

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

Annual Report April 2014 - March 2015

Report of Council

Overview

The UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum promotes awareness of, and conservation of, the rich and unique biodiversity, natural environment and related heritage of the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (UKOTs and CDs). It works in partnership with a wide network of bodies in the UK and UKOTs/CDs, many of which are Forum member and associate organisations, as well as individuals with relevant expertise. In the context of the general ongoing activities and new initiatives during the reporting period, UKOTCF has this year focused on several areas outlined below.

In addition to its linking roles across territories and with Britain and beyond (see below), UKOTCF has always been involved also in projects on the ground in individual territories, in practical conservation, environmental education and capacity development. As reported in previous years, in order to base its policies in the challenging area of marine resources in the context of international stress, the Government of Gibraltar turned to UKOTCF to commission a study of the science and other information on which to base sound policies. In the reported year, the recommendations of that study were implemented in legislation for sustainability of the resource. In the Turks & Caicos Islands, the Forum and its partner the TCI National Museum opened our *Wise-Water-Use Garden*, published our series of guide-booklets *Birding in Paradise* and continued work on the school curriculum courses. The project on *Management of Protected Areas in Support of Sustainable Economies (MPASSE)* finally ended in December 2014. Although the work on the ground was limited to four years, the preceding seven years from 2003 were taken up by

the European Commission's Byzantine approval procedures. Despite further disproportionate procedures plaguing the rest of the project, our local partners, the National Trust for the Cayman Islands and the National Parks Trust of the [British] Virgin Islands, were able to make good use of most of the funds. Changes over this long period within our former partner, the Turks & Caicos National Trust meant that they were unable to claim much of the funding that we had helped them be awarded.

Following a close involvement in earlier years, UKOTCF started a new major programme of work in partnership with Montserrat National Trust and several parts of the Government of Montserrat. This has already included provision of a requested workshop on environmental impact assessment, a start on a guide-book to bird-watching and other aspects of local heritage, securing of part-funding for water-capture for the Botanic Garden and for the rescue of historic records, facilitating a partnership between Montserrat and the Waitt Institute to collaborate on marine conservation, and advice on a range of other issues.

Key roles of the Forum have always included building capacity in UKOTs and CDs, facilitating the exchange of expertise between territories, and identifying common interests and needs, as well as trying to do something about these. Territories have long stressed the high value of the occasional conference for practising conservationists, and called for UKOTCF to organise another. Unfortunately, the UK Government has not felt able to support one since 2009. In summer 2014, UKOTCF was able to announce that it had secured funds, mainly from HM Government of Gibraltar, for



For many years, UKOTCF has facilitated and encouraged the designation and sustainable management of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. It has also been long involved in efforts to conserve the important island of Sombrero, which is half-way between Anguilla (to which it belongs) and the British Virgin Islands. Sombrero sits on its own bank and has been separated from other islands for a long period of geological time. Consequently, it is important for endemic species such as the Sombrero black lizard (illustrated) as well as several species of breeding seabird (including brown boobies, illustrated). The site was included in UKOTCF's review, for UK and UKOT Governments, of actual and potential Ramsar Sites (www.ukotcf.org/pubs/ramsarReview.htm). The Government of Anguilla has recently decided to ask UK Government to designate this

under the Ramsar Convention. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

the sixth such conference. UKOTCF is donating a vast amount of voluntary time to organise this conference. This, in combination with the funding mainly from HMGoG and some support from JNCC, following an initial contribution from Defra to costs in the previous year, will enable colleagues from across the UKOTs to attend as supported participants. Gibraltar will host the conference (*Sustaining Partnerships*) from 11th to 15th July 2015. It is being organised together with the Government of Gibraltar, with the support of the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society. It follows the first held in London in 1999, the second (actually the first in terms of when the organisation of it started) in Gibraltar in 2000, the third in Bermuda in March 2003, the fourth in Jersey in October 2006 and the fifth in the Cayman Islands in 2009.

Many UKOT and CD partners have long looked to UKOTCF to try to influence UK and EU policies that affect the territories. Accordingly, the Forum works with the UK Government and Parliament and EU institutions. Our heavy involvement over the last few years with the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee and its *Inquiry into Sustainability in the UK Overseas Territories* has been reported previously, and the members of the Committee repeated their thanks for this at the end of the Parliamentary session. Although, as we noted in the previous report, both Parliamentarians and conservationists expressed their disappointment at the UK Government's response to EAC's Report (HC 332 of 8 January 2014), it is pleasing to see since progress on some of our and the EAC's recommendations.

- On 27th March 2015, the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) announced the declaration of the extension of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) to SGSSI. Nine UKOTs/CDs are now included in the UK's ratification, leaving 12 not yet included. UKOTCF will be organising a workshop at the Gibraltar conference for those considering joining. While mentioning GSGSSI, it is worth congratulating GSGSSI and, in particular, the NGO South Georgia Heritage Trust on completing (subject to monitoring) the removal of invasive rats and reindeer from the island.
- The Pitcairn Islanders and UK conservation bodies have long called for a marine protected area around the Pitcairn Islands. Intended implementation of this measure was announced by UK Government in the annual Budget announcements on 18th March 2015. Anguilla has decided to join UK's ratification of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), leaving TCI as the only territory not yet included.
- At its meeting on 12th March 2015, Anguilla's Executive Council decided to nominate Sombrero Island Nature Reserve Marine Park as Anguilla's first Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Sombrero was one of the sites in the UKOTs and CDs proposed for Ramsar designation by the review commissioned by Defra in 2005. This review was conducted by UKOTCF in consultation with local governmental and NGO bodies. It is available at www.ukotcf.org/pubs/ramsarReview.htm.
- Noting the EAC's comments on effective development controls, UKOTCF welcomed the implementation (after delay) of environmental measures in relation to the new St Helena Airport, the construction of which is nearing completion. However, it remains a matter of concern that conservation measures started only halfway through the construction rather than before and continue to suffer problems. This needs to be viewed in the context that conservation bodies, including UKOTCF, decided – in view of the needs and constraints – not to oppose the airport development provided that every possible environmental safeguard was put in place. Sadly, this proved not to be the case.
- The European Commission has announced a new round of BEST scheme funding BEST 2.0 (see below).

UKOTCF has been concerned for some years at the lack of a strategic approach in the UK Government's support for conservation in the UKOTs. It has worked with JNCC and other NGOs to set up a joint group to overcome this, UKOTCF providing one of the Chairmen and part of the Secretariat for this. Progress is being made, albeit rather slowly.

UKOTCF continues its work on environmental education and

awareness raising. This includes much in-territory work linked to the situations exemplified above. In addition, we continue to add to the territories included in our series of *Virtual Tours* (http://www.ukotcf.org/1_vTours/intro.cfm). UKOTCF has provided a great deal of advice, comment, text, still photos, videos and assistance in fund-raising to Stewart McPherson for his *Britain's Treasure Islands* programme, which comprises a series of TV programmes, a set of short videos (which will be available on www.ukotcf.org and elsewhere for free use), a book and other resources.

Projects and other in-territory help to our partners

Amongst its other activities, the Forum helps its member and associate organisations to identify, design, resource, manage and implement projects, often involving the development of strategic partnerships between member organisations and sometimes with others. Other projects in which the Forum is involved provide a co-ordinating role for activities across multiple (sometimes including non-UK) Territories. Funding, for both UKOTCF and territory partners, is particularly challenging. UKOTCF is in a particularly difficult situation, in that, as a UK-based charity supporting conservation work in the UKOTs, there are very few funding sources for which it is eligible. Income generated via projects provides an important source of funding for the Forum, although this relies on Council members and others providing their time to project work for no charge or at well below market rates. Some of the projects operating during the reported year are noted below.

