

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum Annual Report 2004/05

Chairman's Report on behalf of the Council

Overview

This has been a productive year for the Forum, with a review of actual and potential Ramsar Convention Wetlands of International Importance completed across UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, major progress made in support of FCO/DFID's Overseas Territories Environment Programme, facilitation provided to several UKOTs, notably St Helena and Ascension, on implementing the Environment Charter, joint projects led by the Forum itself with our Turks & Caicos partners and led by its member organisations in other UKOTs. UK's ratification of the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels was welcomed. The Forum's network voluntarily provided support to Tristan da Cunha to bring its legislation into line to allow its joining UK ratification, but was concerned that UK Government seemed unable to find the small resources needed to complete this process. The problems of illegal fisheries and lack of enforcement in several UKOTs also remained a focus. Planning for the major conference in Jersey in October 2006 progressed.

The Forum continued to work closely with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development to help implement their Overseas Territories Environment Programme, especially in the provision of advice and information. This, including an element of the work contracted by OTEP, will continue in the following two years.

The Chairman managed a series of other projects. These included, for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, completion of the main phase of the review of actual and potential Ramsar Convention Wetlands of International Importance in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, as well as voluntary work on UK's reporting on this and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Following the pilot work in the Turks & Caicos Islands, Mike and Ann Pienkowski facilitated the development by St Helena of a strategy to implement their Environment Charter, with help in this respect given to Ascension also. Major progress was made on the Forum's joint programme with the Turks & Caicos National Trust throughout the year, including in

January-February a major science phase, as well as much conservation application of this, involving several specialist volunteers from across the Forum network, as well as local sixth-form students.

The final financial out-turn of the year was satisfactory in that, for the first time for several years, this was in surplus, helping to restore the severely depleted small reserve. This



The Princess Royal, Princess Anne, discusses with Colin Clubbe, UKOTCF Vice-Chairman, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and Esther Georges, Deputy Director BVI National Trust, the display of threatened plants of Anegada in the JR O'Neal Botanic Garden during her visit to Tortola in February 2005.

was largely due to a great deal of mostly unpaid work as well as work in kind, which has led to much of the income. Council extended its thanks to the Chairman and Dace Ground for their contributions of this nature. It should be noted that it cannot be assumed that this can continue indefinitely, and Council is anxious to widen the bases of funding for the Forum, which remain precarious. The Forum needs to strive to find more sustainable funding from a range of sources.

An important minority of the Forum's funds come from its member organisations. During the year, the Forum welcomed as new full member organisations the Herpetological Conservation Trust, and, as associate member organisations, Alderney Wildlife Trust, the Ascension Island Conservation Centre and the Isle of Man Wildlife and Conservation Division. However, the British Ornithologists' Union and UNEP-World Conservation Monitoring Centre have ceased to be members. It is important that appropriate further organisations should consider membership. In addition, it is important that all member organisations and Friends of the UKOTs identify and encourage potential individuals and corporate organisations to become Friends of UK Overseas Territories.

Relationship with UK government and government agencies

After publishing last year's *Annual Report*, it came to the Forum's attention that certain colleagues in Government had read some meanings into words which were never intended. The item related to the difficulties of maintaining Forum activities without any core support from HMG, and also raised the problems created for the Forum and UKOTs by the frequently changing HMG staff and funding schemes for environmental work in the UKOTs. An article in *Forum News* 25 clarified the issues.

The problem remains that, in certain organisations but especially government departments, the turnover of staff means that some important points are lost from institutional memory. However much hard work has been achieved during the year by the Forum, FCO and DFID officers to contribute to the success of the Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP). OTEP should be congratulated on keeping to the stated timing in publishing results of the OTEP bids for 2005. The first round saw 23 projects operational, out of 37 applications, in thirteen territories, plus three cross-territory projects. Twenty further proposals have been accepted in the second round. Certain comments regarding application and reporting procedures and payments from the fund have been received from Forum member organisations, and the Forum has suggested to OTEP some ways of addressing these. At present the funding for OTEP runs to the end of March 2007. The prospect of additional funds to continue the programme beyond then will depend on the outcome of a mid-term review in 2005, which will assess, among other things, the extent to which the territories are making effective use of the funds currently available in taking forward their Environment Charters. The Forum is exploring with OTEP ways of providing more project management capacity.

