



# UKOTCF

## Southern Oceans Working Group (SOWG) e-Newsletter

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### UKOT/CD *Sustaining Partnerships* Gibraltar Conservation Conference 2015

The beginning of July saw the *Sustaining Partnerships* conference in Gibraltar organised jointly by UKOTCF and the Government of Gibraltar, with support from the Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society. This was a great opportunity for all the Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies to share knowledge, issues, successes and experiences encountered during conservation work in each individual Territory.

Some excellent conservation suggestions and recommendations emerged from the conference. This was as a result of some very energetic discussion sessions. The main conference sessions were designed to cover the following themes:

- Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Resources
- Conservation and Sustainable Use of Terrestrial Resources
- Renewable Energy
- Environmental Education & Awareness
- Implementing Biodiversity Action Plans in the context of Environment Charters, Aichi Targets etc. (and including environmental monitoring)
- Using informed decision making to manage development sustainably (including physical planning, environmental impact assessments etc.)



In addition to some very early starts and hard-working conference sessions, participants greatly appreciated the more relaxed sessions and time to meet other conference delegates. Welcoming speeches on the Saturday evening opened the conference and set the scene for the productive week ahead. These were given by the Hon. Dr Joseph Garcia - Deputy Chief Minister, the Hon. Dr John Cortés - Minister for Health, the Environment, Energy and Climate Change, and Honorary Executive Director of UKOTCF - Dr Mike Pienkowski. The following morning, delegates enjoyed either a boat trip around Gibraltar's waters and plenty of dolphin and seabird sightings, or a terrestrial tour to the Upper Rock and encounter with the macaques.

Later in the week, there was also a chance to preview an episode of Stewart McPherson's new series *Britain's Treasure Islands*. Participants watched the Ascension Island, St Helena, and Tristan da Cunha episode of this long-awaited series. Stewart's project aim was to visit all of the UK Overseas Territories, accompanied by cameramen so that the incredible diversity of wildlife across the UKOTs could be filmed. The footage was then edited to produce a series of 4 documentaries showcasing the natural history of the Territories. With UKOTCF help, Stewart also set up a Kickstarter project to raise funding which would allow unused footage to be edited into 16 short 3-7 minute long documentaries. These will be available to a wide audience and will promote a greater awareness of the Territories, their incredible wildlife and any conservation work being undertaken.

Reports and videos of parts of the conference are being put on the UKOTCF website ([www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org)) and UKOTCF's YouTube Channel ([www.youtube.com/channel/UCZNDrrZLqZFng1\\_RrNWWDA](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCZNDrrZLqZFng1_RrNWWDA)), and this will continue. It is expected that the Proceedings will be published later this year.

## Southern Oceans Working Group Meeting

On the Monday morning, delegates were up bright and early for the Southern Oceans Working Group meeting, and it was great to see so many attendees! We can only hope that many more will join us for future meetings. After some introductions from Mike Pienkowski, gratefully handing over the chair which he had filled temporarily for longer than he had envisaged, our new Chairman Nigel Haywood kicked off the session.

Once again some very useful recommendations arose which will be reported separately. One key point noted by Nigel in the conference summary session on the final day, was that it is important to look at 'how far we have come'. The Territories have achieved some fantastic conservation work and with the support of each other, there is no reason that this should not continue!



All that remains to be said, is a big thank you to lead conference organisers Catherine Wensink and Mike Pienkowski for such a successful event, and to everybody who helped with the organisation before and during the conference itself!

## Endemic Species Factfile: Ascension Island Frigatebird *Fregata aquila*



*Male Ascension frigatebird (above) and immature Ascension frigatebird (left).*  
Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski.

### Description:

Ascension is extremely important for eleven species of seabird, one of which is the highly charismatic Ascension Island frigatebird. This is a large, ground-nesting species, and is the only remaining seabird endemic to Ascension. Classified as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the Ascension Island frigatebird predominantly feeds on flying fish. As a result, the species often associates with schools of tuna or dolphins which drive the prey to the surface. At certain times of the year, small groups have also been witnessed feeding on sea turtle hatchlings and sooty tern chicks.