In June, the *Wise-Water-Use Garden* at the Turks and Caicos National Museum in Providenciales was opened to coincide with World Blue-Water Day. The project was supported by the RBC Foundation (Royal Bank of Canada) Blue Water Project. The Forum partnered the Turks and Caicos National Museum in the project, which received the Foundation's largest grant that year, outside of Canada, the US and UK. The aim was to provide a model garden showcasing the use of traditional capture of rainwater to irrigate traditional crops, and cropping systems suited to dry conditions, native and other traditional plants with medicinal uses, and regeneration of native vegetation. The layout of the garden and planning was developed by Bryan Naqqi Manco (Department of Environment & Maritime Affairs and expert botanist), who gave guests a guided tour of the traditional garden, the medicinal garden, and the regenerating native plant area on the day of the opening, 12th June.

In the TCI also, guidelines for visitors to Salt Cay and outer cays, important for birds, turtles and iguanas, have been produced. This was made possible through collaboration with the Department of Environment and Maritime Affairs, with help also from Salt Cay Divers, the Marine Conservation Society, and others.

Following the success of the set of five booklets produced in 2014 for TCI (under the series title *Birding in Paradise*, available in TCI and from www.ukotcf.org/birding-in-Turks-and-Caicos/) on bird-watching and other heritage sites, UKOTCF was asked by the Montserrat National Trust and other local partners to produce one for Montserrat, to support its tourism industry while promoting conservation. UKOTCF was able to use visits to Montserrat in October and January to fill gaps in information and photographs with the aim of publishing it in 2015, in time for the new



UKOTCF Honorary Executive Director (and lead author of the booklets), Dr Mike Pienkowski, presents a set of *Birding in Paradise* to H.E. Peter Beckingham, Governor of the Turks & Caicos Islands.

Photo: Ann Pienkowski

tourist season. The booklet will be sold locally at the Trust, providing them with some modest income, and by the Forum online and by post.

Work is underway also on a wide range of other advice and potential joint projects with NGO and governmental colleagues in Montserrat. For example, following the request from the Montserrat Fisheries Officer through their representative to the UK, UKOTCF has been working with the Fisheries Department to raise their capacity to manage their fisheries resources sustainably. One result is the recent advertisement of a new 3-year position funded by the Waitt Institute (introduced to Montserrat by UKOTCF), as well as technical and scientific support provided by the Institute itself. Forum personnel continue to advise the Montserrat Fisheries Officer and have provided information on the successful lionfish drives that have taken place in Cayman, through their contacts there.

Work continues voluntarily on the virtual tours and has benefited greatly from the help of several volunteers including the two Conservation Assistants (see Organisational Development, below) as well as Joanna Jones, a volunteer who has lived in Bermuda for several years and now in UK and wished to help the Forum where she could. Two additional virtual tours were made live: Ascension and the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas. These received significant input from partners in the territories and will be further developed when the mini-documentaries (as mentioned above) are complete.

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Pages from the Guidelines for visitors to Big Sand Cay Sanctuary



After the success of securing funding from the British Library Endangered Archives Programme for the Montserrat National Trust to rescue and preserve some of its most important documents, Forum personnel have been working with partners to try to encourage other UKOTs to apply to the fund. Working with new social enterprise Heritage People CIC and its founder Pat Reynolds, the Forum hopes to support further applications to the British Library.

The part EU-funded project MPASSE (*Management of Protected Areas to Support Sustainable Economies*), for which the Forum co-ordinated and drafted the proposal in 2003 (with the European Commission issuing contracts in 2010-11), ended in December 2014. The in-territory work involved the National Parks Trust of the [British] Virgin Islands, and the National Trusts of the Cayman Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands, with support from UKOTCF. Although the Forum's contract had ended in June 2013, some work continued on a voluntary basis, including meeting requests by the partners and the European Commission for UKOTCF to chair the Steering Group meetings. EU processes had been complicated for all partners to understand, disproportionately bureaucratic and involved far more work by all than would have been desirable, probably accounting for more costs than the conservation and other works that could be achieved. Near the end of the project, the partner in Cayman had managed to progress the project to utilise most of the allocated EU funds and used this support effectively to leverage other conservation

benefits. BVI had (like the Forum) suffered in that its contract from the Commission had been received about a year after that of the other two partners. Nevertheless, they achieved most of the visitor facilities, reserve works, interpretation and enforcement facilities that they had originally planned, and used 70-80% of the allocated EU funds. There had been some problems within the TC National Trust which had not been able to use effectively the resources despite efforts from other project partners to advise.

UKOTCF will always aim to help its partners where time and resources allow. Requests are often made through regional working groups but also directly.

Updates on potential funding have been provided including on the EU-BEST, Darwin Plus as well as others. In addition to responding to requests to develop joint projects, the Forum has provided support to a number of bids throughout the year and continues to do this when requested.

An account of Felix Driver's volunteering efforts was given in *Forum News 43*. Felix has completed his first six months in a volunteering position at the St Helena National Trust and is now working together with the Trust and Buglife as a Communications Assistant as part of its *Bugs on the Brink* project.

Environment Charter and conservation concerns

The Forum continues to highlight the importance of the Environment Charters and their value as expressed by local conservation practitioners, as well as their being the main means by which Britain meets its obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Aichi Targets and other Conventions. One aspect is helping local workers keep watch on developments which might be contrary to the guiding principles set out in the Charters, and raising such matters with UK Government at local request where appropriate. The Forum aims to continue to review progress and is working on plans to do this in conjunction with the forthcoming conference in July, as it has done in the run up to previous conferences. It is able to support this through its working groups and continuing gathering of information from partners.

Working Groups and wider networks

The activities of the Forum's Southern Oceans, Europe Territories, and Wider Caribbean Working Groups during the year are summarised in later sections of this report.

The Forum has been facilitating, at the request of local members of its Wider Caribbean Working Group, discussions on coral restoration across the UKOTs, with the possibility of involving also other EU overseas entities. In August 2014, UKOTCF was able to facilitate the involvement of three participants from the UKOTs in the Global Coral Reef Network Caribbean regional meeting in Curaçao (*photo below*), through its Bioverseas network. (Bioverseas is the joint initiative of the umbrella conservation bodies for the overseas territories of the Netherlands, France and UK (UKOTCF)).

The Forum has been providing input in to the current JNCC Database project, which aims to improve and enhance access to biodiversity data in the UKOTs.

Awareness raising and information management

Forum News 43 was published in March. It led with an article on the conference.

UKOTCF volunteer, Dr Phoebe Carter, submitted an article to the *Marine Scientist* journal, which was published in May. The focus of the article was to outline some of her experiences as a volunteer monitoring turtles



while based in the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas, but with the help of Forum colleagues the article was extended to include some information on turtle conservation across all the UKOTs.

UKOTCF has continued to keep its member and associate organisations (and its wider network of contacts) informed of relevant developments, including funding opportunities, consultations and internal activities, through e-mail circulations.

After three years of visiting and filming in all of the UKOTs, film-maker Stewart McPherson has produced a series of four 1-hour films on the wildlife of UKOTs which will probably be broadcast in UK, Australia and North America in late 2015. UKOTCF has advised on some aspects of this work and commented on drafts of the final product.

Stewart had much more film of high-quality than was needed for the TV series, and the Forum has helped him to raise funds through Kickstarter to produce a short (5-10 min) video on each UKOT, as well as a few other shorts on cross-territory subjects. The resulting shorts will eventually be available free to view to all.