The Forum is keen to promote implementation of the Environment Charters and is encouraging moves to explore funding for generic efforts to promote Environment Charter progress, as well as collaborating with any individual initiatives from UKOTs in this area.

The Chairman, accompanied as appropriate by other Council members, normally meets Governors Designate of the

UKOTs. Mike Pienkowski has met the Governor Designate for the Turks & Caicos Islands and the newly installed Governor of St Helena. The Forum has maintained its twice yearly meetings with UK Government, as well as many informal discussions.

Successful Darwin applications in 2004/5 included a correction by Defra so that an application from Falklands Conservation for an Invertebrates Project was funded, as well as projects in Montserrat, led by the RSPB with input from the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew and the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust as well as Montserrat bodies, and from the Cayman Islands in the wake of Hurricane Ivan with input



Arlington Pickering of BVI Conservation & Fisheries Department adjusts a satellite transmitter on Malliouhana after she nested at Captain's Bay, Anguilla in May, as part of the OTEP-funded Turtles in the UK Overseas Territories project
Malliouhana's epic migration can be tracked daily at www.seaturtle.org/tracking/Malliouhana.

from Marine Turtle Research Group, RSPB, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, National Trust for Cayman Islands and the Cayman Islands Department of the Environment. The Forum has continued to draw the attention of Defra to the importance of this fund for the UKOTs and is pleased with the result this year in achieving a number of successful projects for the UKOTs.

The Forum and its members remain concerned at the lack of financial commitment by Defra to UK's shared responsibilities for conservation in the UK Overseas Territories. The Darwin Initiative is a scheme in which UK tries to help other countries, and these are taken to include the UK Overseas Territories for this purpose. However, this is UK acting as a good citizen of the world; it does not address specifically those parts of the world for which UK has shared responsibility. The UK Overseas Territories are the most important parts of the world in biodiversity terms for which UK has responsibility. However, the human populations resident on them are too small (whatever their average income) alone to provide for all the conservation measures. The spend by UK per endemic species, or per vulnerable species, or by whatever unit chosen, is several orders of magnitude smaller for

UK Overseas Territories than for Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Defra has been unresponsive to this disgraceful situation, which has been noted to it for several years by the Forum and others. Action is needed urgently, as endemic species for which UK is responsible continue to disappear.

Working Groups and other links with UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and their NGOs

As reported in last year's *Annual Report*, the Forum worked on two bids submitted to the European Commission for funding, the first on behalf of BVI, TCI and Cayman at the end of December 2003, and the other on behalf of St Helena and the Falklands in April 2004. Although the Caribbean proposal passed the criteria stage early in 2004, no written response regarding the proposal was received until late in 2004, and the comments supplied were vague. Subsequently, at the request of FCO, the Forum's Chairman has tried again to move this proposal despite the problems in securing meaningful responses from the European Commission.

The South Atlantic proposal was in a similar situation. However, following a visit by Sarah Sanders (RSPB) to St Helena in January, she visited Brussels where she has been able to progress the application further as feasibility studies are now required.

Working Groups continue to prosper with regular meetings and contact between the UKOTs. Reports from the four working groups follow this report. It should be noted that, as member organisations move out of London offices, it is increasingly difficult to find meeting rooms for both Forum and Working Group meetings. Suggestions and help in this regard would be appreciated.

Conservation Priorities

Hurricane Ivan caused considerable damage in the Cayman Islands. Hurricane Frances passed very close to TCI. Minimal damage was reported from Diego Garcia, with a 500-metre wide tract of land from the coastline affected following the tsunami that struck on Boxing Day. There were also reports of seismic activity near Tristan da Cunha. The Forum has noted that it is bizarre but typical that these items have been little (or inaccurately) reported in the British press. The Forum would like to pass good wishes in particular to Cayman in the clear-up operations.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Forum which has been contracted by Defra, has been conducting a review of Ramsar sites within the UKOTs. The report to Defra has been circulated by Defra to UKOTs and CDs, and accepted. It is available on the Forum's web-site. The Chairman had been able to take this issue forward while visiting Territories while undertaking Environment Charter and other work. As a side-benefit of visits by the Chairman during the Ramsar review, Alderney has asked HMG to designate its first Ramsar site, and three further sites in Jersey were designated during the review.