Whilst adult males can be recognised by their black plumage and bright red throat-sacs that inflate during courtship, adult females are black with a brownish tint and blue rings surrounding their eyes. The juveniles can be recognised by their white heads and chests.

### Threats:

A major threat to the Ascension Island frigatebirds is the overfishing of tuna. Secondary threats include invasive alien species (until recent successful conservation action, the biggest threat – see below), wind turbines, inshore fisheries bycatch and climate change-induced habitat alteration.

### Conservation actions required / being carried out:

The most urgent management issue as regards Ascension frigatebirds is most likely the prevention of over-fishing and the preservation of foraging relationships between tuna and seabirds. Regularly monitoring the success of frigatebird fledging should be continued as a way of identifying any long-term changes in food availability and productivity. Ideally, this should be reinforced through carrying out periodic dietary studies and GPS tracking to determine whether there are any changes to foraging behaviour.

In 2001, a Seabird Restoration project was established on Ascension Island in order to address the detrimental effects of cats and rats upon seabird populations which had resulted in most seabird nesting being restricted to offshore islets or inaccessible cliffs. The project involved a programme of eradication of feral cats, the last of which was removed from the mainland in 2004. Seabirds have slowly been recolonising the mainland ever since and in 2012, the first two pairs of frigatebirds nested on the mainland for the first time in 180 years! Maintaining the conditions in order to allow the mainland nesting colony to continue expanding is essential. Under Ascension's National Biodiversity Action Plan (see article on p11), individual Species Action Plans have been created. The one for the Ascension frigatebird can be seen here:

[www.ascension-island.gov.ac/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/FRIGATEBIRD-SAP.pdf](http://www.ascension-island.gov.ac/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/FRIGATEBIRD-SAP.pdf)

## SAERI Standardised Information System

The South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute's IMS-GIS (Information Management System – Geographic Information System) data centre is constructing a comprehensive and standardised information system across the South Atlantic UK Overseas Territories. This system will allow data to be easily found and accessed. At present, there are many different data channels, and sources of data are often unknown. However, the IMS-GIS data centre will address this by working within each Territory to build self-sufficiency and to reduce the dependence of Territories upon external organisations for the management and use of spatial data derived through GIS techniques, and its analysis.



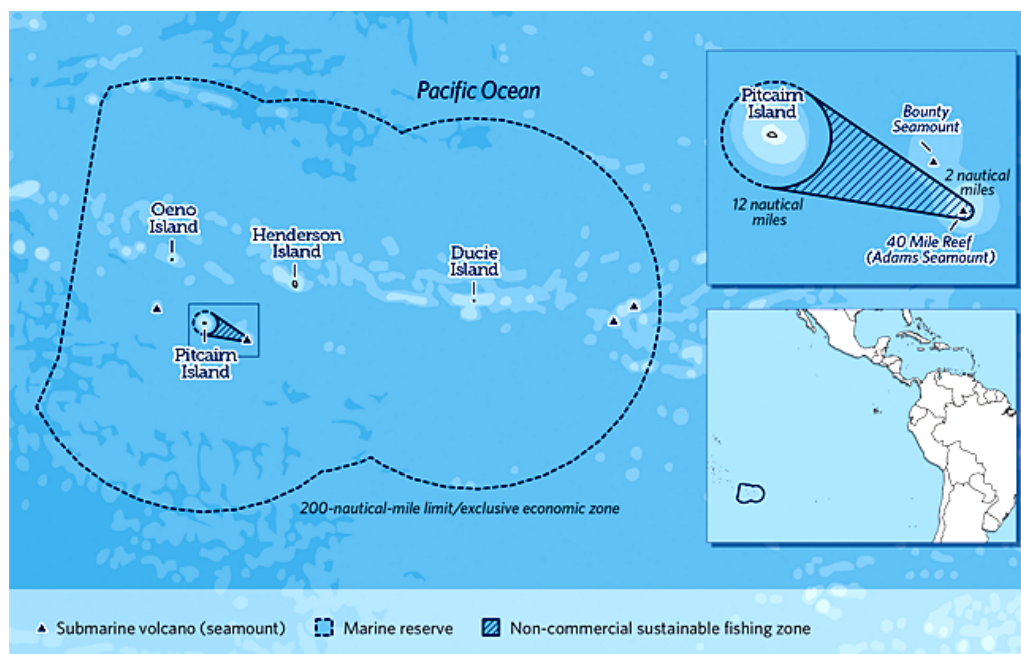
*The South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute Logo*

