

## *UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum* Annual Report 2002/03

### Chairman's Report on behalf of the Executive Committee

#### Overview

This report covers the period from July 2002 to June 2003. The Forum has been involved in the Environment Charter process since before it had that name, and has a strong commitment to strategic environmental planning. A major achievement of the year therefore was the initiation of a pilot project to implement the Charter in an example UK Overseas Territory (UKOT). With Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) support, and at the invitation of the Turks & Caicos Islands Government, this pilot exercise, facilitated by the Forum, started in late 2002. Local "ownership" of the outcomes was paramount. As many local stakeholders as possible have been involved in interviews and workshops, reviewing current work against the needs of the Charter and identifying important gaps. Three rounds of consultations and workshops have resulted in a draft strategy for action developed by senior officials and NGOs. This will be discussed with TCI Executive Council in the coming months. FCO is supporting also a second exercise in the Falkland Islands, and the Forum has advised those who are just starting this work. In early 2004, the Forum will produce guidelines for possible use in other UK Overseas Territories, based on the experience in TCI and incorporating any early additional lessons from the Falklands. An interesting development late in the year, and partly resulting from the Bermuda conference (see below), has been interest from the Crown Dependencies in exploring the possibility of comparable Environment Charters.

One of the major events and achievements of the Forum during the year was the organisation and execution of *A Sense of Direction*, a conference on conservation in UK Overseas Territories and other small islands and communities, which took place between 22 to 27 March. Much time and energy was spent by the Forum and its

partner organisations in Bermuda, Bermuda National Trust, Bermuda Zoological Society, Bermuda Audubon Society and Bermuda Ministry of Environment, in preparing for this conference. The NGO sector, with almost all the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies, was well represented, as were most UKOT and CD governments. Bermuda's Minister of the Environment attended many sessions, leading major participation from the Territory. A strong team was fielded

by Environment Policy Department and Overseas Territories Department of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, but unfortunately there was no representation from other UK government departments. UK Government's statutory conservation adviser, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee was well represented. Several other countries and territories also participated to give a wider view.

On the first day delegates were treated to a very useful introduction to the island and conservation

issues on a tour of Bermuda, which included the world-renowned restoration project on Nonsuch Island. Plenary sessions included presentations related to: Environment Charters and strategic planning; managing conservation organisations; climate change; and dealing with invasive species. Delegates had the opportunity to work on implementing management plans in the field. The conference has been reported to be very well organised and delegates found the topics discussed to be highly useful. The full summary of the conference appeared in *Forum News 23* and is available on the Forum website together with the proceedings of the conference – [www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org).

The Forum and its member organisations have been involved in a number of biodiversity and planning initiatives. Widespread recognition, across Bermuda, of the need for a coordinated community-based plan for the conservation of the Island's unique natural heritage



*Flamingoes and Stilts are popular sights on the salt-pans beside some towns in Turks & Caicos, but some pans are being in-filled to hold new buildings. The process to implement the Environment Charter provides ways to help people decide between options for future developments.*

prompted the launch in 2001 of an initiative to develop a biodiversity Strategic and Action Plan (BSAP); this was launched during 2002. The BSAP had the support from the UK Government's Darwin Initiative, in partnership with the Bermuda Government, Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo and the Bermuda Zoological Society, with another Forum member organisation, Fauna and Flora International. The Forum's joint work with Turks & Caicos National Trust and other member organisation CABI Bioscience over the past few years, partly supported by the Darwin Initiative, resulted in the completion of the first full version of the Management Plan for the conservation and sustainable use of the Ramsar site of North, Middle and East Caicos and its surroundings, and the presentation of this to TCI's Executive Council. Work is in hand starting to implement this plan.

Funding issues have continued to dominate the Forum's agenda, both funding for the Forum and funding for the UKOTs which is more fully outlined in the section below. The lack of awareness in UK – amongst public, politicians, and funding bodies – of the UKOTs and their biodiversity importance remains a severe problem. The Friends of the UK Overseas Territories has increased its membership only slowly despite all publications having membership forms attached. Arrangements for subscriptions to be paid by credit or debit card are now available. Individuals who have an interest in the work of the Forum are encouraged to sign up, and encourage others to do so.

Two rearrangements – within one year – of FCO's fund which supports environmental work in UKOTs have absorbed a great deal of time by Forum personnel. That some of the changes reversed, without consultation, measures brought in only three years earlier after detailed analysis and consultation illustrated a serious problem of lack of continuity. The Forum commends FCO staff who have worked hard to overcome the difficulties and is committed to continue to work with them to develop cost-effective and appropriate procedures to keep funding linked to policy.

### **Relations and links with UK Overseas Territories and UKOT NGOs**

The suggestion by some member organisations in the UKOTs that they should move from honorary Associate Membership of the Forum to paying Full Membership was described in last year's Annual Report. The Forum is delighted that the five UKOT members who indicated that intention last year have implemented that, and a sixth, BVI National Parks Trust, is taking the same course.

The conference in Bermuda (noted above) allowed much exchange of ideas and experience between delegates, governmental and NGO, from the UKOTs, the Crown Dependencies, UK and other countries and territories. Several UKOT representatives reported how important it is to realise that they are not alone, but that many of the UKOTs have similar problems and, by experiences shared

and by asking for help, problems can be solved.

