

Section 11: UK Minister's speech and Conference closing

As noted in the introduction to Section 10, for timetabling reasons concerned with the Minister's flights, the first part of the Section reported here took place between the sessions of Section 10, and the second part after that Session.

The Session started with brief summaries of the preceding sessions, emphasising the conclusions. These are given in the introductory section of these proceedings. These were followed by the presentation of the conference statement (below), which conference participants had decided the previous afternoon to develop.

Mr Huw Irranca-Davies MP (Minister for the Natural and Marine Environment, Wildlife and Rural Affairs, UK Government) then gave his address. He then kindly continued through part of the lunch break to answer questions, with the support of officials from Defra, FCO and DFID. The Minister's speech and the ensuing discussion is included below.

The final session started by some of the student participants giving their individual impressions of the Conference, maintaining a tradition started at the preceding conference in Jersey. This was followed by UKOTCF's Chairman, Mike Pienkowski, closing the conference, with thanks to those who had helped make it happen. This was followed by the marine ecosystems visit by boat, on the way to the closing dinner.



From left: Mr Eric Blencowe (Head, Biodiversity Policy Unit, Defra), Mr Huw Irranca-Davies (UK Minister for the Natural and Marine Environment, Wildlife and Rural Affairs, Defra), and Dr Mike Pienkowski (UKOTCF Chairman).

(Photographs of conference participants in this section by Thomas Hadjikyriakou unless otherwise indicated)

Statement agreed by conference participants

Statement to Huw Irranca-Davies MP, UK Minister for the Natural and Marine Environment, Wildlife and Rural Affairs

This statement comes from the conference, “Making the Right Connections”, on conservation in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island communities, Grand Cayman, 30th May to 5th June 2009.

The conference warmly welcomes the presence of a UK biodiversity minister for the first time at a conference on conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, which we anticipate as a sign of a deepening commitment to the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.

The vast majority of the unique biodiversity for which the UK is responsible is found in the UK Overseas Territories. Indeed, the UK Overseas Territories are the key to HMG meeting many of its international environmental treaty obligations. We note the Commitments made under the Environment Charters, which the UK Overseas Territories are striving to implement.

We applaud the recent recommendations from the House of Commons Foreign Affairs and Environmental Audit Committees.

We appreciate valuable assistance already received from the UK Government.

However, in line with the recommendations of the parliamentary select committees, we urge HMG:

- to recognise and deliver its own Commitments to the UK Overseas Territories under the Environment Charters;
- to identify a lead department for environmental conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies; and
- to provide dedicated resources in order to enable sustained programmes that address pressing conservation needs.

We are committed to continue working together to achieve the highest level of environmental conservation in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies.

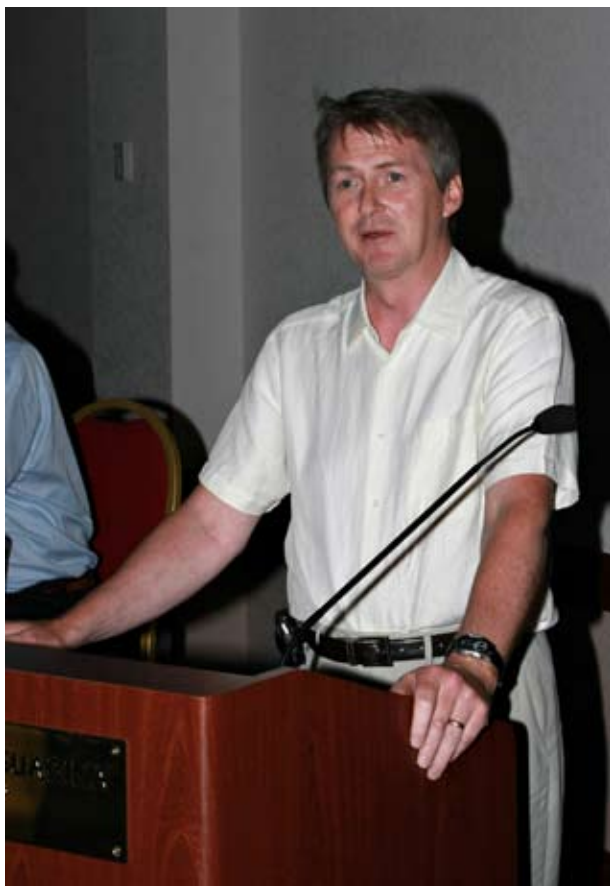
These concerns come from those participants who are representatives of Territory and UK NGOs, technical personnel of Territory Government Departments, and other delegates.

Grand Cayman, 4th June 2009



The conference listens to the Minister's speech.

Speech by Huw Irranca-Davies at the UKOTCF Conference on Biodiversity in the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies: Making the Right Connections: Thursday 4th June 2009



I am delighted to be here to attend this conference, and to meet so many people from regions of the world that are often so distant from the UK, but so close to so many of our hearts and minds. I want to assure you, by my presence and by my words today, that you are never far from our thoughts and actions

We've come a long way from London. I don't mean the thousands of miles travelled. The first such conference – this is the fifth – was in London in 1999. Since then we've seen considerable progress in some areas, and you'll have heard Eric [Blencowe]¹ expounding about the Gyps vulture and human-elephant conflict. But these don't have anything to do with small islands, and it's here

¹ Items in square parentheses [] have been inserted (with permission) to clarify a few items for a wider audience and to refer to a section (on joined-up-ness) where the Minister added to his speech as drafted.

where it's more difficult to identify such clear examples of progress. And we need to do so. [The project here in Cayman]¹, "In Ivan's Wake", is an example, and I saw the evidence for myself yesterday. But there needs to be more.

So here we are again, joined together again to chart progress, to roll out those charts and map the way ahead.

I understand that this is the first time a Defra Minister has attended the conference, and so it is an honour for me to be the Minister doing so, especially on such a beautiful island with so much biodiversity here. I am also very grateful to the organisers, both here on Grand Cayman and in the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, for all the arrangements that have made my attendance possible, and for the immense hospitality and kindness shown in my short but busy visit.

This is also an island and a region which itself encapsulates the raging debate over how best to conserve the best, how to keep beauty beautiful, to protect biodiversity in all its myriad diversity. The UK's Overseas Territories collectively host the most precious, endangered and unique biodiversity to which the UK can lay claim. So halting the loss of biodiversity is of particular importance to us and it represents one of the greatest challenges we face today. Globally 10-30% of all mammals, birds and amphibians are currently threatened with extinction. Over the past 50 years humans have changed ecosystems faster and more extensively than in any period in human history resulting in a substantial and largely irreversible loss in the diversity of life on Earth. And it has been projected that we could lose a further 11% of biodiversity on land worldwide between 2000 and 2050. More than a tenth of biodiversity to disappear in the next 40 years!

We cannot let this happen. Biodiversity is important not just because we value it - and the membership numbers of wildlife groups, as well as attendance at this conference are testament to that - but because we depend on it for our survival. It matters not as a fringe issue for polite discussion at

dinner parties or on the academic campus. It matters for its own sake, but for our sake too.