The online metadata catalogue can be used to search for any data collected in the South Atlantic UK Overseas Territories. Eventually, a full list of metadata for each of the Territories will be available as well. The metadata lists for St Helena, Ascension Island and the Falkland Islands were made available in July 2015. More information can be found via the following link:

[www.south-atlantic-research.org/metadata-catalogue](http://www.south-atlantic-research.org/metadata-catalogue)

## Pitcairn

### World's Largest Marine Reserve



*Traditional and cultural non-commercial fishing by the Pitcairn islanders and their visitors is permitted within 2 nautical miles of the summit of 40 Mile Reef and in a transit zone between Pitcairn and 40 Mile Reef.  
Map: Pew Charitable Trust.*

Some very exciting news for the Pitcairn Islands and the World as a whole was announced in March of this year. The UK Government has decided to establish a marine reserve around the Pitcairn Islands. This is to be the World's largest marine reserve ever, and will include more than 800,000km<sup>2</sup> of ocean. It will extend from 12 miles offshore of Pitcairn Island to the 200 nautical mile limit of Pitcairn's waters.

More than 1,200 marine species have been recorded in these waters including 48 globally threatened species such as the Critically Endangered hawksbill turtle. Many of the species are also endemic, one example being the Pitcairn angelfish.



The announcement was made in the Budget 2015 Report on 18th March 2015 by George Osborne, Chancellor of the Exchequer. This was a significant step for conservationists and Pitcairn's residents who had been campaigning since 2013 for the establishment of a marine reserve around the Territory. The pressure had been increased in February 2015 with a coalition of conservation and environmental organisations and scientists, launching a campaign encouraging UK Government to establish marine reserves around the UK's Overseas Territories.

Designation of the reserve will be significant as it means that the UK will have the two largest marine reserves in the World. The second largest is the Chagos marine reserve which surrounds British Indian Ocean Territory. It also means that Pitcairn's waters will be protected from any extractive and damaging activities, including among others; overfishing, exploration for deep-sea mining and pollution.

## Henderson Island Research Expedition



*Henderson Island, Pitcairn. Photo: Pitcairn Islands Tourism*

An RSPB expedition team landed on Henderson Island on 22nd May 2015 in order to commence a six-month research expedition. The team set out from Pitcairn Island and, upon arrival on Henderson, spent the next two days unloading research equipment ready to commence work into better understanding the ecology of the island. The team worked until the end of August, so as to gather data on the vegetation, rats, seabirds and landbirds of Henderson.

This formed Part I of the project which is divided into two phases, with the second scientific team taking over on 29th August.

This new team will be on the island until November to carry on the data collection. The expedition is funded by the Darwin Initiative and the David & Lucile Packard Foundation. One of its main goals is to gain a greater understanding of rat density and movement ranges on Henderson. This is important data given that the island's unique biodiversity, which includes 55 endemic species, is under threat from invasive Pacific rats. 250 rat traps have been placed on the island allowing rats to be caught and marked with numbered ear tags. The recapture of rats will therefore allow data to be collected on movement ranges and survival rates.