The Chairman has made two visits to St Helena, one with assistance from his wife, to facilitate local stakeholders in developing a strategy to implement St Helena's Environment Charter. This has been well received by Legislative Council, which has commended it to Executive Council for formal adoption. The strategy is on the Forum website. It will become a tool for St Helena, supporting work that needs to be done to develop local actions, as well as being a further



Conservation Officer Tara Pelembe, at the opening of Green Mountain National Park, with the Administrator Andrew Kettlewell, Dick Beales of DFID and Assistant Conservation Officer Stedson Stroud.

model for other UKOTs. Following a request from FCO and DFID, the Chairman had also helped Ascension Island personnel to develop a simple strategy to implement its Environment Charter. The Forum congratulates Tara Pelembe, Ascension Islands Conservation Officer, on being presented with the Brian Marsh Award for International Bird Conservation at the FCO on 14 December 2004.

Visits to Turks and Caicos by several specialist volunteer scientists from across the Forum network in January-February 2005 saw the major science phase of the current OTEP project take place. The opportunity was taken to



TCI 6th form students and their biology teacher work with Naqqi Manco, TC National Trust Senior Conservation Officer and visiting scientists on East Caicos as part of UKOTCF's joint programme with TCNT.

involve virtually all the sixth form or equivalent science students in TCI, as a major part of the education element. Substantial TCI national television coverage was also achieved.

The Forum has continued to meet with Government on a regular basis and has had joint meetings in July and January at which time the Forum has continued to encourage the UK



The Falkland Islands are crucially important to the Black-browed Albatross, where 75% of the global population breed. With the Islands now included in the Agreement for Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, these birds are afforded greater protection.

Government to extend the ratification with the necessary legislation for the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatross and Petrels to include Tristan da Cunha. Fisheries issues have continued to dominate discussion. Many examples of wide but inter-related issues need to be addressed constructively to meet UK's international commitments as well as to aid sustainability in the economies and environments in the UKOTs. The Forum has welcomed constructive thoughts and hopes that, in due course, HMG can identify a larger budget line than OTEP for major fisheries conservation and management projects.

The Forum is also keen to see the procedures for advice and guidance on environmental issues in the UKOTs finalised. There is a desperate need for such guidelines, particularly when Territories are being approached by outside enquires for collection of species.

Many other projects and activities of the Forum and its member organisations can be seen reported in *Forum News* and on the Forum's web-site.

Public Awareness and Publicity

The Forum recognises the low awareness of the UKOTs by the general public as well as ministers, and continued to explore ways to address the situation. Because of the small membership base from which to draw participants and a lack of a sponsor, a proposed lecture series has been shelved. However, Council members have included talks related to Forum activities to the members of related organisations, particularly at the Eden Project and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Forum literature has been distributed at the Chelsea

Flower Show and the national Bird Fair, where the Forum is planning to have a stand in 2005.

Further exploration and means of raising awareness, such as newsletters and press-releases for radio and local TV stations, still needs further exploration. However, present core resources of the Forum allowed for only one day of paid work per week, and this does not allow any capacity for these tasks. Also, those persons offering core tasks voluntarily are severely overstretched. Although it is agreed that the Forum should be more proactive in seeking publicity, this is dependent on finding more volunteer effort or financial resources.