Not only do the myriad of species that make up life on earth have intrinsic value. But together in their habitats they provide us with the very essentials of life. They supply food and fuel, clean our air and water, and help regulate our climate. In short they provide us with a huge range of services - ecosystem services - on which our well being and livelihoods as humanity depend.

One quote you will have heard before sums this up: 'Biodiversity is not the luxury of the rich; it is the treasury of the poor.' The richness of healthy and abundant biodiversity is a treasure trove for all, but once gone, once squandered, there is no bringing it back.

Properly valuing the contribution of environmental resources to the economy is vital. I am pleased to say there is a lot of work underway in this area. At the forefront is Pavan Sukhdev's work on The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity which we are proud to support, among other ways by giving one hundred thousand pounds last year to assist with funding the study. It has real value, and often real scarcity. But unlike a global economic crisis where one solution is quantitative easing - the printing of money in my non-economist terms - you can't reproduce nature when it's gone. There is no National Bank for nature. We have to treasure it now; give it value.

Of course all this illustrates that it is more important than ever for us to halt the current rate of biodiversity loss. At a global level. At a regional level. And at a national level.

And at this level the Government remains fully committed to taking action to address the loss of biodiversity both in metropolitan UK and in our Overseas Territories.

But what are we doing about it?

The UK Government agrees that more effective and better integrated support is needed for the UK's Overseas Territories in order to halt the loss of their biodiversity. Although environmental management of the Overseas Territories is principally and rightly the responsibility of the individual Territories, we recognise that many of the Territories do not have the sufficient financial or personnel capacity to ensure the protection and

safeguarding of the local environment and therefore need support.

My Department has committed a further two hundred thousand pounds to biodiversity in the Overseas Territories in 2008/09, to fund baseline survey work, enhance research capacity in the Territories, and support small conservation projects identified as priorities by Territory governments. This adds to the extra funding of fifty thousand pounds Defra had already committed for 2008/09 through the Flagship Species Fund, the added priority given to the Overseas Territories under the Darwin Initiative (and I shall turn to this in a moment), the extension of Defra's commitment to give extra support through the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, amounting to twenty thousand pounds, and Defra's continuing funding through JNCC, which came to two hundred thousand pounds in the year 2008-2009.

Funding from FCO and DfID continues through the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP). OTEP supports the implementation of the Environment Charters, and environmental management more generally, in the UK Overseas Territories, but has tended to focus on biodiversity conservation given the Territories' significance for biodiversity. FCO and DfID have each committed £3m to OTEP for the period 2004-10, and they are committed to continuing their support.

By the way, DFID are also providing three hundred thousand pounds for Caribbean Overseas Territories to participate in a regional climate-change adaptation programme.

In addition, we established the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on biodiversity (IDMGB) in 2004, which comprises Ministers from DEFRA, FCO and DfID and the chair of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC); in addition, Ministers from other Government Departments can be invited for specific matters. While the Group's remit covers international biodiversity as a whole, biodiversity conservation in the Overseas Territories is currently its main focus as we saw in its most recent meeting only 3 weeks ago.

Through the IDMGB the Government is developing a strategy for biodiversity conservation in the Overseas Territories, building on a recent assessment of priorities for biodiversity conservation action carried out by JNCC and a similar assessment carried out by RSPB. This strategy will need to be

underpinned by an urgent analysis of the costs – as well as the benefits – it would bring, together with confirmation of priorities for immediate action.

In short, joined up cross Government support for Overseas Territories is a reality.

We will also consider the potential to tap into other funding streams - both governmental and non-governmental – to help support biodiversity conservation in the Overseas Territories. DfID has provided JNCC with funding of thirty-five thousand pounds to investigate alternative sources of funding for environmental management in the Overseas Territories. This is expected to conclude in the summer. But there needs to be an holistic approach for each of the Territories, taking account of their diversity, needs, wishes and own identified priorities, as well as the availability of funding.

There is a need for more comprehensive information on the status of ecosystems, as well as current and future threats, in the Overseas Territories. Baseline environmental information is available for all the Territories but the scope and quality of this information is variable, and in many cases it falls short of a full ecosystem assessment. Data on the marine environment is often poor. The most important gaps in data have been identified as part of JNCC's recent assessment of priorities for conservation action in the Overseas Territories. This assessment will guide future work. And we have provided a quarter of a million pounds towards this research.

We must also recall the important initiative of the European Commission, in following up the IUCN's landmark conference in Réunion last summer, bringing together all the European Union's Overseas Countries and Territories and Outermost Regions to discuss the issue of climate change and biodiversity in the context of these states. I think all who attended that conference, no matter where they came from, realised that on these issues we share a common goal. We must conserve our biodiversity and we must look at ways of mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change. In this year where we commemorate the birth of that pre-eminent evolutionist Charles Darwin, and the publication of the *Origin of Species*, it is right to remember he wrote, with incredible foresight: "It is not the strongest of species that survives, nor the most intelligent. Rather, it is the one that is most adaptable to change."

The Caribbean Overseas Territories have borne

personal and traumatic witness to an increase in tropical storms; but also to temperature fluctuations, and erratic rainfall. All of these have had dramatic effects on the local environment. The autumn of 2005 when the Caribbean experienced one of the most devastating coral-bleaching events on record while hurricanes battered the Gulf of Mexico is still raw in the collective memory of the people, and the region, and the world.

Since the conference the European Commission has been developing a possible light-touch system whereby OCTs and ORs may obtain a more streamlined access to EU funding. It's early days but the BEST system (Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in the Overseas Territories) may provide significant support for the future.

I've already given a name-drop to Charles Darwin. I think he'd be proud of what we're doing with the Darwin Initiative. The Darwin Initiative is a significant component of our international conservation work. By providing funding to support the collaboration between biodiversity experts in the UK and local partners in developing countries, as well as in our Overseas Territories, it helps countries rich in wildlife but poor in financial resources take conservation action.

I have had the opportunity to see the benefits of the Darwin Initiative here. [Many Darwin projects provide examples, at the on-the-ground project scale of joined-up-ness – and, at a policy level, Departments are actively working in the same direction.] 1 The Botanic park in particular has proved to be a paragon of the principles of the Darwin Initiative, especially in that it has been used by other small islands as an exemplar for them to use in developing their own Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans.

The Darwin Initiative must count as one of the most successful initiatives that my Department has in its portfolio. And it is a major source of pride for me, the staff involved and the wider Darwin community, and as I said before, probably Charles Darwin is looking down on us here and smiling. Since its launch in 1992 the Darwin Initiative has committed more than seventy million pounds to over 640 projects in more than 140 countries. In that time it has committed over one point five million pounds towards projects in the Overseas Territories.

Results for the latest funding round were announced by Hilary Benn when he was in Nairobi in

February for the UNEP Governing Council. At that time he announced that forty-three projects across the developing world will receive over eight million pounds over the next three years- two of the projects are in our Overseas Territories.