In addition to rats, the team will also be monitoring the Henderson fruit-dove, Henderson lorikeet, Henderson rail and Henderson reed-warbler, four landbirds endemic to the island. This monitoring will determine whether there have been any population changes in the past 4 years since a previous rat eradication attempt which unfortunately failed due to unexpected weather changes.

In a colony of Murphy's petrels along the beach, every petrel chick was killed within 5 days of hatching. As of the 18th September 2015, following nearly a month of rat trapping in this petrel colony, the team has tagged 52 individual rats in a trapping grid. Rat density is estimated as being approximately 46 rats / ha, surprising given the number of seabirds which provide a good food source for the rats. It is also surprising as invasive coconut trees in this area provide an ample food supply. The first estimates indicate that rat density is lower than on the island's plateau, where there are estimated to be 52 rats / ha. This is an interesting finding given that the plateau has less fruit and seabirds.

It is possible that the huge distances that some rats travel may be the clue, and the RSPB team have a suspicion

that they could be underestimating the true movement range of most rats. We will have to wait for further project updates to see whether the answer is solved! We look forward to these future updates which are provided through the RSPB's Saving Species blog. This can be found at the following address (scroll down to find):

[www.rspb.org.uk/community/ourwork/b/biodiversity/default.aspx#](http://www.rspb.org.uk/community/ourwork/b/biodiversity/default.aspx#)

## British Antarctic Territory

### Scientists Unveil New Starfish Family

An international team of scientists has published an article in the April 2015 edition of the *Zoological Journal of the Linnean Society* to report the incredible discovery of a new family of deep-sea starfish. These were discovered in the warm waters surrounding a hydrothermal vent in the East Scotia Ridge, Antarctica. This starfish family, known as *Paulasterias tyleri*, is unusual in that specimens have six or eight limbs as opposed to the usual five.



*Eight-armed starfish on the East Scotia Ridge. Photo: ChEsSo*

This group is the first new family of starfish to be discovered since 2002, with its closest relatives being found over 2000 miles away. Specimens within the group have a white to pinkish colouring and fleshy limbs. It is also the first starfish group to be located in a hydrothermal vent ecosystem. The starfish family was discovered by the Natural Environment Research Council during deep sea scientific research studying Antarctica's Southern Ocean habitats. The starfish group was found between 1400 and 2600 metres below the surface.

Specimen analyses were carried out by Dr Christopher Mah of the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington DC and Dr David Foltz of Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge. The DNA analyses confirmed that the starfish were indeed a new species.

## The Monaco Assessment

A meeting of Antarctic and biodiversity experts was held in Monaco in June, in order to investigate how far conservation of the biodiversity of Antarctica and the Southern Ocean goes towards meeting global targets, as agreed under the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. The meeting was organised jointly by the Government of the Principality of Monaco, the Centre Scientifique de Monaco, the Scientific Committee on Antarctic Research (SCAR), and Monash University.

One outcome of this meeting was *The Monaco Assessment*. This is a statement by the meeting participants, on conservation in the Antarctic and Southern Ocean region in the context of the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020. Another aim of the meeting was to provide guidance for action that can aid in the delivery of conservation successes in the Antarctic and Southern Ocean region. A further goal was to identify key work areas and indicators to provide guidance for this work.



*The Monaco Assessment Group with HSH Prince Albert II of Monaco. Photo: Eric Mahon/Palais Princier.*

*The Monaco Assessment* comments that human activity in the Antarctic and the Southern Ocean region has been increasing considerably in recent years. In light of this and other threats such as climate change, it is essential to determine the outlook for biodiversity in the Antarctic. Unfortunately, it would appear that this outlook is no better for Antarctica and the Southern Ocean than it is for the rest of the World.