Various Forum member organisations and individuals entertained delegates from St Helena, Ascension, Falklands and Pitcairn, who travelled to the Bermuda conference via the UK and made constructive use of their stopovers. RSPB was able to offer a day's course on funding proposals, and a visit to Rye Meads Nature reserve - as well as a chain-saw



*Barbara George and Tara George with her son Nandeli visit Rye Meads during their visit to the UK on their journey to the conference in Bermuda*

course for Tara George for the removal of Mexican thorn on Ascension. As the period covered by this report ends, a 2-month course on herbarium techniques is in progress at Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, with UKOT participation.

The Anguilla National Trust has been visited on several occasions by representatives of RSPB which resulted in a bird identification card being published to help Trust funds. The RSPB has secured funding (now supplemented by FCO) for work with the Trust to set up tours for visitors to help with funds and to raise awareness of the rich biodiversity, both in bird life and heritage. Avon Carty, President of the Anguilla National Trust, attending the conference in Bermuda, stressed the importance of help for the Trust. The main issues are funding, lack of human resources and education of all stakeholders.

The Forum has been pleased that representatives from the Crown Dependencies (the Isle of Man and the Bailiwicks of Jersey and Guernsey) have opted to attend the six-monthly meeting with government and become involved with Forum activities. Their contribution both at the meetings and at the conference held in Bermuda has been encouraging, and it has been evident that the exchange of experiences is beneficial to both UKOTs and UKCDs. The link of CDs to the UK is different from the UKOTs; this has meant that they fall into a gap with no Environment Charter, but this issue is now being explored.

## Relations with UK Government and government agencies

The Forum has maintained regular contact with FCO, both by frequent informal contacts and at the larger half-yearly meetings. Valerie Caton, the new Head of Environment Policy Department, together with Roy Osborne, Deputy Head, Overseas Territories Department, Denise Dudgeon, EPD, and Joeline Foster, OTD, attended the conference in Bermuda. Valerie Caton gave a presentation on the UK Government's commitment to the Environmental Charter process in the UKOTs. Quoting FCO Minister Bill Rammell, she said "The UK has a rich natural heritage in the environment of the Overseas Territories. We must not squander this. We have a shared vision with the OTs to implement sustainable management practices". Valerie Caton stressed the need for close contact between the UKOTs and Government on their implementation of the Charters, and on assistance needed so that HMG could more effectively implement its own charter commitments. The Forum's work on facilitating the Environment Charter process and on



*Cheque presentations from Bermuda Minister of Environment, Dennis Lister, to Andrew Dobson (Bermuda Audubon Society for the conference organisers) and from Valerie Caton (FCO) at the Bermuda Conference*

information flow generally can be of major help here.

Two formal meetings with UK Government have taken place at which funding commitments have been discussed. The Forum expressed concern at the consolidation of the Environment Fund for Overseas Territories into a global Environment Fund, especially as the EFOT had been cited only a few months before in the Environment Charters as a prime means by which HMG would support the work under the Charters. Despite its reservations, the Forum volunteered considerable effort to produce an edition appropriate for the UKOTs of FCO's guidelines for the operation of the new combined fund, but problems remained in handling the first round of applications to this. A few months later, the Environment Fund itself was absorbed into the new Global Opportunities Fund (GOF). Following interventions by the Forum and constructive efforts by FCO officials, Ministers have indicated that at least £500,000 pa (the same amount as the old EFOT) will be made available out of GOF for environmental projects in the UKOTs for the two years 2004/5 and 2005/6. The Forum is now working with FCO

and DFID (see below) to try to arrange that the procedures for this funding will be both simple and reflect the shared responsibilities of UK and the UKOTs to environmental conservation, in the context of the Environment Charters.

The Department for International Development (DFID) announced at last the start of its fund (which had been previously provisionally named the Global Environment Programme for UKOTs). Despite the 4-year delay since originally announced in 1999, this is nonetheless welcome,



*The important intertidal area at the SE of Jersey is already a Ramsar site; the Forum is advising Jersey colleagues on extensions and additions*

as is the appointment of Dick Beales, who has considerable experience of UKOTs, to manage DFID work in this area. The details of the operation of the fund are still being worked out, but the programme will be designed to ensure complementarity with FCO funds, and it is anticipated that the two departments – and the Forum – will work closely together on these issues. As this report goes to press, plans are being developed to combine the FCO and DFID funds as a UKOT Environment Programme.

Two UKOT applications to Defra's Darwin Initiative were successful. They were empowering the people of Tristan da Cunha to implement the Convention on Biological Diversity and assessment of the coastal biodiversity of Anegada, BVI.

The Forum has also worked closely with Defra on the Ramsar Convention, participating in the UK National Ramsar Committee and the Conference of the Parties, where a representative from the Isle of Man formed part of the UK delegation. The Forum has been exploring with Defra and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) the possibility of a review of potential Ramsar site in the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies.

The Forum Chairman has briefed the newly appointed Governors for BVI, Tom Macan, TCI, Jim Poston, and the Falkland Islands, Howard Pearce, and the new Deputy Governor of Bermuda, Nick Carter, as well as other officials. The Forum Chairman has also had follow-up meetings with several Governors and their colleagues.