The first project is a so-called main project – lasting three years from this year. It aims at building civil society capacity for participation in biodiversity conservation in the Territories. It is a joint project across Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Virgin Islands, here in Cayman, Montserrat, and Turks and Caicos. I think it's really appropriate to the substance of this conference, too, as it will really aim to “make the right connections”.

And, like the former Cayman Project “In Ivan’s Wake” the Darwin project I visited yesterday, I hope that this new project will be successful and provide material for other countries in the Caribbean and further afield to use.

The second project is a so-called “post-project”. Building on previous Darwin projects in the Centre Hills in Montserrat, it aims to set up a sustainable, locally managed programme to minimise the destructive impacts of feral livestock in and around the Centre Hills. The final components of this year’s funding round comprise twenty-five new scoping award grants, to support the development of future Darwin Initiative applications. Three of these are in our Overseas Territories. These are going to take place in Bermuda, St Helena and the Falkland Islands. It’s difficult to imagine a wider scope of work being considered here.

And we are also funding four new fellowship awards, to further the development of the most promising project members in developing countries. Together these grants total over 135,000 pounds.

I have decided that Darwin funding for conservation projects in the UK Overseas Territories should account for a much larger proportion of the annual Darwin budget of seven million pounds, to reflect the importance we ascribe to biodiversity in our Overseas Territories.

But, regardless of all this good news, I wouldn’t want to have come all the way here today without anything new to say.

So I am very pleased to announce here today, that when I bring forward the new round of Darwin funding, Round 17, which I hope to do later this

month, I shall also announce that Round 17 will see potentially over one-and-a-half million pounds being earmarked for Darwin projects in the Overseas Territories.

I shall also announce the creation of a new Overseas Territories Challenge Fund within the Darwin Initiative. This fund will be devoted to projects designed to prepare for main projects. But they will be much more than the so-called Scoping Projects already under Darwin, which last for only weeks and have a ceiling cost of three thousand pounds. And they will be just for Overseas Territories. The Challenge Fund will enable new projects to develop over a longer timescale, and commit a much larger amount of money, and probably around twenty-five thousand pounds for each project.

The Fund is intended actively to recognise the specific geographic and resource constraints affecting the UK’s Overseas Territories. It is also aimed at giving Overseas Territories the best chance to secure a significant share of the substantial funding available under the Darwin Initiative.

And this is a Challenge Fund, because the challenge is now yours, to develop the project proposals and relationships with UK institutions in order to access this fund.

Beyond Darwin, our international work is focussed around the major biodiversity conventions. 2010 will see the formal assessment of whether the global and EU targets to reduce and halt the loss of biodiversity have been met. All countries, including the UK, have recently been preparing their reports to the Convention on Biological Diversity which meets in its tenth conference of the Parties next year, setting out actions taken and progress made. We submitted our report, into which many of you provided valuable input, just two weeks ago, and it has now been published on the CBD website.

We must continue to play a proactive role internationally - through the Darwin Initiative and our work around the major biodiversity conventions. The next Darwin funding round will be announced later this month, and this will continue to enhance our contribution to biodiversity work in countries where it is most needed, but where the available resources are insufficient to address the issues involved. And, as I’ve just made clear, this will include greater emphasis on welcoming proposals from our Overseas Territories.

The next critical issue is to secure a new global biodiversity target post 2010. This may take the form of a new target, or possibly a framework incorporating a series of targets. But what is important is that the momentum generated by the current target is not lost at the end of 2010, and that we redouble our efforts to achieve a halt in biodiversity loss.

International agreement on a successor to the 2010 biodiversity target must be secured. The existing target has galvanised action across the world by Governments and NGOs to tackle the most urgent problems. We cannot afford to lose this momentum and must all redouble our efforts to achieve a halt in biodiversity loss.

It is clear that further progress is essential. We are committed to taking action to achieve this. We

recognise the challenge, and the consequences if we fail are great. We believe our approach to international biodiversity work, including the Darwin Initiative, is making a significant contribution to biodiversity conservation abroad and in the UK. But overall there is still much more to do. Agreement to a post 2010 target should represent a call to arms to redouble our efforts at home and abroad to this end.

In closing, I would make reference to John Muir, the naturalist, writer and conservationist, who said: “When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.” We have to recognise that the challenges you face are challenges that are common to us all.

Thank you.



*(Photo:
Dr Colin Clubbe)*

Discussion

Dr Mike Pienkowski (MWP): Well, thank you very much indeed Minister. Obviously, thank you personally for taking the time in a busy schedule to come - which is much appreciated - and also for the signal that it gives.

I am sure that everybody here will be particularly pleased with the comments you have made on many aspects. I suspect that they will be particularly drawn to those in relation to the very interesting announcements about Darwin, including the ear-marking and related measures there, as well as the commitments from your fellow departments to maintain the OTEP programme. These are excellent. I am sure we all look forward very much to working with you on these aspects, particularly relating to the targets after 2010. The Territories will clearly be a most important component of the UK's involvement in this respect. I don't want to hog the time, much as I would love to; I think this is a chance for people to ask the Minister and his colleagues questions, so the floor is open.

Andrew Casebow: Firstly, thank you very much for coming. I am Andrew Casebow from the Channel Islands, so actually I'm not directly affected by the funding arrangements that you were talking about. I was just wondering, to get things started, how do you, in a time of very difficult funding for almost everything, not only set the priorities, but actually say, well it can be £25,000 for this? These seem quite small amounts of money, but very useful.

Minister: It's a very good question because we all know that we have globally limited resources, and we are never going to have everything that we want. So, it is a question of making what we have got go furthest, certainly within the UK. I've seen in other fields now that we have great deal of expertise in making our own judgements on where, in crude terms, you get the biggest value for your buck. Also, we have international obligations that we need to satisfy; we are very keenly aware of these in the territories where actions can impact very significantly on biodiversity loss and turn it round. In the UK mainland, with issues such as what do we do to counter biodiversity loss through set-aside, we are able to define and monitor this with bird indices and so on. Important as these are, I feel a big case can be done in the Overseas Territories as well. So I have, if you like, ministerially in the back of my mind, a set of targets that help

me in setting my priorities. That's important to the scientific community and the NGOs, and we have very strong relationships. Not only with JNCC and the agencies like that, but also the RSPB, the Forum and others, who had important points as well. But I have to say - and I make this point quite deliberately - that it is imperative that the priorities are shared with you yourselves. It has to be determined by the capacity on the ground to deliver projects. Building up capacity sometimes provides worthwhile projects within themselves. It has to be determined by the network on the ground and also by the local government. I have seen here in the Caymans in a short few days, the immense body of local knowledge that there is here. So, there is a wide range that we can turn into priorities and, in terms of the Darwin Initiative itself, a significant source of funding, I am glad to say, as a Minister, I have no direct input into granting decisions for that; that is done by a panel of experts with a wide range of expertise. It's one of the jobs that can be influenced from yourselves as well.