Various recommendations came out of the statement. Mainstreaming biodiversity across the society and science of the region will require great effort. A set of well-established arrangements does exist for the Antarctic and Southern Ocean, including the *Protocol on Environmental Protection* which has been ratified by 37 Antarctic Treaty Parties. However, a Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan for Antarctica and the Southern Ocean, which is adopted and implemented by the Antarctic Treaty Parties, would contribute an effective way of improving the outlook for the region.

Further information regarding *The Monaco Assessment* can be found via the following link:

[www.scar.org/monaco-assessment/document](http://www.scar.org/monaco-assessment/document)

## South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

### Five Year Strategy for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands

Carrying on from the five-year strategy for the period 2010-2015, a new draft strategy has been prepared for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands for 2016-2020. The main objective of this strategy is 'To preserve the unique environment of this UK Overseas Territory, through effective administration and management.' Through this objective, the strategy recognises the unique and relatively pristine environment of the Territory, including both terrestrial and the 200 nautical mile Maritime Zone.

Over the past five years, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands have seen some major successes regarding the environment and these must be built upon to guarantee the preservation of the natural environment. Achievements have included the completion of the rat eradication project by the South Georgia Heritage Trust (see the following article) in addition to the designation of a Marine Protected Area.

The strategy has been revised over the past months and the final version was presented at a Stakeholder Meeting in September 2015. We look forward to the many more environmental successes that the following five years may bring to the Territory!

### South Georgia Rodent Free?



*The first South Georgia pipit nest discovered in a place cleared of rodents thanks to the Habitat Restoration Project. Photo: South Georgia Heritage Trust.*

In March 2015, rodent bait was deposited for the last time as part of the South Georgia Habitat Restoration Project. The project had involved more than 800 loads of bait and three seasons of fieldwork. During this time, more than 1000 km<sup>2</sup> of land was treated. It is amazing to think that South Georgia may now be free from such destructive invasive species, which should have never been there in the first place.



Thousands of people have been involved over the five years of the project; from the Trustees, including the South Georgia Heritage Trust and FOSGI, the designers, and of course Team Rat. It is thanks to their enormous efforts that the last rodent may have been removed from the Territory.

The project does not just end here however. Until it is a hundred percent certain that every last rodent has been removed, the project team will remain vigilant for signs of any that may have survived the initial baiting procedure. In a few years' time, a large scale yacht-based survey will be carried out in order to determine whether the ultimate purpose of the project has indeed been achieved.

## Falkland Islands

### The Falkland Island's 'Gap Project'

The Falkland Islands hold potential for the development of an offshore hydrocarbon industry. This is as a result of the discovery of oil fields around the Islands. The two-year 'Gap Project' commenced in 2014 and, through the gathering and analysis of data, will provide for the development of a 5-10 year strategy designed to minimise and mitigate potential negative impacts on the marine environment from the hydrocarbon industry. The project is being led by the South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI) in collaboration with international and national partners, and is jointly funded by the Falkland Islands Government and the Falkland Islands Petroleum Licensees Association.

In 2011, the Falkland Islands Offshore Hydrocarbons Environmental Forum (FIOHEF) was set up. The FIOHEF promotes discussion related to environmental issues surrounding current and future hydrocarbon activities in the Territory. A subcommittee of the Forum was also established, The Gap Committee Group. This investigates any data gaps that require addressing, so as to better inform and improve monitoring of any potential environmental impacts of the industry.

Key actions required have been identified as; making use of existing data in collaboration with experts, while filling high priority data gaps. Priority data gaps exist for marine predators, in particular seals and penguins, which are species that could be particularly adversely affected by an oil spill. Gaps are also present in data relating to the benthic environment, pelagic fisheries and oceanographic conditions.

As filling the data gaps associated with penguins and where they go when foraging at sea is a research priority, a penguin tracking programme has been set up. SAERI and Falklands Conservation, a local NGO, have been attaching tracking devices to different penguin species breeding in the Territory. As of February 2015, rockhopper, gentoo and Magellanic penguins have been tracked. It was found that some of the rockhopper and Magellanic penguins travelled approximately 900km in less than 12 days during incubation foraging trips, while gentoos covered almost 2000 km between June and October. The MIND THE GAP news bulletins provide the latest updates on this project. These can be found on the SAERI website.