The Forum and partner organisations were involved in the proposal to add Inaccessible Island to Gough Island World Heritage Site, which was submitted via the Department for Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) in January (see



www.ukotcf.org for the management plan).

The Forum has advised and liaised with Government on a range of other matters including regular reports to international conservation conventions, and attended various meetings such as on the preparations and follow-up on the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and at the US Embassy in London on the White Water to Blue Water Initiative.

### Conservation Priorities

This aspect is central to the other activities, and the work reported in other sections is largely to allow delivery of conservation priorities of the Forum, generally with its local partners. A central element giving structure to these priorities is the Environment Charter process, to which the Forum has bent much of its effort, as noted earlier.

Several major individual issues are reported in the Forum Working Groups' reports below.

A highlight from the South Atlantic Working Group is the Forum initiative led by member organisation RSPB, in conjunction with FCO and the Administration of Ascension. A two-year project for the restoration of seabirds on Ascension Island, involving the eradication of feral cats is well advanced and has already resulted in the first successful nesting of some species on the main island of Ascension for many decades.

From the Wider Caribbean Working Group, the British Virgin Islands National Parks Trust in partnership with Forum member organisation Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, has been working on developing checklists of key taxa, documenting threats to biodiversity, developing management plans and promoting environmental education. The major joint initiative in sustainable development in TCI involving the Forum, CABI and TC National Trust has already been noted.

One area not presently covered by working groups is the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas, where progress is noted in the designation by the Ministry of Defence (MoD) of a



*Many dolphins are caught as an unintended result of fishing activities*

Ramsar site on the most important wetland in the island. The Forum is continuing to collaborate in developing management. In Gibraltar, progress is being made by

Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society and MoD in the development of management plans for important areas in Gibraltar.

One issue that the Forum has been able to raise at the request of Crown Dependencies is the severe mortality of cetaceans in the English Channel as by-catch of certain fishing operations. Certain practical solutions are feasible, but the EU fishing policy gives difficulty in implementing these.

### Public Awareness and Publicity

The end of last year saw the completion of the final three in the Forum's series of display boards that are designed to raise awareness of the UKOTs both in the UK and in the Territories themselves. This year, web versions of posters were produced for the remaining (16<sup>th</sup>) UKOT, the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas,

and the three Crown Dependencies. With all this material now complete, the booklet *Promoting Biodiversity Conservation in the UK's Overseas Territories* has been republished to include this latest material. This was produced in time for distribution at the conference in Bermuda.

Following the successful day, noted in the previous report, when the Forum staged a display of the complete set of 18 posters at the UK Overseas Territories Open Day at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, London, on 2 June as part of the String of Pearls Golden Jubilee Celebrations, a smaller display was staged on 8 October for the Global Issues Open Day. The full set of boards was on display at the conference in Bermuda, combinations are used at various other events, and individual boards continue to be used at various offices around the UKOTs.

### Information Management

*Forum News* 22 and 23 were published during the year, and this newsletter remains a facility for the UKOTs to share information.

The Forum's website is continually being updated, and issues of *Forum News* and other publications of interest to members are included on the site. The proceedings from the Bermuda conference are available on the website.

The database is continuing to be used and material added. However more volunteers are needed to populate the database with information. The conference in Bermuda gave the Forum an ideal platform to promote the database and it is hoped that more use will be made of this important facility. It provides also a means to make available key publications. One good example added in the current year is the Management Plan for Inaccessible Island, Tristan da Cunha.



A discussion group facility is available on the site and has the potential to be used as a 'think tank'. Although not yet fully implemented, it potentially complements the database. The database readily stores information that can be easily accessed later, whilst the discussion group is more suited to current exploration of ideas. Implementation of the discussion groups depends on the availability of volunteer moderators for topics.

### Working Groups

The Forum working groups have met on a regular basis and continue to maintain contact between the Territories themselves, Territory government representatives and others helping actually or potentially in these areas. Reports from the Groups follow this overall report.

### Organisational Development

Raising funds for the Forum's work has been a continuing struggle. People donating their time and skills undertake a major part of the Forum's activities, but there is no way that some direct costs can be avoided. Approximately 10% of the Forum's income comes from the subscriptions of its member organisations; the rest has to be secured elsewhere. This has always been difficult, partly because funding for work for UK Overseas Territories falls neither in UK domestic budgets nor via international aid. Despite the Forum's efforts, UKOTs, their immense biodiversity importance, and UK's share of responsibility for them are not widely perceived in UK. The economic situation has been made worse in that many charitable and other organisations have themselves suffered severe declines in their income available for contributing because of the state of

the investment market.

The difficulties leading to a reduction in paid staff time and the loss of valuable experience were noted in last year's report. During the year, the Forum has made, with the approval of its member organisations and the Charity Commission, some changes to its constitution. These open some other potential routes to funding – but the funds themselves still need to be secured.

As foreshadowed two years ago, the Forum has completed a "house-keeping" review to address small inconsistencies in its operating procedures. These have been put before the member organisations for approval early in July 2003.

### Acknowledgements

Many individuals and representatives of member organisations have given many hours of voluntary time to the Forum both in the UK and in the Territories. We would particularly like to thank Jim Stevenson, on his retirement from Executive Committee and as RSPB's representative.