Rob Thomas: Rob Thomas, from the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland, although I am half Welsh, you will be pleased to know. I particularly applaud the ring-fencing of the Darwin Initiative. I think that is very important indeed. But I have also been intrigued as to any decisions in terms of the eligibility of territory-based organisations to apply directly to the Darwin funding, rather than go through a UK institution

Minister: I'm conferring with my friend - it's like *University Challenge*. I am told by Eric that we have the ability to consider direct applications as well, should the Minister decide. Eric?

Eric Blencoe, Defra (EB): There is absolutely no reason why you shouldn't so decide on this Minister. If I may, just to come back to one point about ring-fencing. We deliberately did not use the word ring-fencing; we used the word ear-marking. The purpose of that is what I call a sort of osmotic wall. This is because the projects will be considered at the same meetings as general Darwin projects so, if we don't have enough appropriate UKOT projects, then the money can be reabsorbed. Otherwise, of course, the risk is that we might have to surrender it. That's why we will not be ring-fencing it, only ear-marking. But it's just a fine point of detail.

Minister: Yes. And on that point, it is also important that we use this time from the starting point today, to make sure we have the quality of projects and proposals coming forward. That's the important thing.

Mark July: Minister, I am very interested in the proposal to ask the JNCC to produce a biodiversity strategy for the collective UKOTs, which I think you referred to. I wonder if you see this as a really important opportunity for the subject to draw in the governments of these UKOTs, not just the environment departments, but to use the exercise to really engage in a two-way process, with the senior government members of all the UKOTs in a matter of this importance .

Minister: Yes, thank you. This is actually making quite a lot of progress already, and it is essentially an internally driven. It emanated out of the Interdepartmental Group on Biodiversity, so its very much an HMG-driven one. It doesn't go to the extent of actually sitting down with all the governments of the Overseas Territories, although I take your point in that there is an issue here of trying to inform the agenda politically as well. But this isn't the actual vehicle to do that. What this report will do is give a quite evidence-based analysis to Ministers and to decision-makers about how we should take forward biodiversity. Stripping out the elements of politics - and there is sometimes a good reason to do that - that will allow us the stepping-stone then for myself to come forward with further proposals on the back of that report. And it is quite imminent, we are looking at within weeks, in the summer. So it's almost upon us. It's not the right vehicle for what you suggested, but I do see it as a stepping-stone to advance on the evidence-based case how we need to progress in the overseas territories.

Darren Christie: I was very heartened to hear the recognition from the Minister as to the value of the Overseas Territories. I think that's fantastic. I am also very heartened to hear about the new Challenge Fund, I think that's a real step in the right direction. My concerns arise, however, because there seems to be a real discrepancy between the actual sums of money needed to tackle some of the projects which have been identified in the territories and what is actually available and provided by the UK Government. Providing as an example, the £2½ million roughly that is required to on Gough Island to deal with the introduced mice, it seems there is no real avenue for getting those large sums of money. I come from the Government of South

Georgia. Some of the projects we are looking at in South Georgia would require tens or twenties of millions of pounds to do, and I wonder if there is any comment on where we can turn for those kinds of sums of money.

Minister: Yes, thank you. It's a good point. Some of the discussions that we have been having around the fringes of the conference here, and I think touched upon in some of the themes within the statement which Gina just spoke upon, address the issue of how much HMG provides, not only in terms of project funding, but in terms of longer term funding, and how much should be the role and responsibility of the Overseas Territories governments. (When I say HMG, this is HMG collectively, because it is not only Defra; there is significant funding coming from DFID and FCO as well, through OTEP funding and elsewhere.) Now that's an interesting question, because you and I know that one cannot get away from the fact that there are different capacity in different Overseas Territories to deliver resources. But what I would say in response is that we are collectively setting the agenda around biodiversity, knowing how far we have to go. The project funding that we give clearly delivers, for a relatively small amount of money, quite significant impacts on the ground. Mention was made earlier on of the blue iguana project. What's notable about that is it developed a momentum of its own. And it developed a momentum that goes way beyond the iguana, important as that is. It takes it into preservation of a large tract of habitat and potentially other species, but also changes the whole political climate and possibly the legislative climate that underpins it. I think that's a good example of where, from an HMG perspective, I would like to see, recognising the differences between UKOTs and their capacity to deliver funding and resources, with our support, with Kew Gardens, with JNCC, the Forum and others, getting directly involved: that they take on the long-term ownership of this, because it is a collective issue. We will never back away, because we know how much needs to be done. But I honestly think, and this is perhaps a political ideology I have as well as where I speak in the department, that you can get governments across all areas to step up to the mark and pitch in, small or large, to a greater or lesser extent, the fact becomes clear that they own it - and, not only the government but the fact that the private sector values it is important because, when we talk about conservation, sometimes it becomes conservation versus developers. Actually, I take the Marine Bill that was mentioned earlier on. The

new Marine Bill in the UK is predicated on the idea that you bring people together and get them to own not only the problem but the solution to the problem. So, it's not only about what the territorial governments put in, but also what the private sector put in, what can be brought in with expertise and funding from NGOs and other organisations out there as well. But that doesn't walk away from our commitment. Our commitment, as I hope I made clear for all Departments, is there and it is long standing. But we want to work with governments in order to encourage governments as well, to take this on themselves.

MWP: Thank you Minister. While we are moving on to the next questioner, perhaps I can ask you a question. As you will be aware, our UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum is, at base, a federation of NGOs in the territories and those supporting them, although through its activities, like this conference, obviously we are trying to serve everybody, governmental and non-governmental - we are non discriminatory in that regard. Also, I reflect that one of the core values in the Environment Charters, and indeed many related things, is about inclusiveness and civil society and so on. I may have misunderstood slightly but I thought there was an allusion to most of the reviews of needs being governmentally based. I hope there will be a place for our UKOTCF network that we can pull together to be able to contribute to that

Minster: Yes, absolutely. It's a very straight yes.

MWP: I am most impressed to get a 'yes' from a politician in such a clear way. Thank you, sir.

Joseph Smith-Abbott: Building on the point that was made just before, I think that there is an issue that we need at some point to address, which is the issue of large-scale funding available to the overseas territories over and above what may be perhaps available both UK from our local governments because of the fact that these are restricted. We are hindered from approaching international finance, such as Global Environment Facility funding. Such funding would allow for some of these larger types of activities that clearly are required, and which will be identified by any reasonable review of priorities in discussion with various sectors of our communities. There is a need for the implementation of larger scale, and certainly capital-intensive activities, that clearly may be beyond the scope of what our local governments are able to achieve with some of their funding

resources. We have tried to access these international programmes, when we have been told that we should have access at least to their small grants programme. However, because of our status as UKOTs, we were told that we cannot access them. Eventually, it was made clear that, in practice, even small and medium sized, and certainly the large-scale, international funding schemes are not available to us in UKOTs, even though HMG is a major contributor to these funds. So I think there is a gap when it comes to implementing much broader, larger scale project activities.