[www.south-atlantic-research.org/media/files/GAPNewsletter\\_Issue2.pdf](http://www.south-atlantic-research.org/media/files/GAPNewsletter_Issue2.pdf)



*Southern Rockhopper Penguin.  
Photo: Falklands Conservation.*





## Tristan da Cunha

### Tristan Lobster Sustainably on London Menus

The Tristan lobster has travelled far afield and is now available in Central London restaurants. This famous Tristan rock lobster can be found at Roka, a group of Japanese restaurants found in the city centre, as well as in the Little Chelsea Fish Market, Kensington. Visitors can enjoy the shellfish in a variety of dishes including sashimi, tempura and with linguine! Selfridges on Oxford Street has also stocked the lobster since February 2015.



*Tristan lobster is on the menu. Photo: Tristan da Cunha Website ([www.tristandc.com/newtristanlobsterUK.php](http://www.tristandc.com/newtristanlobsterUK.php))*

Marine Stewardship Council certification was achieved for the Tristan da Cunha Fishery in 2011. This award recognises the sustainability and high quality of the Tristan lobster. More good news was received when in October 2014, the Tristan lobster was imported into the European Union for the very first time. As well as London, this popular shellfish can also be found on menus in France, Germany and Switzerland.

## St Helena

### St Helena Airport Project Update



*Airport site, Prosperous Bay Plain 15/01/2015. Photo: St Helena Airport Project*



*First plane landing, 15/09/2015. Photo: St Helena Tourism*

Tuesday 15th September 2015 is a memorable day for St Helena. On this day, the first plane landed at St Helena's new airport – an incredibly historic moment. The aircraft in question was a Beechcraft King Air 200 which had flown over from Angola. Calibration tests were then conducted, with the final test completed on the 23rd September. An assessment of the test findings will now be made.

Planning for the airport commenced many years ago, to reduce the isolation of St Helena and thereby provide the opportunity for economic development. Increasing self-sustainability, and decreasing dependency on UK grants in aid, have been recent drivers for the airport project. The project accounts for a total land area of 200ha, a cost of £250 million, and 9.5million m<sup>3</sup> of earth moved.

Prior to the signing of a Design, Build, Operate (DBO) contract with South African construction firm Basil Read in 2011, an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) process was carried out. Commencing in 2005, the EIA resulted in an Environmental Statement (ES) and Environmental Management Plan (EMP). The latter outlines measures that must be undertaken by the contractor according to the results of the EIA. As it composed part

of the employer's requirements of the contractor, this meant that everything within the EMP was a contractual requirement that the contractor could be forced to meet.

The airport project drove the establishment of management practices that include positive environmental considerations. It led the Territory towards formally adopting the EIA process, which is now directed by EIA Regulation, 2013. In many respects, the project has set the standards for environmental assessment and management of future development projects on St Helena.

Various ecological considerations had to be addressed throughout the airport project. As there is very little flat land on St Helena, choosing the airport site was challenging. It was finally decided that Prosperous Bay Plain would be the site. This is the only desert-like habitat on the island and is therefore a site that is very important ecologically. One ecological issue that had to be addressed by the project was the fact that the site is a significant habitat for the wirebird, St Helena's only endemic bird. While the airport construction plan



*St Helena wirebird or plover Charadrius sanctaehelenae.*  
*Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski.*

covered several wirebird territories, mitigation work carried out in advance, as part of the EIA process, meant that three compensatory wirebird habitat areas were restored outside the airport construction area. In actual fact, the wirebirds appeared unaffected by the construction works despite large areas of their habitat being destroyed or altered, and were present for the duration of the project!