Information Management

Planning is well advanced for the next environmental conference, to be held in Jersey from 7th to 12th October 2006, with additional workshops before and after. This will focus on UKOTs, Crown Dependencies and other small islands. The full notice is on the Forum website. The conference is being organized by the Forum in consultation with the Environmental Department of the States [Government] of Jersey, the Société Jersiaise, the National Trust for Jersey and the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, and with support from FCO/DFID's OTEP

	<p>THE ENVIRONMENT CHARTERS A Partnership for Conservation and Sustainable Use of the Environmental Resources of the UK Overseas Territories</p>
<p>Is a little-known fact that many of the United Kingdom's most significant biodiversity resources are not in the British Isles themselves. They are to be found in the UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs), former colonies or territories scattered around the world. A few have no permanent populations, but in the inhabited ones the local populations have chosen to stay part of the sovereign territory of the UK. There are relatively few people in the UKOTs (less than 200,000 in all) – but there is a vast array of unique flora and fauna and of pristine and diverse ecosystems. Endemic species – those which occur in only one place in the world – are critically important to the planet's overall biodiversity, and the UKOTs have at least ten times as many endemic species as Britain itself. This includes at least 20 endemic bird species, as against zero in Britain, more than 200 endemic plant species and about 500 endemic invertebrates. It is the joint responsibility of the UK Government and the Government of each of the UKOTs to care for this treasure trove of biodiversity.</p>	<p><i>Preservation of critical terrestrial habitat such as tussock grass in the UKOTs is vital to the survival of both terrestrial and marine fauna worldwide.</i></p>
<p>In 1999 the UK Government issued the Overseas Territories White Paper 'Partnership for Progress and Prosperity'. This recognised that responsibility for environmental issues in the Overseas Territories rested with the local governments, but that the UK Government had responsibility to support these local efforts. This concept was embodied in the Environment Charters (see centre pages of this brochure), each signed by the Government of the UK and of the Overseas Territory. Although there are small differences to fit individual Territory circumstances, all Charters include guiding principles and a set of mutual commitments by the UK Government and the Territory concerned in respect of integrating environmental conservation into all sectors of policy planning and implementation. In each case, the first commitment of the Territory is to develop a detailed strategy for action to implement the principles of the Charter, and the first commitment of the UK Government is to help build capacity to support integrated environmental management. The Overseas Territories Environment Programme (see back page) is a key tool in meeting this commitment.</p> <p><i>The UKOTs provide nesting grounds for endangered sea turtles in three oceans around the world.</i></p>	

Front page of general leaflet produced by UKOTCF for OTEP to raise awareness of the Environment Charters and support for them. UKOTCF has produced also individual leaflets from some UKOTs.

The main topics have been determined after wide consultations amongst conservationists working in the Overseas Territories. The main topics are:

- Environmental Charters and strategic planning
- Education and raising awareness of conservation issues
- Integration of conservation and sustainable livelihoods
 - Terrestrial
 - Marine, including fisheries
- Obtaining and Using Resources (not just money)
- Species conservation issues:
 - Dealing with alien invasive species
 - Turtles in the UKOTs

Two editions of *Forum News*, 25 and 26, have been published during the year. *Forum News* is also available on the website and continues to be a major means of disseminating information around the Territories and the UK.

DFID/FCO have extended the OTEP communications strategy contract for a further two years, to support OTEP and the Environment Charter process. Products to date have included: a logo for OTEP; a set of Environment Charter/OTEP information leaflets, one general, as well as specific ones for Anguilla, TCI, BVI, St Helena and Bermuda; and a considerable amount of material on web-pages, as well as advice and the initiation of later elements of work. The material on the web site is being extended progressively.

Organisational Development

The question as to whether the built heritage should be a major part of the Forum's work has been raised on several occasions. Most of the Forum's member organisations in the UKOTs address conservation of built and cultural heritage, as well as the natural heritage. Council has been concerned to move further in this direction only if its member organisations wanted this, and if expertise and resources were available. A basic questionnaire circulated amongst member organisations has confirmed considerable interest on the part of several UKOTs. However, resourcing remains a problem. Accordingly, Council decided that it should not propose changes in the Forum's structure and operations to incorporate cultural and built heritage at an equal level to the natural heritage, but should maintain its current practice of incorporating cultural and built heritage matters as appropriate and as opportunities allowed.

Recent discussions with HMG have revealed that the UK Government does not have a budget to provide any support for the built heritage in the UKOTs. The Forum proposes to take this matter further with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport. The Forum was able to secure funds from elsewhere to contribute to the costs of establishing a flax mill museum in St Helena.