Minister: Thank you very much for that question. This is very much why the JNCC project looking at additional sources of funding was set up, to try and identify where funding can be pulled together to deal with quite very different circumstances on the ground. OTEP funding is still out there; the flagship species fund is still out there. But, we are very keen to continue to work with you to try and identify additional sources of funding, and perhaps JNCC will identify some ways forward on this. That analysis will be coming forward sometime in the summer. So, hopefully, it could be of help to you.

Mat Cottam: Can I just start by saying it's great news to hear about the earmarking of funds for the UKOTs. That is something that was mooted, or wished for, earlier in the week, when we had discussions, by several people. However, even if those funds are earmarked, at the end of the day, we as individual UKOTs will still be competing against each other for those funds. So, we will be in a position that, on the ground, the most biodiverse parts of the UK will be competing with each other for this limited pot. This might be a very dim question, but I don't know how things work in the high levels of government, how all these departments and organisations join together. Is there any mechanism for reporting 'bang for the buck' that those ring-fenced funds might return to the UK, and to compare them with the 'bang for the buck' that similar initiatives actually within the UK bring back, as for as biodiversity preservation goes. If the UKOTs do turn out to be good 'bang for the buck', which I think they probably will, would there be any sort of mechanism that might move more funds to where they make the most difference.

Minister: I have spoken too long. Like any magician, I've got three glamorous assistants along beside me. I am going to pass this to Eric.

EB: A few points there, I think. On the last point first, I think it is pretty clear to us, having been here this week, and having seen the projects yesterday that the Overseas Territories deliver a 'bang for the buck', similar to what they deliver in developing countries, in the sense that they deliver a hell of a lot more than what was put in. I would strongly suspect that domestic UK projects don't deliver as much because of the costs involved and so on. But I don't know. And the two budgets are entirely separated. So, I think when we are looking at the national budget or international funds that we do provide, that's it really; we are not really going to be able to increase them at the moment. What we are trying to do is to make sure that they stay as they are, and are secured for as long as possible in the current climate.

Now, turning to the point on overseas territories competing with one another: in one sense it's not overseas territories competing; it's actually project leaders. I accept the point that some come from stronger overseas territories, and some come from less well resourced overseas territories, but there are various options. There is a project that is just starting now, with Sarah Mackintosh dealing with it, and involving five overseas territories together for capacity building. There is no reason why other

regional projects shouldn't continue; in fact they probably are. Under different funding streams. But also, just because there is this ear-marking doesn't mean to say that project leaders from the overseas territories can't apply for the other side of Darwin Funding, the main project funding. Were we to get an enormous number of very high quality proposals, then we would probably end up not funding very many in the developing countries at all. Then we would be asking ourselves why we have set up this discrete fund because all the Darwin Fund is being used in overseas territories. So, in a sense, they can compete against all of the projects, as well as having their own earmarked section. I hope that helps.

Anna Ballance (DFID): I just wanted to add a couple of points about less project-based funds. I want to point out that, for the Territories which receive budgetary aid from DFID, that can be used as another source of funding for ongoing work: for capacity, or for postings. It's up to the territory themselves to set priorities. If there is environmental work that can be included into their core budget, that's another vehicle for some longer term funding. There is also EU funding, both thematic and development funding. The South Atlantic Invasive Species project is a really good example of



From left: Ms Anna Ballance (DFID), Ms Heather Christie (FCO), Mr Eric Blencowe (Defra), Dr Mike Pienkowski (UKOTCF) and Minister Mr Huw Irranca-Davies MP

using EU funding to get regional projects on a high priority issue. It's been really successful. Just one other point about capacity, because I think somebody mentioned earlier volunteers to fill capacity gaps: DFID is working with the voluntary service overseas (VSO) to try to establish a programme of support matching VSO volunteers with posts in territories.

Paul Keetch (Member of Parliament for Hereford): Huw, I couldn't let this go because, as a friend of this organisation, I thank you for coming and thank you for the announcement. It is very well received, I am sure. I would not want you to go away without the memory, as I know you have, that one of the biggest threats to the environment in the Overseas Territories comes from human development. It comes from developments like the one we are sitting in now. And very often they rip up mangrove swamps and allow other development in the marine habitat. But it is human-led. Now, in many of the territories, environmental impact assessments are not required; they are not mandatory. Indeed, in some of the territories, as we know, developments occur as a result of blatant corruption. I appreciate it is not directly in your line of view but the reality is that, unless we actually impose - if necessary from London - on some of the territories the need to look at the environment when development happens, then we will continue to lose very very important parts of these territories. The Chief Minister of Gibraltar said just yesterday that it was nothing to do with the UK what happens in the environment in Gibraltar. I am very glad to see here today that you have actually acknowledged that it is something to do with us and that we will take that responsibility very very seriously, and I am very pleased about that.

Minister: Thank you Paul. I take this seriously as well. This is, I have to say, part of a long process. It's not simply the politics of the moment. It is the chain that is required, both on a society level and a mental level, and also the legislation that underpins that as well. And we are still developing within the UK itself. We have some landmark legislation coming forward that's been sitting around for six years waiting to happen. But noticeably it was a significant manifesto commitment of at least a couple of the parties and we are now agreed on it, to take it forward, so it's a process. We have just had a session including the role of governors. I was a Wales Office Minister for quite some time, not to say that the Wales Office is in any way a colonial governor or anything like that! However, it was

interesting that the Wales Office very much portrayed itself as the voice of Wales in Westminster and the voice of Westminster in Wales. It does, sort of, cut both ways - and that is helpful in the sense of trying to encourage diplomatically and persuade. It is absolutely logical, as we see the increasing pressures on some of our most fragile habitats, to realise that, if you do it the right way, you can actually not only mitigate some of the environmental aspect but you can find compatible uses in some areas as well. It is a long business. There are areas that, you can have a virtual no-go on activities, and in some you can have other activities alongside each other.

Stephen Mendes: Good-day, I am Stephen Mendes from Montserrat. This is just a statement, really. On the joined-up Government scenario, I think that it would be wise if that could be put in place, because of our peculiar situation in that we are funded by DFID on both ends, both for biodiversity and also for physical development. It would be good if something at the administrative level in the UK is put in place to prevent conflict occurring between DFID, OTEP, and the Darwin Fund for biodiversity and other UK funding. In other words, these being severely impacted by development projects funded primarily by DFID which actually negate the biodiversity efforts and, in some cases, actually contravene current established legislation in the UKOT territory.

Minister: OK, thank you. That's a useful comment. Certainly the Interdepartmental Group, I think, is very much the way forward on that - when you have the minister from the FCO, from DFID, myself and others sitting down and working through these issues. I don't think it is a question of simply saying try and identify one individual minister or one department that should do everything. That can actually undermine some of the very good partnership work that does go on between different departments, and on the ground with NGOs and with territorial governments as well. It is a question, as you rightly point out, of every day of every week trying to improve how effective we are at joining up our thought processes, because certainly you will see examples where OTEP-funded projects have kicked into another gear on the back of Darwin money, and so on and so forth. Now, if we can get more thinking going like that, both on the ground and in Westminster, that would be a great help and we are very keen to do that.