Financial assistance as project grants or donations is greatly appreciated, from Foreign and Commonwealth Office, British Ecological Society, the Royal Bank of Scotland Group and anonymous donors.

The Forum would also like to thank all the Friends of the UKOTs for their continuing support and interest in the Forum.

The Forum is also grateful to member organisations for allowing meetings to take place at their offices, particularly RSPB, the Zoological Society of London, The National Trust, and UNEP-WCMC. Falkland Islands Government kindly allowed the use of Falkland House for South Atlantic Working Group meetings.

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## Report of UKOTCF British Indian Ocean Territory Working Group

The two major conservation projects pursued in the year 2002/3 were the Chagos Conservation Management Plan and Designation of the Great Chagos Bank as a Ramsar Site. There was progress on both.

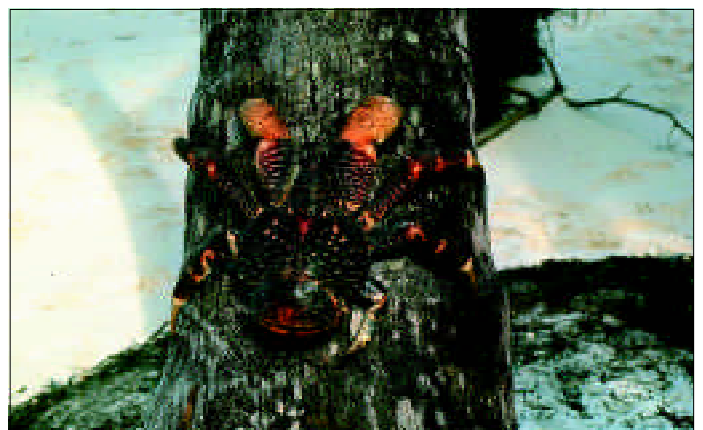
The BIOT Government commissioned Dr Charles Sheppard and Dr Mark Spalding to write a draft desktop management plan for the whole Territory. This was produced in October 2002 and is being considered by the Government.

As regards Ramsar designation, the meeting on 15 January 2003 between the UK Government and the UK Overseas Territories Forum was informed that the UK Government intended to pursue the proposal that the Great Chagos Bank should be designated as a Ramsar site. The Friends of the Chagos welcomed this important announcement. Implementation of the announced policy is under examination by the Government.

Fishing levels continue to be closely monitored. Longliner activity remained steady; there is high demand for yellow fin tuna licences from purse seine vessels and a high level of vessels transiting BIOT waters to fish on the high seas. At the Friends of the Chagos AGM Dr Spalding argued for new precautionary measures to protect fish stocks ("no take" zones and protection of breeding "hot spots").

Specific recent and current scientific and environmental projects include the expedition of the research vessel "Odyssey" in the summer of 2002 (which recorded high cetacean abundance and diversity) and a planned habitat restoration project (with rat eradication) on Eagle Island.

On the question of possible human re-settlement (which has environmental implications), the British Government has said, "While the [Posford Haskoning] report concludes that short-term habitation for limited numbers on a subsistence basis is possible, it also emphasises that any long-term settlement would be precarious and costly".



*The CITES-listed coconut crab*

# Report of UKOTCF South Atlantic Working Group

The Group held four meetings during the year, including an informal get together at the Forum's Bermuda Conference – a rare opportunity to talk face-to-face with conservation representatives from our far-flung and widespread Territories. Ann Brown took over from David Taylor who had skilfully steered the Group from its formation and retired after 5 years as the Group's Chairman.

Frances Marks

continued her sterling work as Secretary to the Group.

Our membership continues to be small in number, but contains considerable expertise and an in-depth knowledge of wildlife and conservation issues in the South Atlantic.

Ann Brown, Dorothy Evans, Sarah Sanders and Jim Stevenson visited the Falklands, St Helena and Ascension during the course of the year. The departure of Jim Stevenson is a considerable loss to the Group, but we extend a warm welcome to Sarah Sanders who replaces him as RSPB International Officer for Overseas Territories.

The past twelve months have seen some significant events and developments. The newly formed St Helena National Trust appointed its first full time Director. Ascension Island elected its first democratic council. The Princess Royal visited Ascension Island and St Helena in October, and the Duke of York visited the Falkland Islands in November. It is very encouraging to note that seabirds are returning to Ascension Island in areas abandoned as breeding sites over 100 years ago, following the first stage of the restoration work long pursued by the Forum and now led by RSPB with initial funding from FCO.

On a less happy note, there is great cause for concern about the threat to seabird populations from extensive commercial fishing activities throughout the South Atlantic. Such activities are seriously impacting on the globally threatened Tristan Albatross and Atlantic Petrel, the Black-browed Albatrosses in Falkland waters, and the Wandering Albatrosses of South Georgia. We urge the UK Government to include these Territories within its ratification of the international Agreement on Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels as soon as possible to help effect maximum protection measures.

## Falkland Islands

Seabird issues feature strongly in efforts to protect the wildlife of the Falkland Islands where legislation has now banned the traditional collection of albatross eggs.