With the airport being constructed in such an ecologically important area, the need to compromise was a frustrating element of the project. It was not always possible to put the environment first, otherwise it would have been impossible to develop an airport at all. Regardless of this, any decisions

taken were carefully considered against technical, economic, financial, and social issues. The project certainly allowed worthwhile environmental lessons to be learnt. These included the importance of including the EIA process in legislation, guaranteeing that there are enough resources to then implement and monitor compliance, develop early ecological baselines, and most importantly, learn to work collaboratively.

## Ascension Island

### Ascension Island Marine Sustainability Project Update

Recent research being carried out under the Darwin Initiative funded Ascension Island Marine Sustainability (AIMS) project has involved histological observations from yellowfin tuna *Thunnus albacares* and rock hind *Epinephelus adscensionis*, also known as grouper or jack. The histological process studies the microscopic anatomy of cells and tissues in plants and animals. It is an accurate way of obtaining data about the life-history of fish species when used as an instrument for analysing their reproductive biology.

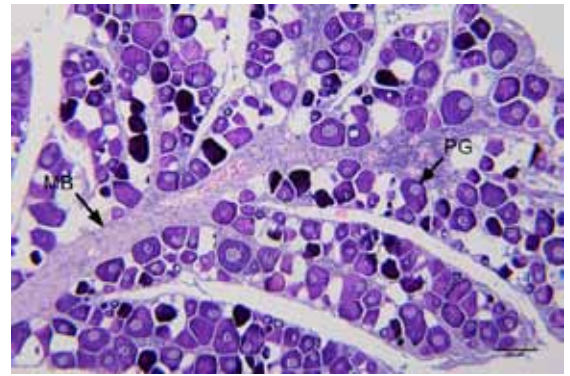
Through the AIMS project, the Ascension Island Government Conservation Department received funding in 2014 to establish a Marine and Fisheries Department for the Territory. One project outcome included the setting up of a laboratory with all of the equipment required for processing and analysing gonad samples from commercially important species on Ascension Island.

Rock hind and yellowfin tuna, are two species that are recreationally and commercially important on Ascension Island. The former is found in high densities in the shallow sub-littoral reef around the island, while the latter

is actually a highly migratory species found throughout the tropical and sub-tropical waters of the Atlantic. The rock hind is often caught for sport and for consumption on the island, while the yellowfin tuna is one of the key species targeted by Ascension's sport-fishing businesses. Regardless of this, there is very little information about the reproductive life-history of either species.

Despite the rock hind and yellowfin tuna displaying different life-history cycles, they both have the same stages of sexual maturation within a reproductive cycle which can be determined effectively using histology. Between June 2014 and June 2015, the AIMS team used opportunistic sampling of recreational and sport fishery landings to collect 306 yellowfin tuna between 48.5 and 200 cm fork length, and 453 rock hind between 4.4 and 64 cm total length, from inshore waters. Sampling is on-going in order to identify any monthly/annual differences in reproductive status. Gonads are then removed and sent to the laboratory for reproductive analysis. On-going analyses will provide important information on the spawning seasonality of both species as well as a better understanding of spawning behaviour. For more detailed information on this project, there is an article in issue 50 of *Ascension Island Conservation Quarterly*:

[www.ascension-island.gov.ac/government/conservation/library-publications/quarterly-newsletter/](http://www.ascension-island.gov.ac/government/conservation/library-publications/quarterly-newsletter/)



*Photomicrograph of yellowfin tuna Thunnus albacares ovarian histology showing primary growth (PG) and muscle block (MB). Scale 100 µm. Photo: Ascension Conservation.*

## National Biodiversity Action Plan Online

Ascension Island now has a National Biodiversity Action Plan (NBAP) and a very informative webpage to go alongside it. The BAP was created through funding received from the Darwin Initiative. Extensive stakeholder consultation was carried out for the development of the plan, which outlines Ascension Government's programme for biodiversity conservation.