MWP (after consulting the Minister): OK, I can

see three or four hands. We will be going to take a couple of extra minutes, so keep your questions as concise as you could please

Noeleen Smyth: I am representing here Pitcairn Island. Just thinking of the really small capacity of Pitcairn, even to apply for funds and do all the long term things, maybe small islands with small populations should have a special consideration as well, and maybe they shouldn't be put into the same pot for larger projects.

EB: Thanks Noeleen. I think this is where the partnership actually comes in with a UK institution. Obviously, as said earlier, this isn't absolutely necessary but, in the case of Pitcairn, probably is necessary, as happened before with other projects, and very successfully. But it is also an opportunity that you can use, particularly DFID and FCO and Defra contacts that you have to try to make better contact and assist further. Then, these UK institutions can do those jobs for you, e.g. applications, because they are very techie. My colleague (Heather Christie, FCO) is saying that is exactly what the Governor's Office did with Pitcairn before.

Chris Bates: Chris Bates, Tristan da Cunha. I must admit I was very concerned to hear the Minister refer to the involvement of the private sector in ambitions for work with biodiversity conservation. In our own case, on Tristan, great things are being achieved by partnerships between the three government departments, OTEP, and NGOs, in particular the RSPB. However, none of that is going to get away from the fact that huge sums of government money will be needed for projects such as the elimination of the so-called "supermice" on Gough Island, which threaten almost immediately the extinction of species such as the Tristan Albatross. I feel a sense of concern that, in the end, no government commitment to expenditure on the scale that is necessary is going to lead to an environmental disaster there, from which the world will not recover. Without wishing to sound alarmist, I would welcome the minister's comments and thoughts on that.

Minister: Involvement of the private sector, where appropriate, is absolutely imperative. It is horses for courses. There are going to be some areas, that we know of already, predominantly driven by either legislation or development funding, or collaborative funding and so on. But, in the long term, I have to say the ownership - and I say this quite unashamedly - the ownership of these problems

and these challenges that confront us, including over things like climate change and rising sea levels as well as biodiversity, have to be shared. If we leave it purely to the green lobby and government to get on with doing it, then it allows others to abdicate their common responsibility to it as well. And I say quite unashamedly from any platform that I am on. I have to say that. In some parts of the world and in some projects, we see cases where indeed the primary commercial centre is really on-board with this idea, because they see the benefits. They see the benefits, not only in terms of what it means to them their employees and so on, they see benefits as means for actually protecting their own businesses - whether it's sea invasion or alternatively from eradication of species that might actually be of benefit to them in future prosperity. Now, you know I sat in a meeting the other day with the representative from the chamber of commerce here, talking about issues on this island, talking about the possibility of the impending conservation legislation, and was absolutely amazed at the passion that was there to move ahead with this. So again, in that case you need, like the green NGOs, like some of the organisations here today, to also be putting those views strongly forward at every opportunity to keep people informed. So I am not saying that that is to the exclusion of all government; I am saying everybody has got a part to play in this.

[Short break in the record]

Question on funding of larger projects.

EB: ...for a period of a few years, we have begun to examine that. We don't even know actually who would do these projects, but you know it's not simple. In the current climate, you are not going to get what we would actually like to see, which would be a new fund for big projects. I mean that is what I would like to see, but it is not going to happen. We are going to have to hope that we can retain what we've got. So that is not a helpful response. I mean species are going extinct all the time. I would hate to see the loss of the Tristan Albatross or any of the others, having seen them myself. They are fantastic creatures; it would be awful. But there's not a simple answer to this question. So I am sorry I can't be more helpful than that.

MWP: The Minister has kindly said that he will take the two questions waiting provided, I say, that they are concise ones: but Sarah and then Iain.

Sarah Mackintosh: Yes: a quick question/comment. I am Sarah Mackintosh, from the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute, local partner in the Caribbean Darwin Initiative project, and therefore obviously very appreciative of, and excited about, this project. But I wanted to go back a little bit to the comment that Joseph Smith-Abbott made earlier about being in a limbo situation between where you can access funding. We also have regional projects on forests funded by the EU and FAO, but we can't include the Overseas Territories because their pots of money even within the EU and FAO are different. I do wonder whether there isn't the scope for two things. One would possibly be to have some earmarked funding (sort of matching funding) within UK government funding to enable UKOTs to participate in regional projects, because I think we would all benefit from that. The second would be for FCO or others who could make this case to some of the UN agencies, and the other financial agencies that are doing large projects in some of these regions, for Overseas Territories to be part of it. This would be on the grounds that, in many ways, issues of biodiversity, particularly marine biodiversity, don't respect political boundaries.

Ian Orr: Iain Orr on the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Council. I wanted to mention, and to welcome particularly warmly, one other aspect of your address to us. That was your very strong emphasis on the UK presence at meetings in the next year of the Convention on Biological Diversity. My request would be: we are making connections across Government Departments, between Government Departments and NGOs. It would be wonderful to make a really big splash for the Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies at that COP (Conference of the Parties) next year, and I'm sure all the member organisations in the Forum, those in the Territories, those in the UK would work very closely with Eric and other colleagues to really make an impact for the world to see that the UK is very strongly committed to the huge amount of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories.

Minister: Well thank you for those two. Sarah, I note your comments. We'll take those thoughts away, have a look at them try and get them fed into other JNCC projects as well, just trying to look at some lateral thinking on funding streams. Mention must be made of course of the European Union funding as well. That is an area that we haven't tapped into sufficiently. But all of these are complex areas, the nature of the beasts.

Iain, we intend to push hard on that. I take your thoughts away as well.

Despite the complexity of some of these issues and the challenges that we are faced with, I just want to give the assurance, not only from Defra but from DFID and FCO and others, that we will continue to be there to try to work through these issues – some extremely challenging issues, big projects, small projects, capacity and resourcing, capabilities on the ground - in order to get the maximum benefit that we can, both for you individually, but also for us as the UK Government. If we can do that, we end up with a complete win-win situation. So we just need to keep on talking through this and actually working together on it. That has to be the way forward on this, not least since I have to say what quite challenging economic times we are in, not only for the UK, not only for the territories, but globally as well. So how do we keep this going? It's actually more important than ever right now to keep this message going, and to keep the projects going, and to keep changing the whole cultural agenda of this. So, collectively we need to work on this and keep on talking about how we do it.

I am going to have to go Mike, I'm afraid.

MWP: Thank you Minister, so much for giving up extra time on this one, and missing your lunch. I hope they are not going to starve you in the process. But I am sure we would all like to thank the Minister and his team for their kind answers to our questions.