*Some members of the South Atlantic Working Group meet for discussion at the conference in Bermuda*

Falklands

Conservation, our member organisation in the Islands, has continued to research and test measures to reduce seabird mortality from trawlers. A natural catastrophe led to the poisoning of thousands of penguins over the spring and summer months, thought to be the result of a locally occurring red algal bloom. The results of investigations into this are still uncertain. Until birds return to breed in the following season the

size of any serious reduction in numbers will not be known. As the health of the world's oceans deteriorates, so incidents of this type are likely to become a more frequent occurrence.

A survey of Southern Sea Lions was conducted around the Falklands in January-February 2003. Encouragingly, numbers were found to show a 35% increase on a similar survey in 1995. The population however remains at but a fraction of the 80,000 of the 1930s, with no explanation as to why it is unable to recover to previous levels. On land, eradication of rats from offshore islands continues to improve these habitats for ground nesting native birds. The start of work to study and assess distribution of Falkland invertebrates is a notable development receiving our wholehearted support.

We are delighted to welcome the appointment of a Conservation Strategy Officer by the Falkland Islands Government, with support from the Environment Fund for Overseas Territories. Work has commenced on drawing up a Biodiversity Action Plan with the aim of the Islands signing up to the Convention on Biological Diversity in due course. This is also a key step in identifying conservation priorities and defining how commitments in the Environment Charter will be met; in this, the Forum which is facilitating the first pilot exercise elsewhere, is advising the Strategy Officer.

## South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands and the British Antarctic Territory

Further south, concerns over potential disturbance and damage to its sensitive environment from tourism activities on South Georgia have been expressed. New wildlife legislation is urgently needed here, and it is understood that resources have now been made available to do this.

The series of display boards produced by the Forum featuring wildlife and conservation issues in all Overseas Territories has been completed with the final pair on South



Georgia and the British Antarctic Territories. Suitable locations to obtain maximum and appropriate exposure for copies of them are still being sought.

## St Helena

The Group continues to place a high priority in supporting conservation efforts on St Helena. We have closely followed the proposals for an airport development,



*The Spiky Yellow Woodlouse is an amazing little creature found on the endemic plants at High Peak. It has been called a 'living fossil' because it is an ancient species.*

following a vote in favour of its construction last year. Discussions with the leading developer were terminated, however, and new expressions of interest sought – the outcome of which are not yet available. We know that the proposed site contains a high level of endemic invertebrates. We strongly recommended that a baseline invertebrates study should be done prior to any plans being considered so that important wildlife locations are taken fully into account, mitigation measures for protection or any damage can be imposed and areas defined or excluded from the development area in order to safeguard key populations. With support of FCO funding, a survey is now due to take place in September 2003. The submission of a comprehensive Environmental Impact Assessment(s) for this development is also of key importance, and we await progress on this major issue with considerable interest.

The St Helena National Trust completed its first year of operations. The appointment of Barbara George as its first Director was a key development. These are early days for such an essential body, which not only co-ordinates wildlife and conservation interests, but also has a key role in preservation of the Island's historic buildings. These are one of its greatest assets but many are suffering from neglect. We look forward to supporting the Trust's further development, and to working with them in years to come.

## Ascension Island

The RSPB Seabird Restoration Project is coming to a close on Ascension Island. There are clear indications that this has been a very successful programme, aimed at eradicating predatory feral cats and so encouraging seabird populations to re-colonise the main island where they were once present

in very large numbers. Encouragingly, three species of seabirds have recently fledged their young from mainland locations for the first time in living memory. The final stages of the programme have yet to be completed, but it is hopeful that the old major breeding colonies will be re-established.

The Ascension Island Conservation Officers have had a busy year – Richard White finished his contracted term supervising the Seabird Project and returned to UK; Stedson Stroud was appointed Assistant Conservation Officer to support Tara George. Studies have been conducted and nursery cultivation started with the endemic Ascension Spurge *Pteris adscensionis*, a feasibility study on rat eradication was organised, events were run for the Conservation Group and Ascension Explorers and wildlife tours arranged. The Conservation Centre in the Old Bakery continues to be an important focus for the Island's wildlife activities.

## Tristan da Cunha

As with other Territories, large scale commercial fisheries pose a major threat to the internationally important seabirds of Tristan da Cunha. With very limited resources adequately to patrol these activities, birds continue to die at unacceptably high rates. The spread of introduced species is another serious problem to the many native and endemic species in the Tristan group, the most remote islands in the world. The removal of flax from Inaccessible Island is planned for the near future. We have also been actively pressing for the extension of the World Heritage Site at Gough Island to include Inaccessible Island, and look forward to its confirmation soon. Improvements in communications would be an enormous help in supporting conservation efforts on Tristan. We strongly urge all who can play a constructive part, in reducing the huge cost and the access problems of communications with the wider world; to tackle this issue with some urgency. For the future, we strongly support the RSPB Darwin Initiative Project *Managing Biodiversity on Tristan da Cunha* due to take place over the next three years, and offer every assistance to make this the success it deserves.



*One of the first Masked Booby chicks to be reared on the main island of Ascension for over a century, following conservation action*

# Report of the UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

The WCWG held two formal meetings and one informal meeting during the year. In addition there was an informal lunch meeting during the Conference in Bermuda and regular contact was maintained by email between members of the Group and representatives in the Territories dealing with particular issues.