The Forum has been investigating a possible agreement between the Forum and IUCN's UK Committee. Over the past few years, the Forum has tried to build links with bodies in France, the Netherlands and other European Member States which also have Overseas Territories. The links with France have been particularly constructive, and the French IUCN Committee (which fills in France a roughly equivalent role to the Forum) has investigated, in conjunction with the Forum, various initiatives to promote in the EU recognition of the biodiversity importance of the Overseas Territories and Regions of EU Member States. Most recently, the

French Committee enlisted the help of IUCN Europe Office to host a small meeting of representatives, including also from the Dutch and Spanish IUCN Committees. This resulted in constructive discussions, leading to progress for OT conservation in the EU, IUCN and elsewhere. At the recommendation of this meeting, the Forum has proposed that it should take the UK lead in conservation



Alderney Wildlife Trust field trip for residents and visitors beside proposed Ramsar Convention Wetland of International Importance

matters relating to Overseas Territories, both in its own right and as appropriate on behalf of IUCN UK Committee. The latter has welcomed this, and formal agreement is expected early in the new reporting year.

Council decisions during the year allowed the Ascension Island Conservation Centre and the Isle of Man Wildlife and Conservation Division to strengthen their links with the Forum and become Associate Members. As an additional consequence of visits by the Chairman during the Ramsar review, Alderney Wildlife Trust joined as an Associate Member. Sadly, however, both UNEP-WCMC and BOU informed the Forum well into the year that due to financial constraints within their own organisations, they were not in a position to continue membership of the Forum. The Forum welcomed the Herpetological Conservation Trust as a new member, as well as initial enquiries from the Royal Zoological Society of Scotland.

Acknowledgments

The Forum is grateful to individuals and representatives of member organisations who have given many hours of voluntary time to the Forum both in the UK and in the Territories.

Financial assistance as project grants or donations, from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development, Bryan Guinness Charitable Trust, the Royal Bank of Scotland Group, and anonymous donors is greatly appreciated.

The Forum would also like to thank all the *Friends of the UKOTs* for their continued membership and interest in the Forum. The Forum is grateful also to member organisations for allowing meetings to take place at their offices: particularly the National Trust, Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, Royal Society for Protection of Birds and Zoological Society of London; and to Falkland Islands Government and St Helena Government for allowing the use of their London offices for South Atlantic Working Group meetings.

Report of UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

The WCWG has held four meetings during the year, and maintained regular contact with all members and representatives in the Territories by e-mail. In addition to activities in individual UKOTs (outlined below), a number of initiatives involving cross-Territory partnerships have finished, progressed or commenced in 2004/05. The JNCC-funded review of invasive species in the UKOTs, undertaken by Karen Varnham, was completed. Discussions are now underway on how best to build on this project, and the 2006 conference will play a key role. The Defra/FCO-funded Turtles in the Caribbean Overseas Territories project, led by the Marine Turtle Research Group (MTRG), reached the final stages of reporting during the year. Results emphasised the dramatic decline in turtle numbers across UKOTs in the Wider Caribbean region. The Defra-funded review of existing and potential Ramsar sites in the UKOTs and Crown Dependencies, undertaken by the Forum (see above and *Forum News* 25), is now close to completion. Despite positive initial indications, further feedback on the proposal submitted to the EU to support conservation/sustainable tourism work in TCI, BVI and Cayman is still awaited.

The Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) made a few additional awards under its first round, and projects supported under the second round of this important funding mechanism were announced in March. These include new cross-Territory projects. One on Turtles, Environment Charters and Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) is led by MTRG, and is now underway with fieldwork having been carried out in Anguilla and Montserrat. Another project, led by the Tyndall Centre at the University of East Anglia, addresses preparations for, and adaptation to, climate change impacts in the Caribbean. A third cross-Territory project makes available three OTEP Research Studentships, open to citizens of UKOTs (ideally individuals employed by relevant NGOs or government departments) who wish to study for an MSc in Conservation and Biodiversity at Exeter University's Centre for Ecology and Conservation. Reports on individual Territories follow.