Student views on conference topics

Following the tradition established at the Jersey Conference, the student participants had been invited to give brief views on their experience of this Conference. The comments of those who accepted the invitation are given below. UKOTCF would also like to record thanks to Piers Sangan, the student from Jersey who participated also in the present conference. His transfer of experience to the student participants this time was of great value in enhancing continuity, and making best value of the experience.

Tashara Lewis (University College of Cayman Islands, Brac Campus)



Firstly, I would like to start off by saying that I am very nervous, so please bear with me. My name is Tashara and I am a student at the Cayman Brac Campus. I am majoring in Natural Sciences. I was

actually chosen randomly by my teacher to come to this conference to take notes and report back. I am proud to say that I have been glad to have this opportunity. I have found this conference to be interesting, eye-opening and extremely informative. This conference for me has meant a great deal. And I've learnt a lot of information I can take back and share with my class and my community. I really enjoyed all of the presentations, especially the ones on Invasive Species because, as you may know, we have a lot of invasive species in the Cayman Islands. One recent one on the Brac has been the Lionfish. Dr DaCosta-Cottam in his presentation

said that it is hard to stop or control the invasive species because the community will sometimes go as far as they can to prevent the destruction of invasive species because they do not know the damage they can and will cause. They only think that the species are magnificent and beautiful, but they need to become aware of the many damages they cause. With this aim I just need to help to get my community aware of the invasive species and the many damages they cause. Yes, invasive species may be beautiful and mind blowing species. but with their beauty comes tremendous damages. Also, throughout this conference, it was said that parents play a tremendous part in children's lives. Parents should be the primary example for assisting in and becoming involved in environmental activities and encourage children and other people to become part of the solution rather than being part of the problem. With parents being involved this will help the community achieve much more.

So with all of that said, thank you for allowing me to be here and thank you for providing me with useful information.

Dustin Boddin (University College of Cayman Islands, Brac Campus)

Some of you might actually know me by now. I'm the annoying student that posed the really tricky questions of some of the presenters. My name is Dustin Boddin and I'm actually a student from the Brac. I attend the Brac Branch of the UCCI which is the University College of the Cayman Islands and for me this conference has probably been one of the most life-changing experiences I have ever attended. It is filled with some extremely extraordinary people, I mean, some of you are mind-blowing, the things that you do. But I would like

to comment on environmental education, where that it is not really pushed in the high schools. I think that is a little bit disappointing, seeing that high school students really influence the lower students. They are becoming, or starting to become, part of the



control generation which are making the decisions and becoming policy makers. They may also become conservationists, like yourselves, or even just members of the general public. In twenty years, we will be where you are right now. So we really need the education, and the experience that all of you can give us. I thought of a solution to this, of promoting clubs for high schools, just maybe in the lower years of high school, but also going on into A levels, - but this is hard with the exams. There should be clubs for teaching the children about the environment and just involving them, even, in some of the research that you do. I mean, just involve students, pointing out what you do. They will pick up on what you do because most of them are actually quite smart. And they're extremely resourceful and will actually tend to help you. I mean they'll come home and go to the yard and even involve parents and they'll educate others and their

parents about these things. Getting back onto my point, of making the right connections, I've made a lot of connections in this conference. I've met a lot of amazing people as I said. And this should actually help to push for a more green generation.

I would really like to thank all the organisers who helped me and my fellow students here involved in this life-changing event. As I've come to see from this conference a lot of you are actually like super-heroes. Not that you are all perfect in everything you do, but the amazing feats that some of you have achieved with the moderate resources that you have. I would like to again thank you. And I would really like to wish all of you a safe trip home, or to whatever extraordinary adventure you are off to next.

Jodiann Jackson (University College of Cayman Islands, Grand Cayman)



Good Afternoon.

I will be speaking on behalf of UCCI students and myself. It was a privilege for us to get to attend this conference even though we did get out of class. Writing our conference reports was the catch (there is always a catch) but we got to broaden our horizon on the conservation

of UKOTs which was a life learning opportunity. In my opinion you can always teach the lesson on biodiversity and conservation but it is not everyday you get to be with great people who have a patience for the environment and discuss about real life issues and solutions.

Over the week we got to learn about the UKOTs themselves and hear about island biodiversity and population we didn't even know about. Some students got to go on the field visits which was their first time at the Botanic Park. They were very enthused and really enjoyed themselves. Another student and I got to go to the Mission House

for the first time and enjoyed with you a taste of Cayman culture and watch the bats come out - which continued to inspire someone I spoke with to build bat houses in their islands. This just shows the domino effect of information and sources being shared. I personally enjoyed the session on invasive species and now know that there are approximately 120 non-native species. One or two are the monk parrot and the green iguana which I find very amusing that they are protected and are also used as a tourism symbol. It struck me as well to know that we shouldn't blame the invasive species for being there but to know that it is humans who are the cause.

It was very nice to see and hear from past governors of the Cayman Islands. I found Michael Gore on the role of the governor in environmental issues topic very interesting.

It is great to know that there are a lot of people who are making the right connection in the UKOTs to find a balance with the environment and humans. After all it was the flora and fauna that populated the earth now the human population is increasing and we are continuing to think of new ways to conserve. Through this conference we UCCI students are very inspired and have personally enjoyed meeting with you. We want to thank you for opening our eyes and letting us know what opportunities there are to do with our environment. Thank you once again.

Jessica Ebanks (University College of Cayman Islands, Grand Cayman)

I was only able to make it to the conference on Monday June 1st for an hour and a half but what I learned in that short period of time was astonishing! In that session of the conference, they were discussing the impacts and adaptations of the climate change. I found this very interesting because this is an extremely important topic relating to our Islands.

The characteristics which made the Cayman Islands (and most other islands) vulnerable to climate change are: their small physical size, high ratio of coastal length to land area, limited natural resources, prone to natural disasters, relative isolation and having high population densities concentrated in low-lying coastal areas. These characteristics limit the capacity of small islands to mitigate and adapt to future climate change.

Key climate change issues for the territories like ours (small islands) are: sea-level rise, changes in precipitation patterns, increasing effects on flora and fauna, air temperatures, sea surface temperatures and extreme weather including increasing intensity and (possibly) frequency of hurricanes.

Climate change is not something we just have to worry about in the future, we need to start worrying about it and try to prevent as much of it as we can now! When I was at the conference a presentation was given by a gentleman from an island called Guernsey, which is off the coast of France. In his presentation he was talking about how climate change was affecting Guernsey and even though we live nowhere near there it was very interesting to hear what he had to say because Guernsey is an island as well so it has similarities with our islands. From studies done he pointed out that sea level has risen 120 meters in 20,000 years! Also over the years there has been less rainfall. This means it will be harder for plants to survive leading to fewer plants worldwide.

Overall, I've learned so much from this conference in such a short period of time and I'm very grateful for the information provided to me from all the persons I got to hear speak as well as information leaflets I picked up. The leaflets have tons of useful information and extraordinary, eye-opening facts in them. I won't repeat all the great facts they have in them because that will take me days! But they're definitely worth reading!