The Bermuda Conference provided an excellent opportunity for us to get to know each other better on an informal basis, but at future Conferences a formal Group meeting should be included in the programme. As Jim Stevenson has left the RSPB, he resigned as Secretary in February and Oliver Cheesman has taken his place. The Group and its Chairman would like to take this opportunity to thank Jim for all that he has done over the past four years to help the Territories and the Group on a wide range of issues, and thank Oliver for agreeing to take over.

Unlike previous years there was no one major environmental issue which had to be dealt with. It was the ongoing problems – over-development, lack of proper planning controls etc – which have been at the forefront of our efforts to support our colleagues in the Territories.

One unique ongoing problem is the volcano on Montserrat, which still shows signs of activity with pyroclastic flows during the year.

Another problem which is fast developing throughout the Region is that of invasive species: the population of feral pigs has continued to expand in the Centre Hills of Montserrat; feral cats, chickens and pigeons in Bermuda; feral cats and introduced Green Iguanas in the Cayman Islands; and goats on Anegada. Following the initial success of the restoration programme on Ascension Island, we will have to support action on invasive species in the Territories covered by the WCWG without further delay.

## Anguilla

RSPB is assisting the Anguilla National Trust in the implementation of an FCO-supported ecotourism project. The purpose is to demonstrate how a network of protected areas on Anguilla can benefit local people through education and income generation from ecotourism. Focusing on Big Spring and East End Pond, an important site for breeding and migrant birds, and in close association with the village and school, it is hoped to increase the number of visitors to the site through the following activities:

- Training local guides and offering tours;
- Media campaign (seminars, posters, media releases, invites to VIPs) to promote the site to decision makers



*Some members of the Wider Caribbean Working group meet for discussion at the conference in Bermuda*

and tourists;

- Education programme for teachers and students;
- Strengthening the ANT through developing an effective sales and marketing strategy.

It is anticipated the income generated from tours and other marketing initiatives will enable the ANT to employ a development officer and operate the following season's tours without external funding.

The Governor of Anguilla has approached the Forum to

explore assistance in implementing the Environment Charter.

## Bermuda

Quarrying resulting in the destruction of the unique cave system is an issue facing the various environmental organisations in Bermuda. Bermuda is fast running out of quarry material and in the near future will anyway have to resort to importing such material. Therefore there is a strong case that the Government should stop all quarrying forthwith if the caves, which are interconnected and contain more than 60 endemic species so far identified, are to survive. Feral animals, as on many islands, remain a serious problem. The Ministry of the Environment is currently looking at island-wide eradication programmes for some. Discussions are continuing on the proposal that Cooper's Island (the site of the abandoned US tracking station) should become a national park. And, on another positive note, the Biodiversity Project has been working on a publicity campaign, on radio and TV, in the press and by advertisement, to raise awareness among the people of the need to protect the environment.

The Bermuda Audubon Society has acquired two new reserves, thanks to the generosity of local landowners. The



*Part of Bermuda's rich but threatened cave system*



Alfred Blackburn Smith Nature Reserve was officially opened in February 2003. This 8.7-acre reserve is one of the last remaining tracts of undeveloped Bermuda upland forest supporting unusual plants such as Box Briar, Darrell's Fleabane and Turnera. White-tailed Tropicbirds (Longtails) nest on the coastal side of the reserve while the woodlands on the lee-side of the hilltop provide habitat for a variety of bird-life. The Society has already carried out much restoration work. As part of its management plan for the reserve, the removal of invasive species and the planting of native and endemic species continue today through working parties from the Bermuda Audubon Society and Bermuda Zoological Society, and horticultural trainees from Bermuda College.

In May 2003, the Bermuda Audubon Society also acquired the ten small islands situated in Harrington Sound known as "Cockroach Island". These massive rockfalls from the nearby Abbot's Cliff have historical, cultural and environmental significance in one of the most scenic areas of Bermuda. The Audubon Society has pledged to remove all invasive plant species, replant with indigenous plants and install nesting boxes for Longtails. For more information on these reserves, read the society's newsletter Vol. 14 No. 2 (Summer 2003) at [www.audubon.bm](http://www.audubon.bm)

Just prior to the Forum's conference, Colin Clubbe (RBG Kew) and Karen Varnham (invasive species consultant) ran a workshop on invasive species as part of Bermuda's Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. Bermuda's invasive species problems are extreme, and the introduction of alien invasive species is still the greatest threat to Bermuda's biodiversity. The one-week workshop, well attended by all sectors of society, identified awareness raising and import controls as key needs.

## British Virgin Islands

A three-year project, entitled the *Darwin Initiative Assessment of the Coastal Biodiversity of Anegada, BVI*, was submitted and approved on behalf of the University of Exeter, with UK partners RBG Kew and RSPB, with local partners including the BVI Conservation and Fisheries Department, BVI National Parks Trust (NPT) and the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College. This project will commence in October 2003 and will include assessments of marine turtles, plants and birds on Anegada.

The NPT's Anegada Rock Iguana *Cyclura pinguis* rehabilitation programme continues to address the recovery of this critically endangered and endemic species on Anegada. However the primary threats to project success include feral cats and habitat loss within the proposed protected area. The NPT has participated in a number of public meetings to discuss these on-going issues.