A media campaign, preview and accompanying book will follow. Many of the conservationists involved in the films will be present in Gibraltar, and so Stewart is also hoping to attend to showcase the films.

Continuing the interest being shown in developing programmes on the UKOTs, the Forum was approached by naturalist Nigel Marvin's production company to provide information for his trip to the Caribbean. He visited British Virgin Island to film on Virgin Gorda.

The *Radio Times* is the UK's biggest selling magazine, outlining weekly media coverage with over 800,000 readers. The Forum was asked, at very short notice, to provide a photo of the Turks and Caicos pygmy boa to accompany an article highlighting the BBC4 radio programme *Costing the Earth* which aired in May – and this was published. Documenting the wildlife of the UKOTs through photography has long been an important aspect of the Forum's work, as a collection as such did not exist. Together with Stewart's archive, this is beginning to look quite impressive and is a major resource.

The Forum responds to the requests it receives from its partners and wider network. These vary enormously in size and scope but, given the continuity in UKOTCF personnel, we are able to provide an important service to the UKOTs. Some examples out of many more include: working with Writtle College, University of Essex on a volunteer programme; establishing links between schools in UKOTs and institutions in the UK; establishing links with Sheffield Hallam Business School to integrate UKOTs issues into the Tourism and Leisure course syllabus; forming new partnership with a new social enterprise, Heritage Peoples CIC, to support cultural and historic heritage in the UKOTs; providing a link between successful lionfish drive organisers and those wishing to develop similar initiatives (Montserrat and Cayman Islands); seeking advice from experts on issues relating to sensitive Environmental Impact Assessment matters; making recommendations on possible restorations of important habitats to Governments; advising on a Kickstarter campaign to raise funds for the UKOT mini-documentaries (all £11.5k needed raised); drafting text to use in a book on *Britain's Treasure Islands*; providing Guadeloupe conference secretariat with suggested speakers for sessions in response to a last-minute request; providing information to IUCN regional hub for environmental profiles; providing information on the UKOTs to academic researchers; providing background to issues in UKOTs to UK and international journalists; providing a link between UKOTs and a production company wishing to film in UKOTs and CDs (Nigel Marvin series currently on UK TV on Adventure Cruise in BVI); briefing Ministers in the UKOTs and UK on issues across the UKOTs; providing input to the environment profiles for British Virgin Islands (now online at irf.org); establishing links with teachers in the UKOTs to further education on UKOTs within territories; providing information to RSPB/FIELD governance review of UKOTs; and input to the 5th report to the Conference of the Parties on the Convention on Biological Diversity (see www.cbd.int).

The website and the Facebook page continue to be an important source of information and publicity. The website leads to many inquiries from interested persons, and researchers with specific questions on matters relating to the UKOTs. UKOTCF endeavours to respond to all such requests, as time allows.



UKOTCF has been working with Stewart McPherson on his *Britain's Treasure Islands* videos and book. In addition to the other contributions mentioned in the text, Ann & Mike Pienkowski are providing additional still and video coverage to help fill gaps. Here, a drake flightless steamer duck, endemic to the Falkland Islands, has led his ducklings to a freshwater trickle on the shore, so that they can all drink.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Influencing policy

In advance of the Conference of the Parties (CoP)12 of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands, which takes place in Uruguay in June 2015, UKOTCF was asked to provide input for the UK's Ramsar Report. An outline of some of the work, mainly in the Turks and Caicos Islands in collaboration with the Turks and Caicos National Museum, was provided. These included: the *Wonderful Water* project which was in part funded by UK Government (through OTEP) but involved a major amount of voluntary time and other contributions; the *Wise Water Garden*, launched in 2014, after securing a grant from private business (see elsewhere in the report); and the bird-watching guide books and trails which were produced to highlight the excellent opportunities for viewing wetland birds. Some errors and omissions in the UK draft report relating to other UK territories were also corrected.

JNCC and several NGOs continue to hold meetings to develop an agreed framework of priorities for best use of resources from Britain to support conservation in the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) & Crown Dependencies (CDs). During the year, there have been several meetings, with UKOTCF providing the Chairman for the first chaired by the NGOs and the Secretariat for that and other NGO-chaired ones. The fourth meeting of the group in December agreed the need for a smaller sub-group to undertake the first re-sorting of priority areas suggested by members of the wider group. This re-sorting was to be into the priority themes identified by the main group, as modified by the sub-group. This was chaired by UKOTCF. A workshop drawing in a wider set of stakeholders in order to ensure that the priorities were robust is planned for spring 2015.

IUCN (Europe), Guadeloupe Region, the European Commission, the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the French Government co-organised an international conference on biodiversity and climate change in Guadeloupe from 22-25 October 2014. It followed on from the Réunion Conference in 2008. Forum personnel attended the meeting, and coupled this with a visit to Montserrat to meet with partners there. Relatively few territories were represented, in some cases because of problems within the organising secretariat. Most organisations and even territories that were able to attend were represented at the conference by only one person, but participants were limited to one workshop (out of 5 which ran concurrently on the two working days of the conference, the other two days being devoted to opening and closing speeches).

During the conference financial mechanism session, seen as crucial to taking forward any other actions, the European Commission announced that there would be a new programme starting in 2015, BEST 2.0. Despite being from a different funding source, this was intended to develop the original preparatory BEST (the Voluntary scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of EU Overseas) – a programme which evolved from a suggestion several years earlier by UKOTCF and its partners for the territories of other EU Member States, in Bioverseas. The three years of that had sometimes been referred to as BEST I, II



The UKOTs at the Guadeloupe conference: (from left) Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF; Hon. Claude Hogan, Minister of Environment, Montserrat; Dr Liesl Mesilio-Torres, Chief Executive Officer, Department of Environment & Climate Change, Gibraltar; Joseph Smith Abbott, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Natural Resources & Labour, British Virgin Islands.

Photo: Stephen Mendes

and III. BEST I & II included calls for funding applications, although the UK Government and others noted that the selection process was badly flawed and the European Commission admitted that it was by their staff, who have no expertise in this area. BEST III saw funding go to a consortium led by IUCN-Europe. The project aims to create “a network of regional hubs to identify the priorities for investment, and inform and train local stakeholders”. SPAW RAC and Réserve Naturelle de Saint-Martin is coordinating the Caribbean regional hub and the development of ecosystem profiles for the 15 European overseas entities in the Caribbean. In the South Atlantic, the South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI) is leading.

BEST 2.0 will have a total budget of about €7m, spread over 5 years, across all the EU Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs), including most UKOTs. Grants will be applied for as one of two types: Small (less than €100k) and Medium or Large (up to about €400k). There will be emphasis on local organisations accessing grants. At a meeting of the EU Roundtable on 31st March 2015 in Brussels, in response to a question from the Forum, it was revealed that there is likely to be effectively one round of grants but applications will be staggered in time over four calls. Details of these calls would be released in early summer.

In October, the UK Parliament’s All Party Parliamentary Group for Biodiversity held an event focusing on *Conserving globally important natural environments - some views from the UK Overseas Territories*. The Forum was heavily involved in the organisation of the meeting in collaboration with the APPG secretariat. Gina Ebanks-Petrie, Director of Environment for the Cayman Islands, and Kathleen McNary Woods, former Director of Environment for the Turks and Caicos Islands, and Sarita Francis, Director of the Montserrat National Trust, were able to participate via Skype. They made a great impression on the meeting participants as they gave their first-hand accounts of the progress and issues faced by conservation practitioners in the UKOTs. A summary of the meeting was circulated to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Biodiversity in its subsequent newsletter. Activity on raising the profile of the UKOTs in Parliament diminished as the General Election approached, but the Forum will pick up with the APPG secretariat and others when the new Parliament settles in.

