May of this year, Terry Dawson, Robert Irving and Ana Pinto, presented an update on a Darwin Initiative Project which is looking to develop 'a sustainable marine and fisheries management plan for the Pitcairn Islands'. Having commenced in 2013, this project will come to completion in March 2017.

A partnership between Sea-scope, the University of Dundee and ZSL, the project hopes to produce a management plan that is, as explained on the website of the Darwin Initiative, 'ecosystem-based and sustainable' as this is 'crucial to providing a secure future for the economic benefit of the Island community and protection of the unique marine biodiversity of the Pitcairn Islands'.

Summer 2014 saw MSc student Henry Duffy, carrying out Baited Remote Underwater Videography surveys in Pitcairn waters. This was to allow an assessment of fishing impact and the development of a sustainable fishing plan. In the same year, work to increase tourism opportunities was carried out, with the idea that Pitcairn's Marine Protected Area (MPA) could be a unique selling point.

A well-being survey was due to be carried out in August 2016, with periodic surveys continuing following the legal designation of the MPA. The idea behind this project element is that it will allow an evaluation of whether the MPA designation has had an influence upon the quality of life of the Pitcairn Islanders.

We look forward to seeing the outcome of the surveys and of the project as a whole!

More information about this project can be seen at <http://www.darwininitiative.org.uk/project/20006/>

British Antarctic Territory

Review of Seabird Threats

The journal *Biological Conservation* has recently published a review of threats and conservation actions required for the 29 albatross and large petrel species that are covered by the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP). The study indicates that there were declines in the global population numbers in 38% of the species, between 1993 and 2013.

Thankfully, the numbers of 28% of the species were shown to have increased, while another 28% remained stable. Nonetheless, 19 of the 29 species listed under ACAP are classified as threatened on the IUCN Red List, and conservation action must increase if we are to guarantee a sustainable future for these seabird species.

Many factors remain a threat to the albatross and large petrels, with bycatch being one of the worst issues. Dr Richard Phillips of the British Antarctic Survey, who was lead author of the study, noted that “Bycatch mainly occurs as seabirds become hooked on baited hooks, trapped in nets or collide with warp cables, when scavenging for food on the sea surface.”

For more information on this study, visit <https://www.bas.ac.uk/media-post/review-of-threats-to-seabirds/> and <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0006320716302427>.

Contact Information:

If you have any questions regarding any of the articles in this Newsletter, or about any of the UK’s Overseas Territories more generally, please contact SOWG Secretary Sarah Barnsley at: sbarnsley@ukotcf.org



Male wandering albatross (Source: British Antarctic Survey website)