Anguilla

2004/05 has seen changes at the Anguilla National Trust. Damien Hughes took up the position of ANT Director when Ijahnya Christian moved to a government post (Director of Youth, Culture and Sport), and ANT recruited a new Protected Areas Officer. Further changes may be expected, as a proposal is currently with Government regarding the reorganisation of the Department of Environment (DoE) and ANT to enable both institutions to meet their mandates. It is intended that the DoE will be responsible for setting policy and ANT for implementation.

The draft legislation for Protected Areas in Anguilla has still to be passed by Government. It will be revised under

the OTEP MEA project with the aim of presenting to Government towards the end of 2005.

Although the Anguilla Ecotourism project has successfully trained a number of tour guides, it was not possible for bus tours to take place during the last tourist season, due to factors beyond the project's control. Marketing and promotion are currently underway to ensure bus tours are conducted next tourist season. Two 2-day teacher training workshops, focusing on wetland environmental education, were run successfully in Anguilla in December 2004. The workshops, funded by RSPB, were based largely on the work of the West Indian Whistling Duck and Wetlands Conservation Project, managed by the West Indian Whistling Duck Working Group (WIWDWG) of the Society for the Conservation and Study of Caribbean Birds (SCSCB). The ANT did a superb job planning and



Sombbrero Black Lizard, found only on this small island. UKOTCF congratulates the Government of Anguilla on its decision, based on work over several years, to make Sombbrero a Protected Area.

coordinating the workshop logistics, together with the Department of Education. Amongst follow-up activities, it is intended that a wetland project be developed jointly by RSPB, WIWDWG and ANT

Also during the year, the Forum was approached by the Anguilla Government representative in London, and an official from the Anguilla Ministry of Finance, who were keen to secure assistance in developing an Environment Charter Strategy for the Territory, although this was not ultimately pursued.

New OTEP initiatives include the Anguilla Coastal Resource Assessment, Monitoring and Management (ACRAMAM) Project. This aims to improve the flow of environmental information, allowing for enhanced awareness raising activities, strategic planning, environmental impact assessment and decision making. A further OTEP award provides resources for the development of a bird-watching guide to Anguilla.

Bermuda

2004/05 has seen a number of conservation activities reported from Bermuda, including the translocation of ten Cahow (Bermuda Petrel) chicks to artificial burrows on Nonsuch Island. This long-considered action was triggered in response to damage caused to small off-shore islets by Hurricane Fabian in late 2003. The Cahow will feature in a documentary, a short version of which will be shown at the 2005 Bermuda International Film Festival. Further ornithological excitement arose during the year, with sightings in Bermuda of the rare Kirtland's Warbler. The importance of invertebrate conservation was emphasised by the transfer of 56 Bermudian land snails to London Zoo, as part of a recovery programme for the species, which is threatened by non-native predators. The publication of *The Natural History of Bermuda* by Martin Thomas was also announced during the year.

In relation to habitats, *Forum News* 26 included a report on the Buy Back Bermuda campaign, coordinated by the Bermuda National Trust and Bermuda Audubon Society. The initial target of this campaign is the purchase of a site at Somerset Long Bay, to allow the extension of the nature reserve there, and to underpin other activities (including environmental education and community involvement) laid out in the Bermuda Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan. A newly funded OTEP project in Bermuda will support development of the Somerset Long Bay Nature Reserve. Another new OTEP award will assist in the development of species and habitat action plans, and in capacity building for their implementation, and a third will support the Saltus Island Project.

There was further concern in 2004/05 over the environmental impact of quarrying on important and vulnerable cave ecosystems in Bermuda. However, objections to these activities appear to have halted potentially damaging operations.



Cahow caught as part of the study informing conservation measurers.