The Island Resources Foundation (IRF) completed a Resource Characterisation and Management Plan of the privately owned island of Sandy Cay, in order to address future management requirements, which may include the NPT.



*The scrambling cactus Leptocereus quadricostatus growing on limestone cays in Anegada*

The NPT reviewed and updated its principal act, the *BVI National Parks Ordinance*, through funding provided by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Upon the Act's approval, anticipated for 2003, the BVI will fulfil requirements found within regional and international agreements.

A red-listing workshop, comprised of NPT and RBG Kew personnel, identified five critically endangered and two endangered plants that are Puerto Rico bank endemics. These listings have been submitted to the IUCN for inclusion in the 2003 Global Red List of Threatened Species.

The island restoration of Great Tobago National Park, a regionally important habitat for the endangered Magnificent Frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens*, continues. The NPT has constructed two artificial nesting platforms to promote the expansion of the colony, whilst removal of feral goats is an on-going activity to ensure complete eradication. However rat predation is expected to escalate following the decline in the goat population.

## Cayman Islands

The Grand Cayman Blue Iguana project is proceeding successfully, and will be the model on which other iguana protection and breeding projects in the Region will be based. Barkers National Park in West Bay has been established as Cayman's first National Park. The nature project on Little Cayman, funded by FCO, comprising a series of viewing platforms with interpretive signs overlooking all the wetlands, has been completed. This project, again, is one which can be a model for other Territories.

On Cayman Brac, trails and a forest boardwalk have been established as avitourism sites. The Department of Tourism have asked for a proposal for a similar project on Grand Cayman and are taking a stand at the UK Bird Fair in August to encourage avitourism.

Sadly, there has been no progress on acquiring the Central Mangrove Wetland as a Ramsar site. Proposals have been put to CIG for the establishment of a series of "Heritage Sites" to protect small but environmentally important areas.



*Enameled ceramic interpretative sign for Grape Tree Ponds, Little Cayman*

## Montserrat

The volcano still poses a problem, with a dome building on the north side in January followed by some pyroclastic flows later in the month.

Efforts are still continuing with the development of the botanic garden at the Montserrat National Trust headquarters with the help of Royal Botanic Gardens Kew. The installation of a solar powered pump has provided an environmentally friendly way of circulating water in the newly constructed pond. A network of trails is being developed in the Centre Hills.

The FCO-funded project on *emergency conservation of the Montserrat Oriole*, conducted by RSPB, MNT and the Montserrat Forestry Department, is now into its third year. Research continues to focus on identifying the cause of the recent decline. The picture that is starting to emerge is of three particular problems. First, major ash-falls almost certainly reduced the insect food supply during 1997 and 1998. Second, the rat population explosion in 1999-2001 led to very high rates of nest predation, while concurrent increases in a predatory native bird – the pearly-eyed thrasher – added to predation pressure. Finally, drought in 2001, and to a lesser extent in 2000 and 2003, appeared to reduce oriole breeding effort. Researchers are currently wrestling with the problem of predicting the circumstances under which rat numbers might return to high levels, or insect numbers might drop in



*Montserrat Oriole, Icterus oberi*

response to ash falls. Population monitoring is delivering indeterminate information on current trends in the population, though there are certainly no signs of major recovery. Meanwhile, attempts are being made to develop some conservation interventions that might help the oriole. In particular, during 2003, field-tests are investigating supplementary feeding, experimental rat control, and predator deterrence. During July 2003, a training workshop on 'introduction to bird census techniques' is being conducted in Montserrat, with participants from the Forestry Department, keen volunteers, and other neighbouring islands. In addition, during the second half of 2003, the RSPB and MNT are launching a joint environmental education project based around the oriole, which will concentrate on schools on the island.

## Turks and Caicos Islands

In 2002, TCI Government decided that it would like TCI to act as the pilot UKOT to develop the strategy for action to implement the Environment Charter, this being the first commitment under each Charter. FCO had agreed to fund the facilitation work by the Forum in a suitable UKOT, and work started in late 2002, with UKOTCF's Mike Pienkowski and Dace Ground as facilitators. Michelle

Fulford-Gardiner, Deputy Director in TCI's Department of Environmental & Coastal Resources, chairs the project committee. Three rounds of consultations and workshops on the development of the strategy have been held, in October/November, January/February and April/May. A presentation has been given to the Governor and Ministers in Executive Council, and a progress report made to the Bermuda conference. By May, the draft strategy for action had been prepared with senior personnel of government departments and NGOs, the next stages being to take this back to Executive Council. The facilitators will also prepare guidelines for wider use. As one need already identified by the process, there was a bid to FCO to investigate a pilot biological records centre approach for UKOTs; this was not successful but will be explored further.

The Environmental Charter process is occurring at a particularly interesting time for TCI, because there is both a Sustainable Development Planning Initiative current as well as major development proposals involving: built

development over much of the currently uninhabited West Caicos; further developments in Providenciales and North and Middle Caicos; and the introduction of large cruise liners at Grand Turk. How these large developments relate to strategic planning is a matter of concern to both senior officials and others, who hope that some process can be developed.