The Forum has been advising several UKOT governments on issues from fisheries protection to uncontrolled and unregulated developments, both impacting biodiversity in a big way. Through its network of highly skilled personnel, it has been able to provide the scientific basis for decisions made by several UKOT Governments, most notably in recent years in Gibraltar and Montserrat.

In Gibraltar, the management of marine resources report has led to new legislation which makes provisions for the protection of Gibraltar’s waters which are important in terms of biodiversity.

Following discussions with UK Government officials and requests from both FCO and the newly elected Government of Montserrat, UKOTCF arranged for training on best practice in environmental impact assessment. International expert Dr Jo Treweek conducted *pro-bono* a two-day

workshop in January 2015, supported by UKOTCF and its personnel. All four Ministers of the Government including the Premier, as well as many other senior and technical personnel from government, NGOs and business, attended. The workshop generated a lot of positive press stories (including an item in the OECD regional radio news bulletin). UKOTCF aims to follow this up with more capacity development.



Rose Willock (ZJB Radio Montserrat), Dr Jo Treweek and Catherine Wensink in the studio. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Relations with UK Government and Government Agencies

UKOTCF personnel have ensured that UKOTs and CDs were not overlooked in other quarters, using a range of opportunities. They met regularly with the FCO Director for the Overseas Territories, Dr Peter Hayes. The Forum is continuing to explore ways in which it can assist FCO with good governance on environmental aspects in the UKOTs.

Forum personnel were invited to give a presentation to desk officers and section heads at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on biodiversity in the UKOTs, the role of the UKOTCF network and related matters. This was to try to address the lack of corporate memory in FCO (something noted also by a few FCO personnel of longer standing); this is related to a high turn-over of staff. It seems likely that many FCO officers had never heard of the work of the NGOs, Environment Charters and a range of other matters – but it is encouraging that most seemed to want to learn. These presentations are to be continued.

Regular meetings continued to be held with Defra officials on various matters, including in relation to the Gibraltar conference, which received some earlier support from Defra and some further modest support from its agency, JNCC. Liaison with the Department for International Development (DFID) has been interrupted because DFID terminated its only post (which had already been reduced to half-time) concerned with environmental matters in the UKOTs. UKOTCF shares the concern of the UKOTs, the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee and others about this serious gap in the Department responsible for most UK expenditure in the UKOTs.

UKOTCF personnel met the Governor and other FCO and DFID officials in Montserrat, and had several meetings in TCI with the Governor, who kindly opened the *Wise-Water-Use Garden* and launched the *Birding in Paradise* booklets. At a meeting with the Governor of Gibraltar, he kindly agreed to host the opening of the conference. UKOTCF briefed the new Governor of BVI and the Administrator of Tristan da Cunha.

UKOTCF personnel attended the Reception for participants in the Joint Ministerial Council (of UK and UKOT ministers or equivalents) in December (see note on appropriate menu and entertainment on next page), and the annual stakeholders meeting on South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands which took place in September.

Coordinating with Others

UKOTCF aims, where possible, to link with organisations with potentially complementary remits to try to explore ways of collaborating. They include: the Europe Overseas entities Roundtable, which it attends where possible; the Honorary Executive Director continues to serve on the Executive Committee of IUCN’s UK National Committee, providing them with regular updates on UKOT activities.

Throughout the year, and wherever possible, UKOTCF personnel have attended receptions organised by Friends for the Overseas Territories (FOTBOT). FOTBOT aims to develop relationships with citizens of the



UKOTs, especially students studying in the UK, to promote the interests of the UKOTs and supporting its students. In December, they attended a very interesting presentation by Glyn Christian, a descendant of the first settlers on Pitcairn.

Several meetings, which UKOTF personnel have attended, of the Pitcairn Environment Group were held during the year to discuss the work of many NGOs currently working on Pitcairn.

Linking with various institutions that wish to draw on the Forum's knowledge has been an important part of our work throughout the organisation's existence. An invitation was received to attend and address a workshop on biodiversity monitoring in the territories organised by University College London. Following this, various proposals are being developed to coordinate data and monitoring information on the UKOTs.

With the assistance of Sarita Francis, Forum personnel met in London with Director of the West India Committee (and chair of the Heritage Lottery Fund's London Committee) to discuss areas of common interest.

In December, the Chartered Institute for Ecologists and Environmental Managers (CIEEM) held an event on mitigation and management relating to alien species in the UKOTs. Forum personnel attended and Council Member Bruce Dinwiddy chaired the event. This marks a rise in interest in UKOTs by CIEEM. The Forum Chairman was a key organiser, as a founder member of CIEEM.

Organisational development

Difficulty in securing funding remains a severe constraint on the Forum's ability to respond to requests from territory partners and others.

A considerable amount of time and effort continues to be put into exploring new opportunities from a wide variety of sources. This is not just to enable the Forum to continue supporting its members and associates, but also to look for funds for them to continue their work. These include fund-raising drives, private companies, charitable foundations and individuals.

In 2014, two Council members stepped down from Council and four were elected to replace these and fill two earlier vacancies. Profiles of all the new Council members, Tom Appleby, Sarita Francis, Nigel Haywood and Boyd McCleary, can be seen in *Forum News 43* and on the website. We are grateful to long-standing supporter of UKOTCF, Dr John Cortés, for stressing his wish to continue to support UKOTCF after his recent terms on Council, as compatible with his present role as Gibraltar's Minister of Health, Environment & Climate Change, and for agreeing to take on a role as Adviser to Council.

The Forum recognised an opportunity to involve recent graduates in UKOT activities. The volunteers are benefiting from widening their base of experience, while the Forum is most certainly benefiting from their work. A position of Conservation Assistant, for 6 months, was advertised. In total, 27 applications were received. These were reviewed independently by Forum personnel and six were selected for interviews. Of these, two MSc graduates were selected as outstanding, Sarah Barnsley (MSc, Imperial College London) and Emma Cary (MSc, Durrell Institute of Conservation & Ecology, University of Kent). Both were offered the volunteer roles and both accepted, starting in early October. They continue to work with the Forum on various tasks, working groups, virtual tours, database management, communications as well as others.

Acknowledgements

UKOTCF Council would like to thank the individuals and representatives of member and associate organisations who have given numerous hours of voluntary time to the Forum, both in the UK and the Territories. These included: Sarah Barnsley, Dr Phoebe Carter, Emma Cary, Felix Driver, Joanna Jones, David and Ann Quick, Callum Waldie and the specialist time donated by Dr Jo Treweek, as well as much time donated by Catherine Wensink. Although all Council members donate time to UKOTCF, Council would like to acknowledge the very large quantities donated by Mike and Ann Pienkowski, on which UKOTCF depends. The Forum would also like to thank existing *Friends of the UK Overseas Territories*, and encourage those who have an interest in the UKOTs/CDs to join. The Forum is very grateful for financial assistance as project grants and donations, from HM Government of Gibraltar, Defra, players at EVE_NT, and Ian Thornhill. The Forum is grateful also to member organisations and others for allowing meetings to take place at their offices during the year, particularly HM Government of Gibraltar.