British Virgin Islands

Update notes received during the year from the BVI National Parks Trust were greatly appreciated by the WCWG, and it was suggested that such notes might provide a model for regular reporting from other Territories. Progress on the OTEP project on Marine Protected Areas, including attendance of a training workshop in Seattle on seabed mapping, was reported, as were efforts towards the development of Regulations for the Draft National Parks Act 2004, and work with RSPB on Important Bird Areas (IBAs). The Trust also reported on its project with Island Resources Foundation on planning and development of the Parks and Protected Areas system, including a planning seminar in May 2004 which attracted attendance from representatives of thirteen different Government Departments and organisations.

Regular reports during the year indicated that the Darwin project towards Assessment of Coastal Biodiversity in Anegada is progressing extremely well, based on a dynamic partnership between MTRG, RBG Kew, RSPB, the BVI National Parks Trust, BVI Conservation and Fisheries Department, and the H.Lavity Stouff Community College. Some of the botanical outputs from the project, including a display of BVI plants organised by RBG Kew and the Eden Project at the 2004 Chelsea Flower Show (as part of an exhibition of island endemics), are reported in *Forum News* 25. The regular newsletter produced by the project is available at www.seaturtle.org/mtrg/projects/anegada/



BVI schoolteachers learn techniques to teach about wetland invertebrates in the "Pour-a-Pond" activity at a wetlands education training workshop 2005.

The EFOT/Darwin Seed Bank work is also progressing, as are efforts to develop the Tortola Botanic Gardens. It is hoped that teaching training workshops on wetland environmental education (like those described above for Anguilla) will take place in BVI in March 2005.

Cayman Islands

In September 2004, Hurricane Ivan caused widespread devastation in the Islands. For some months afterwards, communications between WCWG and its members and friends in Cayman were severely impeded by damage to the islands' infrastructure. Early reports indicated no fatalities, a remarkable and merciful outcome given the astonishing scale of the damage to property. Initially, it was difficult for the WCWG in the UK to assess the full extent of environmental damage caused by Hurricane Ivan, except by reference to shocking images circulated by the media. Measures to assess the impact of hurricane damage on the islands' bat populations, and collaborative work between Lois Blumenthal (National Trust) and others to monitor and conserve these species, were outlined in *Forum News* 26. This article also reports worrying estimates from the Cayman Islands Bird Club, that the local avifauna may have been depleted by as much as 70-90%.

In addition to the considerable challenges presented by Hurricane Ivan, the year has seen a number of changes at the Cayman Islands National Trust. Frank Roulstone took on the role of Acting Executive Director/General Manager, and Matt Cottam moved to a post at the Department of Environment (DoE). Recent reports from Frank Roulstone indicate that, despite the widespread damage to important habitats, reserves and heritage sites, the National Trust is moving forward with new initiatives as well as with reconstruction work. A new five-year plan was approved in February 2005, including provisions for continued support of the Blue Iguana Recovery Programme, acquisition of important heritage and wildlife sites, and a new public awareness initiative. The latter in particular will be facilitated by the Trust's new Development and Education Specialist, and the Educations Programme Manager soon to be recruited.

In addition to these developments, MTRG, RBG Kew and RSPB have developed a Darwin proposal for the development of a Biodiversity Action Plan in the wake of Hurricane Ivan, which includes the DoE amongst local collaborators. The DoE is also working with RBG Kew in producing a second edition of the Cayman Islands Flora, which is nearing completion.

Montserrat

In May 2004, a workshop was held in Montserrat to prepare a five-year Species Action Plan for the Montserrat Oriole, setting out objectives to sustain the species in the wild. Subsequently, a Darwin proposal has been developed by RSPB, RBG Kew, the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust, Government of Montserrat and Montserrat National Trust. The purpose of the project is to enable the people of Montserrat to conserve the Centre Hills Forest Reserve for present and future generations.

The latest round of OTEP projects includes two for Montserrat. The first will work towards the rehabilitation of Pipers Pond, and the second will support botanical garden development.

Turks and Caicos Islands

Although TCI was affected by Hurricanes Frances and Jeanne in 2004, the islands were fortunate to escape the serious impacts experienced by Cayman, despite the close proximity of the storms. Happily, there were no serious injuries. Only relatively minor damage occurred to newly developed field-roads (trails), and reconstruction was planned following more serious damage to one of the classic iguana trails on Little Water Cay. As part of the profile-raising of UKOTs, the Forum published a letter in the UK's *Independent* newspaper, pointing out that they had printed a satellite image of a hurricane centred on TCI without mentioning either the territory or that this was a UK Overseas Territory.