The draft management plan (developed over the last 4 years largely by the Darwin Initiative project run by Turks & Caicos National Trust, CABI and the Forum) for the area around the Ramsar site was discussed in further workshops with the local community, as well as one with senior technical officers of government departments and other bodies. The plan was then revised in the light of these comments, and printed and circulated both physically and on the Forum's web-site ([www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org)). At the same time, TCNT Executive Director Ethlyn Gibbs-Williams, Vice-Chairman Norman Hamilton and Forum Chairman Mike Pienkowski gave a presentation on the Plan to TCI Executive Council, and this was very well received, with the Ministers encouraging further related work. The plan is being used as the basis for 3-monthly planning and

reviewing the continuing work, initially at the low level that funding allows. Local funds have been secured by TCNT for much of the renovation of the old school in

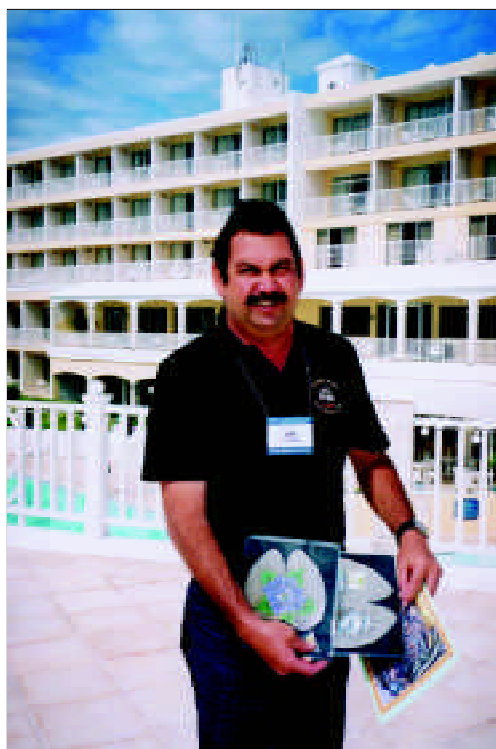
Middle Caicos given by TCI Government to the Trust for an eco-centre. FCO has just offered funding for field-road (trail) development. Funds continue to be sought from local, UK and other sources for other key aspects of the implementation of the Plan, including recruitment and training of more local personnel to ensure its long-term sustainability.

The Trust continues its many environmental education projects, including a newsletter, junior membership, summer camps and other activities. Bryan Naqqi Manco, Conservation Officer of TCNT, is participating throughout June and July in a herbarium management course at Forum member organisation, the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.



## Report of UKOTCF Pitcairn Working Group

Pitcairn has remained in the public gaze throughout this year, and, towards the end of the reporting period, seven men dwelling on the Island were charged with a number of offences. It would be facile to deny that this cloud hanging over the community has had conservation repercussions, both because of the administrative effort diverted towards resolving legal issues and because of the impact on the morale of the small, 45-person community. Perhaps for these reasons, tourist proposals highlighted in recent annual reports have not advanced. Nevertheless there is good progress to report on some fronts.



*Jay Warren, Conservation officer from Pitcairn at the Bermuda conference*

During February and March Dr Mike Brooke, the Working Group Chairman, and Rosie Trevelyan, Director of the Tropical Biology Association, visited Pitcairn to discuss with the Islanders the Henderson Island Management Plan. This visit, supported by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, resulted in a substantial re-write of the draft plan and the revision that emerged was approved by the Island Council. That revision is now undergoing scrutiny by Government and NGOs. The hope is that it can be submitted to UNESCO late in 2003, in fulfilment of the obligation accepted by the British Government at the time of the World Heritage Designation some 14 years ago.

Following this visit, the Group Chairman was able to accompany the Pitcairn Conservation Officer, Jay Warren, from Pitcairn via Los Angeles to London and thence to the Bermuda 'Sense of Direction' Conference, (see *Forum News* 23).

Also good news was a successful application to the Foreign Office for funding to extend the work of the small nursery established by Jay Warren. The money awarded will allow Jay Warren and others, under the guidance of Dr Steve Waldren of Trinity College, Dublin, to enhance populations of the rarest plant species and to develop methods for replacing some of Pitcairn's alien vegetation by native flora. The work will start in the second half of 2003.



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*Photographs courtesy of Chagos Conservation Trust, Colin Clubbe, Andrew Dobson, Tara George, Annie Glasspool, Michael Gore FRPS, Frances Marks, Paul Pearce-Kelly (Zoological Society of London), Mike Pienkowski, Eric Shaw, Jim Stevenson, Andrew Syvret, Jack Ward, Richard White.*

## Membership

The current UK members of the Forum are: British Ecological Society; British Microbial Biodiversity Association; British Ornithologists' Union; CAB International; Fauna & Flora International; The National Trust; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre; World Wide Fund for Nature UK; Zoological Society of London.

Current members of the Forum in the UK Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies are: Anguilla National Trust; Ascension Heritage Society, Bermuda Audubon Society; Bermuda National Trust; Bermuda Zoological Society; Friends of the Chagos; British Virgin Islands National Parks Trust; National Trust for the Cayman Islands; Falklands Conservation; Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society; La Société Guernesiaise; Société Jersiaise, National Trust of Jersey, Manx Chough Project; Montserrat National Trust; St. Helena National Trust; National Trust of the Turks & Caicos Islands.