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Summary Statement of Financial Activities (including Income and Expenditure Account) for the year ended 31 March 2015

	2015 Unrestricted Funds	2015 Restricted Funds	2015 Total Funds	2014 Total Funds
Incoming Resources				
Voluntary Income	156,134	162,829	318,963	319,630
Investment Income	25	-	25	18
Incoming Resources from Charitable Activities				
Project Income		173,081	173,081	80,647
Total Incoming Resources	156,159	335,910	492,069	400,295
Resources Expended				
Charitable Activities	148,272	266,827	415,099	383,459
Governance Costs and Other Resources Expended	7,144	-	7,144	7,334
Total Resources Expended	155,416	266,827	422,243	390,793
Net incoming/outgoing resources	743	69,083	69,826	9,502
Balance brought forward at 1st April 2014	16,210	26,625	42,835	33,333
Balance carried forward at 31st March 2015	16,953	95,708	112,661	42,835

Note: Incoming and outgoing resources include donated time and expenses of £313,250 (2013: £311,885).

Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

Introduction

WCWG met four times during the year, each time via Skype. Two WCWG eNewsletters were produced. Throughout the year WCWG responded to requests for information and advice about the Caribbean UKOTs.

Cross-territory activities have included discussions on coral-reef restorations in the UKOTs, and linking practitioners in the UKOTs with others in the Caribbean, including the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) which included a workshop in Curaçao in August 2015.

Issues which have been highlighted include the seemingly never-ending problem of lack of strategic planning, inappropriate built development and lack of transparent and effective Environmental Impact Assessments. In the last year UKOTCF took positive action to address the latter by holding an Environmental Impact Assessment workshop in Montserrat. This was funded by UKOTCF from its very limited resources and with *pro-bono* support by the workshop facilitator, Dr Jo Treweek, an international EIA expert. This demonstrates UKOTCF's commitment to taking practical steps to forward conservation in the UKOTs. With increased funding, UKOTCF could undertake many more such practical activities, multiplying the value of the funding.



The workshop in active discussion. Photo: Catherine Wensink

The part-EU-funded *Management of Protected Areas to Support Sustainable Economies (MPASSE)* project, involving UKOTCF, the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, the National Parks Trust of the [British] Virgin Islands and the Turks and Caicos Islands National Trust finished at the end of December 2014 for the three territory partners. UKOTCF's contract had finished in June 2013, but UKOTCF had continued working on a totally voluntary basis (rather than the largely voluntary basis in the funded period) to support the project. This support included UKOTCF's Honorary Executive Director chairing the Steering Group Meetings held in 2014, at the request of the EU Delegation in Jamaica. Territory partners had to produce their final reports by April 2015. UKOTCF looks forward to reviewing these. The EU procedures, especially tendering requirements and rules on origin of materials have made the building aspects of the work particularly challenging, but partners in Cayman and BVI achieved considerable success in accomplishing major parts of their building programmes. Despite very many structural problems in the EU procedures, this was an important grant, as it did enable construction works, which other funding sources do not.

Another EU-funded project (under the BEST scheme, and led by RSPB) *Conserving Species and Sites of International Importance by the Eradication of Invasive Alien Species in the Caribbean UK Overseas Territories* is being carried out in Anguilla, BVI, Cayman, Montserrat and the Turks & Caicos Islands.

Anguilla

After the successful rat eradication project, Dog Island was declared rat-free in May 2014. An assessment of the health and integrity of Anguilla's coastal ecosystem, conducted by the Anguilla National Trust, suggested that Anguilla's coastal ecosystems are faring relatively well, primarily because of the number of beaches that have been left undisturbed along the central and eastern portions of the islands. The largest threats to these ecosystems are coastal constructions with limited (if any) setback,

and sand-mining. Anguilla's nesting and foraging sea turtles remain at risk, and management measures to protect their populations are still required. The year saw Anguilla moving forward towards designating its first Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention. Following the 2005 UKOTCF review (commissioned and part-funded by Defra) of potential and actual Ramsar Sites in the UKOTs, the Anguilla National Trust has been updating a National Wetland Inventory. With this baseline information, the viability of designating Ramsar site(s) in Anguilla was considered at a stakeholder workshop. It was recommended that Sombrero Island be nominated as Anguilla's first Ramsar Site. On 12 March 2015, Anguilla's Executive Council decided to nominate Sombrero Island Nature Reserve Marine Park as Anguilla's first Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.

Anguilla is involved in a cross-territory project, with BVI, on *Using Seabirds to inform Caribbean Marine Spatial Planning*. Joint activities have included tagging and tracking seabirds, in both territories.

Bermuda

WCWG was very pleased to note the award to Jeremy Madeiros, Senior Conservation Officer with the Department of Conservation Services, of the Blue Turtle Award for the successful *Cahow Translocation Project* (see last year's *Annual Report*). The endemic Bermuda petrel, the cahow, was thought to be extinct for 300 years until David Wingate and others rediscovered a tiny remnant population on four tiny offshore islets, about 60 years ago. For many years, David and then Jeremy worked to conserve this population by a range of approaches. Jeremy began the *Cahow Translocation Project* in 2004, after recognising that the greatest threat to this nocturnal ground-nesting bird was erosion and storm damage at their nesting sites. From 2004-2008, he trans-located 102 near-fledged chicks from their original nests to artificial burrows on Nonsuch Island Nature Reserve, located off the south-east coast of Bermuda; this island had been cleared of introduced predators. His work over the last 14 years has included spending hundreds of nights, working in difficult conditions, monitoring and hand feeding chicks, until they were ready to fledge. Another conservation success story of a species previously thought to be extinct was the re-discovery of the endemic snail *Poecilozonites bermudensis*. Great effort has been put into lionfish control. Restaurants are serving lionfish, there is an annual lionfish capture competition, and the lionfish control taskforce, with a dedicated website <http://www.lionfish.bm/>

Bermuda was hit by two bad hurricanes in October 2014. This caused a great deal of damage, particularly to the trees and nature reserves, with thousands of trees felled. A great deal of voluntary work has been undertaken to clear and mitigate the damage, and the opportunity is being taken to address invasive species, such as the Brazilian pepper and balloon vine.

British Virgin Islands

This has been a very busy and successful year for conservation work in BVI. Projects have included the last stages of the MPASSE project; involvement in the collaborative project *Using seabirds to inform Caribbean marine planning*, the Darwin Plus project, with RBG Kew, *Conserving plant diversity and establishing ecosystem based approaches to the management of forest ecosystems in the British Virgin Islands*; and the Darwin Plus project, with Cefas (Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science) *British Virgin Islands MPA and hydrographic survey capacity building*.

Throughout the year, Island Resources Foundation worked on the *Environmental Profile for Tortola*, following the very successful production of previous profiles for Jost Van Dyke, Virgin Gorda and Anegada.

The Government of BVI embarked on a very ambitious and far-sighted project to address climate change, including establishing a climate-change trust-fund. Legislation was passed prohibiting commercial fishing of all shark and ray species throughout the exclusive economic zone, and banning the sale and trade of sharks and shark products in BVI

Cayman Islands

The passing of the National Conservation Law after over 10 years of delay is a great step forward for conservation in Cayman. A broadly

representative National Conservation Council has been established. This committee is working to put in place the administrative processes needed to support full implementation of the National Conservation Law. The National Conservation Law includes provisions for requiring Environmental Impact Assessments, enabling the Council to recommend an EIA process to Cabinet. The Council has also established a subcommittee for dealing with invasive species. There is clearly a great deal to be done. The Council has a schedule to take actions forward, these actions including meetings open to the public.

The part-EU-funded *MPASSE* project, being carried out by the National Trust for the Cayman Islands and the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme, ended in December 2014. Overcoming many unforeseen challenges, many generated by complex EU tendering processes and rules of origin, substantial progress was made in providing visitor facilities in the Colliers Wilderness Reserve, and plans are in place to complete the remaining planned works outside of the *MPASSE* project.