*From left: Piers Sangan, Jodian Jackson, Dr Mike Pienkowski, Tashara Lewis, and Dustin Bodden
(Photo: Rob Thomas)*

Conference Closing

In closing the conference, UKOTCF's Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski, said:

On behalf of all participants, I would like to thank the following for the main resourcing of the conference: the UK Department for International Development (DFID) via the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP), its joint initiative with the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO); the Cayman Islands Government, especially its Department of Environment; and the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) and its volunteers.

I would like to thank also the people of the Cayman Islands, who have made us so welcome.

The Governor, His Excellency Stuart Jack, gave us an excellent launch via the opening reception on Sunday evening – many thanks to him and all his staff, especially staff officer, Andy Holbrook, for much help throughout the planning. We are very grateful also to the Cayman Islands Leader of Government Business, The Hon. W. McKeever Bush, and the Minister of Environment, The Hon. Mark Scotland, for finding time just a few days after the General Election and their taking up of office to join us and formally to open the conference.

It was a really great pleasure also to be able to welcome Mr Huw Irranca-Davies MP, UK Minister for the Natural and Marine Environment, Wildlife and Rural Affairs. For a UK environment Minister to participate for the first time in one of our conferences is a major signal of developing support, which is much appreciated, as are his announcements. As some of you know, the Minister had originally planned to be present on Thursday with visits to local projects on Friday. Unfortunately, it became necessary for him to be back in London on Friday, and we thought that he might have to cancel. However, his commitment was so great that he arranged to reschedule his visit for a day earlier. (This accounts for some of the curious programming yesterday and today.) We are very grateful for this, and we should note also how much we enjoyed working with his supportive officials, especially Eric Blencowe, to make all this possible.

The conference centres on discussion and exchange of ideas and experience. However, it is difficult to generate this from nothing. Therefore, we

are particularly appreciative of the speakers. It is a difficult task to select 15-minutes worth of relevant material from the riches of information that could be presented, and we are most grateful to those who achieved it without over-running and thereby reducing discussion time or slots available for later speakers. We want to link this to thanks also for the display exhibitors, who again have a challenge in getting so many key points into such a small space.

For both of those groups, we thank those who have supplied their texts and illustrations for the proceedings – and offer more thanks in anticipation for those who will help to reduce our work and stress by supplying theirs soon! By that means, we should avoid holding up publication of the contributions of others.

We should not forget that the various presentations and other inputs to the conference are based on the work of many people, often volunteers, in the various organisations represented by those attending. These include UKOTCF Member and Associate organisations, UK Overseas Territory, Crown Dependency and UK official bodies, and other participating institutions. We are grateful to them all.

I would like to thank especially the students and their lecturers – maintaining the fine tradition from the Jersey conference – and Ann Pienkowski, who has spent many months organising this involvement.

Lots of people are needed to make a conference go reasonably smoothly – and if it is going well, they remain pretty unnoticed. I notice them – because I would be in real difficulty without them! These include the session coordinators and chair-persons, the rapporteurs, those athletes like Stedson Stroud and Catherine Quick who have sprinted around with the roving microphone, Oliver Cheesman and colleagues who have juggled with computer projection of the speakers' presentations. (Oliver tells me that he is amazed to be entrusted with a role with electronic equipment – but I have assured him that it is a matter of training and career development.) Thanks to the various photographers who volunteered to capture images of the event – and a reminder to make sure that they let the organisers have copies of their photographs please, as soon as possible. Most of you have not seen the conference

office, where we have tried to confine the more chaotic elements. We are grateful to Steve Cheesman who has reprised his work in the underground pipework of TCI's Middle Caicos Conservation Centre by helping to reinforce our local partners in fighting our office network and printer.

We got off to an excellent start on Sunday, with the tours and initial discussions taking place in very pleasant surroundings. Thank you to the guides and drivers, caterers, tent company, the folk at Pedro St James and, of course, the Botanic Gardens, as well as Fred Burton and his Blue Iguana Team – with guest appearance by Tootsie, the gender-challenged dragon.

We are grateful for the escape, on Tuesday, from conventional conference sessions, provided by UKOTCF Associate organisation, the National Trust for the Cayman Islands. We thank particularly: Roger Corbin, Chairman; Denise Bodden, Historic Programs Manager; and Frank Balderamos, General Manager (who had to be off-island). We would like to thank also: Caybrew for donating the local beer; Jacques Scott Group for donating the wine; Welly's Cool Spot, Elrita Seymour and Zelmalee Ebanks for preparing and serving the local food – a very important part of culture. We are very grateful also for music from the North Side Kitchen Band, piano in Mission House by Katie Moore (NT volunteer), Mission House Tours by Arthurlyn Pedley, Aida D'Angelo and others. And, of course, we thank performers Denise Bodden, Pirate Darvin Ebanks, Rita Estavanovich, David Whitefield, Michael McLaughlin, Erica Daniel, Chris Bowring, Pastor Alson Ebanks, Carmen Comolly, Kem Jackson, Jerilo Rankine and Stuart Mailer. Please pass on our thanks to those who are not here, and thanks to all of that team for the generous provision of their time and effort.

We hope to be able to thank soon the team from Red Sail who will look after us on the catamarans and, at dinner this evening, Kaibo.

We are grateful to the Westin hotel staff, especially our primary contact, Amanda Jay, who has been amazingly helpful in sorting out all our problems – for example, finding a meeting room for the Ministers' team last night, literally at less than a minutes' notice. I would also like to thank the team from Banquets, who are the ones who look after these meeting rooms and provide the lunches and break-time refreshments. They describe themselves as the team from Goa, in India, which is where many of

them come from. So I guess that the hospitality in Goa must be particularly good too.

For some reasons, which we are still trying to work out, this conference has taken more organising than most previous ones. It is something to do with the amount of individual attention needed for most participants – but it is nice to be wanted! I would like to give a special thanks to my colleagues in the conference core team, Catherine Quick, Oliver Cheesman and Ann Pienkowski.

I have probably missed some, for which I apologise – but there is one group that I have left to the end, because they have been so key to it all: the local organising team from the Department of Environment. We are indebted to Director, Gina Ebanks-Petrie, for huge support and for arranging that her staff and equipment be made available, while maintaining the busy schedules of their main work. We know that this has been well beyond the demands of duty. Many staff at the DoE have helped, and we thank them all. Lead roles have been played by Tim Austin and Mat Cottam. One unique resource though has been a particular person. Nothing has been insoluble to him – and we have thrown him some amazing challenges.

Occasionally though, I have seen a grimace cross the unflappably cheerful face of the man they know as the Commander: John Bothwell. Thanks so much, John, and to all your colleagues.



Commander John Bothwell, in his natural habitat, speaks with Fred Burton.

(Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski)



*Marine ecosystems tour in North Sound and its mangrove areas, and pre-conference dinner informal discussions
(Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski)*