A Microsoft Access database application allows local management of the BAP. This means that actions can be updated on the system which keeps the BAP relevant and able to adapt to changing situations. The database also provides various sorting/filtering options meaning that specifically tailored action plans can be created.

Eventually, users not linked to the Ascension Island Government server will have real-time access to the database. For the meantime, a monthly update can be downloaded from the following webpage:

[www.ascension-island.gov.ac/government/conservation/projects/bap/](http://www.ascension-island.gov.ac/government/conservation/projects/bap/)



*The land crab Johngarthia lagostoma is one of two invertebrates on Ascension Island with an action plan. Photo: Ascension Island Government Conservation Department.*



*The Ascension Island spleenwort Asplenium ascensionis has a Species Action Plan. Photo: Ascension Island Government Conservation Department.*

For now, the BAP focuses on priority species, habitats and ecosystems requiring conservation action. This is due to limited resources and time. The BAP therefore currently targets 13 endemic and indigenous species, including the Ascension Island frigatebird (see article on p3) and



the land crab. These species have been chosen as they are either threatened with extinction, or they represent a 'flagship' species for ecosystems/taxa with the same conservation concerns. A few priority habitats and ecosystems, as well two invasive species also have action plans prepared. Individual action plans updated on a yearly basis can also be seen via the link provided on p11.

## Bicentenary Celebrations

2015 is an important year for Ascension Island – marking 200 years since the Island was garrisoned and settled by the Royal Navy. In 1815, a naval garrison was set up on Ascension in order to deter any attempts by the French, to release Napoleon from St Helena. Napoleon had been exiled to the British Island of St Helena following his defeat at the Battle of Waterloo.

A program of events has been planned for the whole Island community to celebrate this special Bicentenary year. The Bicentenary Weekend will be held from 22-25 October 2015, with events including; a concert with the Royal Marine Band, a flag raising ceremony, and the official opening of the Bicentenary Park. We hope that this special occasion runs smoothly and we look forward to seeing lots of photos!



*The Ascension Island Bicentenary logo. Ascension Island Government.*

## British Indian Ocean Territory

### 2015 Chagos Expedition

The Darwin 2015 Chagos Expedition is the third of a series of three, the purpose of which has been to achieve the objectives of a Darwin Initiative project *Strengthen the World's Largest Marine Protected Area, Chagos Archipelago*. The main aim of this three-year project is to provide scientific knowledge for effective management which will allow the Chagos Marine Protected Area (MPA) to be strengthened. It will also allow the development of a strategy that engages with potential stakeholders.



*A grey reef shark spotted while some of the team were diving. Photo: 2015 Darwin Science Expedition Blog.*

Dr John Turner of Bangor University and the Chagos Conservation Trust (CCT) is the Principal Investigator of the project, working alongside Co-investigators Professor Charles Sheppard of Warwick University and CCT and Dr Heather Koldewey of the Zoological Society of London and CCT. The main project partner is the British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) Administration, and together they hope to increase the value of the Chagos MPA and provide for effective management.

Various research activities were carried out during the final expedition which took place in March-April 2015. The status of the corals that form the Chagos Archipelago was studied, taking into account factors such as coral cover and juvenile coral density to investigate reef 'health'. Video archive of the structure of coral reef communities was also recorded during the Chagos expeditions, allowing any changes to be observed over time. Now that the expedition is finished, we look forward to hearing some of the results of the research. If you would like to know more about the daily activities of the team during the expedition, visit their blog at the following link:

<http://chagos-trust.org/2015-darwin-science-expedition-0#main-content>

## **New Director for the Chagos Conservation Trust**

From the 12th October 2015, Helen Pitman will take up her post of Director of CCT. Having previously worked in organisations such as WWF International, Helen's roles as Director of CCT will include coordinating and cultivating the various work areas in which CCT are currently involved. She will also liaise with BIOT, as well as with other conservation and science initiatives that are interested in Chagos, such as members of the Chagos Environment Network.

We wish Helen all the best in her new role!