The National Trust for the Cayman Islands has also, during this year, increased protection by acquiring land and successfully campaigning against a potentially damaging road proposal.

The Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI) played an important role in promoting the UKOTCF-facilitated UKOT discussions on coral reef monitoring and restoration. Sadly, their application for funding to run a workshop for UKOT stakeholders, part of a Darwin Plus proposal, was not successful.

Montserrat

In January 2015, UKOTCF organised a workshop in Montserrat to help Montserratians steer their future development. International EIA expert Dr Jo Treweek donated time to lead this workshop, supported by UKOTCF and the Montserrat National Trust, with the encouragement and participation of Montserrat Department of Environment, and government Ministers.

The need for effective Environmental Impact Assessment was highlighted by the newly elected Government of Montserrat, following the unnecessary infilling of Piper's Pond (the last remaining mangrove wetland ecosystem in Montserrat), carried out under the previous administration as part of the Little Bay development.

During the January visit, UKOTCF, in conjunction with local stakeholders, conducted research and fieldwork to produce a Montserrat bird watching and other heritage guide booklet, following the successful series produced for the Turks and Caicos Islands. It is anticipated that the Montserrat booklet will be published later in 2015.

Both during a visit in October 2014 and the longer stay in January 2015, UKOTCF personnel advised Montserrat Government and other local stakeholders, and explored a range of future possible collaborative initiatives. One of these is UKOTCF's successful facilitation of a partnership between Montserrat and the Waitt Institute (see above).



"We recognise that it is in our benefit to work hard for healthy oceans in order to sustain our vital fish stocks, the marine life and biodiversity, and of course the livelihoods of our communities", the words of Hon. Donaldson Romeo, Montserrat Premier on the announcement of a partnership with the Waitt Institute, which UKOTCF facilitated.

Photo: Waitt Institute



Sometimes, office working conditions for UKOTCF personnel, Mike Pienkowski and Catherine Wensink, in Montserrat were arduous. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

Montserrat National Trust was awarded a grant from the British Library to address endangered archives on Montserrat. This important award allows Montserrat to address the conservation of irreplaceable archives, suffering from challenging natural climatic conditions, including hurricanes and volcanic eruptions. UKOTCF's co-ordinator worked with the Anguilla Archaeological and Historical Society, consultant archivist Nigel Sadler and the Montserrat National Trust on the preparation of the successful application.

Turks and Caicos Islands

This was a busy and productive year for UKOTCF and partners, the Turks and Caicos National Museum (TCNM), the Turks and Caicos Reef Fund (TCRF), Salt Cay Divers, the eco-tour company Big Blue Unlimited and the Department of Environment and Maritime Affairs (DEMA).

With partners, the Turks and Caicos National Museum, UKOTCF launched the *Birding in Paradise* guidebooks to bird-watching and other heritage sites in June 2014 available for purchase of printed copies or download at www.ukotcf.org/birding-in-Turks-and-Caicos/birding-in-turks-and-caicos.cfm. These were very well received, one reviewer commenting "They are excellent and could be used as prototypes for guides to other Caribbean islands." The *Wise-Water-Use-Garden* at the Caicos Heritage House museum site in Providenciales was opened at the same time. The latter was part of the Royal Bank of Canada (RBC) Blue Water programme. Both events were supported by the Governor, HE Peter Beckingham.

TCRF continued their campaign against the proposed Dolphinarium in TCI, which is still an ongoing issue. A successful year of projects and fund-raising has enabled them to continue coral reef restoration work, implementing a mooring buoys project, and delivering environmental education.

Salt Cay Divers provided logistical support and expertise to enable UKOTCF and DEMA to develop a protocol for visiting Big Sand Cay, one of the most important seabird breeding colonies in the Caribbean, and important also for nesting turtles. Although a designated Sanctuary, its remoteness, coupled with lack of resources for DEMA, meant that its status could not be enforced. The Cay received many unauthorised visits. The idea for the protocol was to encourage people to behave responsibly, whatever the status of the visit. Salt Cay Divers will be raising public awareness and monitoring the effects of the protocol.

The TCI Government-led proposal to develop a mega trans-shipping and cruise centre on East Caicos (the largest uninhabited island in the Caribbean) has caused great concern. UKOTCF has provided background biodiversity information, and publicised this proposal, with the aim that any such development would be undertaken only after a full and transparent Environmental Impact Assessment.

Report of UKOTCF Europe Territories Working Group

After a brief lapse in activity, the Europe Territories Working Group met again in December 2014 via Skype. The meetings are benefiting from a wide participation, and thanks go to Liz Charter and Keith Bensusan, and especially Emma Cary who has taken on the Secretary role, for their efforts in reinvigorating the Group. The Working Group particularly welcomed participation from Cyprus at the meeting, with input from the Sovereign Base Areas Administration (SBAA) staff, BirdLife Cyprus and other parties.

Bailiwick of Guernsey

The second stage of public consultation of the *Review of the Island's Development Plans* ran from 29 July to 13 September 2013. This stage of the consultation included key issues, messages and options surrounding the natural and built environment.

As part of the *States Strategic Plan* to protect and improve the Island's environment, a *Biodiversity Strategy* has been drafted for Guernsey. Its purpose is to act as a robust framework which can be used to identify, develop and implement a set of interrelated Action Plans.

Alderney

The single most important project running on Alderney over the last year is *Living Islands*. This 2-year project is collaboration between the States of Alderney, the Alderney Society and Alderney Wildlife Trust, and aims to promote the natural history and heritage of Alderney to new audiences, whilst engaging local communities. By identifying socio-economic drivers which link the environment with sustainable development and increased tourism interest on the island, it is hoped that the potential of the island's natural and heritage assets can be realised.

In March 2013, the Alderney Commission for Renewable Energy commissioned a regional assessment of the potential environmental impact of possible future renewable energy development in Alderney. This is focused largely on tidal stream development within Alderney's territorial waters.

Sark

An ongoing conservation project by La Société Sercquaise is focusing on L'Eperquerie, an area of rare heathland which is being brought back into management. Practical conservation work has removed areas of gorse, bramble and blackthorn, monitored invasive species and recovered some of the historical landscape. This, and other work, is greatly assisted by Digimap, which now benefits from a lot of data.


After being granted *Dark Sky* status in 2011, Sark Astronomy Society (SAstroS) marked the 2-year anniversary of the event with a Spring Starfest. Permission has been granted to build an observatory on the island; fundraising for this proposed project is ongoing.

Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas

In January 2014, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the UK and the Republic of Cyprus. This agreed to a relaxing of controls on non-military developments in the SBAs. The agreement covers the whole of the Sovereign Base Areas but excludes Ministry of Defence-controlled sites within the SBAs. Some local conservation bodies have queried the opportunities for public access and opportunity to comment on proposals. SBAA has indicated that there are such safeguards, and conservation bodies look forward to seeing these set out.

A new Environmental Education Centre at Akrotiri has been built, thanks to collaboration between the SBAs, the Republic of Cyprus and the Akrotiri community. Originally established in 2004, the Centre had been operating out of rented premises. The new building will enable the Centre to continue to provide its invaluable environmental education with the aid of state-of-the-art facilities.

Turtle monitoring is continuing in the SBAs, through a collaborative effort between volunteers and the SBAA. There have been problems with fox predation on one of the main breeding beaches over the last few years; this is having an impact on breeding success. Many aspects of the turtle projects were discussed by Dr Phoebe Carter in an article she wrote for *Marine Scientist* magazine ('Sea Turtles: Conserving Ancient Keystone Species').



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Virtual Tours: Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas

Features of Natural Interest


Endangered Loggerhead Turtles (*Caretta caretta*) and Green Turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) both breed in Cyprus and nest on beaches in the ESBA and WSBA. Projects overseen by the SBA Environment and Conservation team and run by volunteers monitor turtle nesting and hatch success on beaches in the SBAs. Turtle mortality is recorded from beached carcasses.



Loggerhead turtle swimming underwater.

© Mick Smith / Dragon Divers (Features of Natural Interest, 8 of 12 - Slide ref. 713)

Cyprus SBA is one of the two latest additions to UKOTCF's Virtual Tours (www.ukotcf.org/1_yTours/intro.cfm); two of the pages are reproduced above and below.



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Virtual Tours: Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas

Features of Natural Interest

Cyprus has two endemic bird species, the Cyprus Wheatear (*Oenanthe cyprica*) and the Cyprus Warbler (*Sylvia melanothorax*) that can both be found in the SBAs in the breeding season.



The endemic Cyprus Warbler (*Sylvia melanothorax*) is insectivorous and uses bushes on hill slopes for nesting. The nest is built in low shrub or gorse and 3-5 eggs are laid.

© Dr Mike Pienkowski (Features of Natural Interest, 6 of 12 - Slide ref. 711)

The process of formally designating Special Areas of Conservation (SACs, as defined by the European Habitats Directive) is ongoing, but it is hoped that designation will be complete in May 2015. (Whilst the SBAs are not actually in the European Union, their laws essentially copy those of the Republic of Cyprus which joined the EU in 2004. Therefore, laws to implement the EU Birds and Habitats Directive have been passed.)

Isle of Man

The final draft of the Isle of Man's first Biodiversity Strategy has been completed and is to be sent to the local parliament, Tynwald, for approval (<http://www.gov.im/media/1346374/biodiversity-strategy-final-draft-for-tyrnwald.pdf>).

Manx Basking Shark Watch has begun using a new generation of tags to monitor sharks found in Manx waters. The tags allow for far more detailed data to be gathered. However, 2014 was a poor year for basking sharks, with no new tags applied, although three from 2013 were still transmitting.

A film documenting the natural history of the Isle of Man has been released, filmed and presented by local ornithologist Chris Sharpe. The *Isle of Man – A Natural World* is a collaboration between Manx BirdLife, Manx Ornithological Society and a variety of other funders. (The film is available at <http://www.dukevideo.com/prd8021/The-Isle-of-Man-a-Natural-World-DVD>).

An extension has been granted to an existing wind-farm development in UK waters between the Isle of Man and the Cumbria / Lancashire coast. Although outside of the jurisdiction of the Isle of Man, the Government has been involved in on-going dialogue with the developers about the potential impacts. The Island Government announced in November that it plans to lease an area of seabed east of the island to a Danish company for a windfarm in Manx waters.

A nomination paper is being prepared proposing the whole island and its waters as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. This is a government priority now.

Gibraltar

A revised version of the *Environmental Action & Management Plan* has been published; this looks forward towards 2015. There are notable changes in the areas of development and planning, traffic and transport and green buildings. Progress will be evaluated again in 2015, with a new plan developed up to 2020.

In May 2013, the Government announced that the Barbary Macaque Management Plan is in the implementation stage. This aims to address problems surrounding human/macaque interaction.

A report, commissioned via UKOTCF, has been completed into the management of marine living resources in the waters around Gibraltar. This found that the basis for environmental protection laws is sound, but there is insufficient evidence to determine the state of fish stocks around Gibraltar. During the year, new legislation was passed, with local support,

based on the study's recommendations.

Bailiwick of Jersey

The *Birds on the Edge* project is ongoing. Outputs this year include a working list of the birds of the Channel Islands (<http://www.birdsontheedge.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Working-list-of-CI-birds-to-Dec-2013.pdf>)

There was a three-month consultation period for a *Marine Resources Strategy* in 2013, to gauge public opinion on proposals regarding the fishing industry, aquaculture sector and marine spatial planning, amongst others.

Cross territory activities

In October 2014, HM Government of Gibraltar hosted the first Overseas Territories GIS conference, sponsored by JNCC. The conference concentrated on the wider use of GIS amongst the UKOTs and CDs, including how GIS can be used for environmental management purposes and to inform decision making and development planning.

The Channel Islands Renewable Energy Group (CIMREG) and the South West Marine Energy Park (SWMEP) signed a MoU in December 2013 agreeing to work closely together in the development of marine renewables. The partnership recognises the compatibility of the two regions in this sector, and sees it as an important opportunity for economic growth and low carbon energy security.

Report of the UKOTCF Southern Oceans Working Group

The Southern Ocean Working Group met three times during the year, all via Skype. The end of the year saw progress in the transfer of the Chair from Mike Pienkowski, who has been covering this on an interim basis, for rather longer than he had wanted to, to Nigel Haywood, who had recently retired as Governor of the Falkland Islands and Commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. At the end of the year also, Sarah Barnsley joined the team fulfilling the role of a Working Group Secretary, to boost capacity in this area.

Ascension Island

From 1 January 2014, the Ascension Island Government (AIG) suspended the issuing of fisheries licences until a better, sustainable and defensible model could be introduced. An expert review of the management of fisheries in Ascension's Exclusive Fishing Zone (EFZ) is currently being carried out by Cefas. The aim of the review is to establish a carefully managed and sustainable licensed commercial fisheries regime from 1

January 2015. There had been a campaign by many international groups for a marine protected area (MPA) to be established. The Government is being open-minded. However, they feel that an MPA must be scientifically justifiable, sustainable and affordable and that the minimum scientific data to support consideration of the viability, location and type of protected area in Ascension's EEZ is unlikely to be available for 3-4 years. It believes such data collection will be better facilitated through the replacement commercial licence regime. These data will be collected as part of the current Darwin Initiative-funded *Ascension Island Marine Sustainability* project, which is being led by the AIG Conservation Department with expert input from overseas partners including SAERI and RSPB and further support from the Blue Marine Foundation.

New legislation has been introduced which has created seven new nature reserves on the island. This, combined with the development of the first *National Biodiversity Action Plan*, will provide a framework for conservation action on the island.

In early 2015, a team led by RSPB, including National Geographic Explorer-in-Residence Dr Sylvia Earle, and the IUCN's Marine Vice-Chair of the World Commission on Protected Areas, Prof Dan Laffoley, visited Ascension to meet with government and members of the

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Land crabs *Johngarthia lagostoma* are a near-endemic of Ascension Island, being found on just three other islands in the South Atlantic - Ilha Trindade, Fernando de Noronha and Atol das Rocas. Prior to human settlement, *J. lagostoma* was the main terrestrial omnivore on the island. The carapace of the land crab can exceed 10 cm in width and the leg span can reach approximately 25 cm. *J. lagostoma* exists in two distinct colour morphs, one yellow and one purple, with few intermediates. Although primarily nocturnal, the land crabs can be observed during the day in the high, moist areas of Green Mountain, often under vegetation where it is darker. They spend much of the day in burrows excavated in vegetated areas and pyroclastic deposits. They feed mainly on plant material, but will scavenge dead animals and occasionally catch live ones - it is probable that they consumed eggs and chicks of seabirds in the past when both species were more numerous on the mainland. Between January and May, many adults migrate from higher elevations to spawning sites along the southern and eastern shores - the majority of spawning occurs at North East Bay.

Female land crab *Johngarthia lagostoma*.

© Ascension Island Government Conservation Department (Features of Natural Interest, 26 of 32 - Slide ref. 618)

Ascension is one of the two latest additions to UKOTCF's Virtual Tours (www.ukotcf.org/1_yTours/intro.cfm); two of the pages are reproduced here.

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While Ascension may have low species diversity relative to other tropical islands, it makes up for this with its unique species which, in terms of marine biodiversity, include 11 fish endemic to Ascension, a further 16 shared endemics with St Helena, and 2 endemic shrimp species. An example of a fish species endemic to Ascension is the resplendent angelfish *Centropyge resplendens* which is a small blue fish found in deep water.

Resplendent angelfish *Centropyge resplendens*.

© Ascension Island Government Conservation Department (Features of Natural Interest, 18 of 32 - Slide ref. 611)

community to raise the profile of their rich waters.

A new short documentary about their conservation work is available at: http://biosciences.exeter.ac.uk/cec/staff/index.php?web_id=Nicola_Weber&tab=research. This, together with UKOTCF's new virtual tour for Ascension (www.ukotcf.org/1_vTours/intro.cfm) and the documentaries being prepared, with UKOTCF help, by Stewart MacPherson (see above) will help to raise the profile of the island within the UK and globally.

British Antarctic Territory

The annual Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meeting took place in Brazil in May. The meetings are called in order to discuss the Antarctic Treaty and the Environmental Protocol and to provide regulations and guidelines for the management of the Antarctic Treaty area. The UK Government plays an important role in this.

The British Antarctic Survey, responsible for the majority of the UK's scientific research on and around Antarctica and the management of research stations, has published many reports during the year on its work many of which are from its partnerships with other international partners including: a new atlas of Southern Ocean marine life, a humpback whale subspecies revealed in a genetic study, a genetic study shows major impact of climate change on Antarctic fur seals as well as many others.

British Indian Ocean Territory

Several scientific expeditions took place during the year. In order to share the results of these, a portal for scientific data and information for the Chagos is currently under development. Data from research conducted in Chagos over the past 40 years will be collated into an online database. The database will then be used as a platform for communication between researchers, the public, and decision-makers.

During the year the feasibility study, conducted by KPMG at the request of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, was published.

The annual Chagos Conservation Conference 2014 took place on in December at the Zoological Society of London.

Falkland Islands

There have been several changes at Falklands Conservation including a new CEO and new UK Director.

The South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute, as part of a consortium for BEST (see above), is now working on environmental profiles for the South Atlantic territories. It will be co-ordinating the next phase of BEST grants in the region to commence in late 2015.

Pitcairn

The Chancellor announced in the budget statement in March, the intention to declare a marine protected area around Pitcairn. This is a move towards the culmination of several years of work by the islanders and many conservation groups, including UKOTCF. The UK Government still has reservations about enforcement of the vast area that will be created under the MPA, but is working with several bodies to find solutions.

In support of this and scientific research, several meetings of the Pitcairn Environment Group took place throughout the year at the offices in London of the Pew Charitable Trusts. These meetings are an opportunity for those with programmes to meet and discuss results and possible future collaborations in support of the islanders.

UKOTCF had worked on an article, with colleagues, which had subsequently been published in local newspaper *Dem Tull*, outlining the work on goat eradication taking place on an island of similar size in the British Virgin Islands, Jost Van Dyke; this was to highlight the work being done globally on control of introduced animals to protect and conserve threatened wildlife.

South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands

As reported above, in March, the Government of SGSSI announced that the UK had added SGSSI in its ratification of the Convention on Biological Diversity.

In September, the annual stakeholder meeting was held in London (see main report).



Endemic South Georgia pipit. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

The South Georgia Heritage Trust continues to work and report on its habitat restoration, which has achieved the final stage of baiting to remove rats but will continue to monitor for several years to come. *Forum News 43* reported the recent discovery by Sally Poncet of a nesting pair of pipits in an area where rats had been removed. This was significant for the project as a key target is to have species re-establish. The Government of SGSSI completed its removal of introduced reindeer, which will allow natural vegetation and other wildlife depending on it to recover.

St Helena

The construction of the airport for St Helena is due to be completed in 2015, with test flights due to start in June. After some delays the Landscaping and Ecological Mitigation Programme (LEMP) has begun.

A full article on efforts from UKOTCF volunteer, Felix Driver has been published in *Forum News 43*. Felix had been a welcome addition to the National Trust team.

Phil Lambden has produced a field-guide to the plants of St Helena. David Pryce, currently the Darwin Project Officer for Buglife and working on their project *Bugs on the Brink* (<https://www.buglife.org.uk/blog/bugs-brink>), has been given Red-list training and hopes to catalogue all 416 invertebrate species, many of which are mites.

The island continues to struggle with invasive species such as rabbits and mynah birds, which are having a major impact on the ecology of the island. Some control of these has commenced as resources allow.

Tristan da Cunha

Fisheries Officer Norman Glass was able to take part in a SOWG meeting as he was in the UK for training and to meet with partners. He has a background in fisheries. He is currently conducting some GIS data work for the Fisheries Department.

During the year, James Glass had been awarded an MSc degree and was the first person on the Island to have achieved this.

There is a Darwin Plus project, which is due to finish in December 2015, to do more work on the Tristan rock lobster. Lobster stocks around Inaccessible and Nightingale Islands seem to be recovering after being smothered in soya beans when the *MS Oliva* ran aground in March 2011. The situation is still fragile, as young lobsters grow, with regard to setting quotas.

There had been some discussion about the harbour, which is vital to its fishery. A report had been published by the UK Department for International Development on this.

Lobsters were now exported into the EU, an exciting development, which highlights the importance of the lobsters for the Tristan economy. MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) certification had previously been achieved in 2011.

John Cooper from the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of African Ornithology, who had long been supporting bird monitoring, conservation initiatives and other projects, ended his term as voluntary warden and scientific adviser for Tristan. UKOTCF wishes him well; John had done a lot of excellent work on a range of issues, some jointly with UKOTCF,



Some of the endemic Tristan da Cunha species on Inaccessible Island, which Dr John Cooper and UKOTCF helped the Islanders designate for World Heritage and Ramsar status: Inaccessible flightless rail; Tristan thrush; and Inaccessible bunting. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

in support of Tristan conservation. UKOTCF personnel had enjoyed working with him particularly on designation of the Ramsar and World Heritage Sites.

After 12 years of studies, RSPB is now exploring the possibility of mouse eradication from Gough Island, which will be a major exercise in fund-raising and logistics.

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Membership

UKOTCF's current Member and Associate organisations linked to a particular UK Overseas Territory or Crown Dependency: Alderney Wildlife Trust; Anguilla Archaeological & Historical Society; Anguilla National Trust; Ascension Conservation Centre; Ascension Heritage Society; Bermuda Audubon Society; Bermuda National Trust; UK Antarctic Heritage Trust; Chagos Conservation Trust; National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands, BVI; Jost van Dykes Preservation Society, BVI; National Trust for the Cayman Islands; Central Caribbean Marine Institute; Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre, Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas; BirdLife Cyprus; Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society; La Société Guernesiaise; Société Jersiaise; National Trust for Jersey; Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture; Montserrat National Trust; Pitcairn Natural Resources Division; St Helena National Trust; La Société Sercquaise; National Trust of the Turks & Caicos Islands; Turks & Caicos National Museum; Turks & Caicos Reef Fund.

UKOTCF's current Member and Associate organisations not linked to a single Territory: Amphibian & Reptile Conservation; Army Ornithological Society; Royal Air Force Ornithological Society and Royal Naval Birdwatching Society.