During the year, considerable progress has been made towards further implementation of the Biodiversity Management Plan, including through work supported by OTEP. Further field-roads have been developed on North and Middle Caicos, and the first of these was officially opened in June 2004 by the Hon Jeffrey Hall, a Government Minister and Middle Caicos representative to the Legislative Assembly (see *Forum News* 25). January 2005

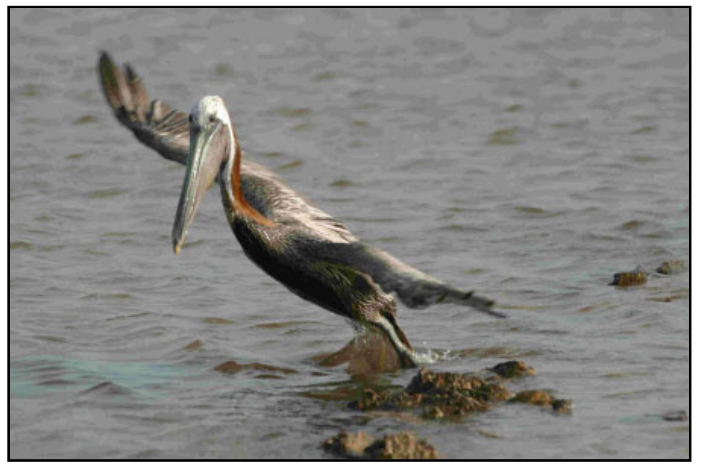


Caicos Pine - the national tree species under threat possibly due to diseased imported alien trees.

saw another successful round of fieldwork, with a multidisciplinary team visiting TCI to collect further data on birds, bats, butterflies and plants. The team were fortunate to be able to spend four days exploring East Caicos, surveying biodiversity, trail cutting and exploring the local caves. Three student groups (including all the science sixth-formers in the country) were able to join the team for a few days of fieldwork, and video footage of the expedition was secured, some of which was later integrated into material broadcast by national television.

A worrying development was the discovery of infestations of a scale insect on Middle Caicos stands of the national tree, Caicos Pine *Pinus caribaea* var. *bahamiensis*. A provisional identification by the UK's Central Science Laboratory suggests that this is a new host record and most southerly occurrence of a North American pest. Whilst its identity is yet to be confirmed, this discovery has once again highlighted the threat of invasive exotic species in the Caribbean UKOTs.

During the year, concern has been expressed locally over the environmental impacts of a cruise liner dock being constructed on Grand Turk, and over possible built developments in statutory protected areas, on East Caicos and on the Grand Turk salinas. The Forum and the TCI National Trust have maintained liaison with TCI's Department of Environment & Coastal Resources, the Tourist Board and others over protection of local sites, and implications of increased numbers of visitors arising from the cruise liner development. Also during the year, the Forum responded to a request from TCI Government officials to help restart implementation of the Environment Charter strategy, following changes in key senior staff.



UKOTCF's review of Ramsar sites for UK and UKOT Governments has underlined the international importance of the Grand Turk Salt-pans and Wells for many water-birds, including Brown Pelican. The pans, which are under threat from built developments, and their natural and cultural heritage are a valuable resource for the tourism industry and deserve urgent protection as a Ramsar Wetland of International Importance.

Report of UKOTCF British Indian Ocean Territory Working Group

This Working Group is provided, under agreement with the Forum, by its member organisation, the Chagos Conservation Trust.

Is the new British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT) Environmental Zone, over 500,000 square kilometres in size, Britain's largest natural protection zone?

Is the area of the Chagos Archipelago in the middle of the Indian Ocean the most unpolluted tropical ocean environment left on Earth?

The Chagos Conservation Trust thinks that the answer to both questions may be "yes". In any event and even if there is competition for the No 1 spot, there is no doubt about the need for shorter-term conservation measures and long-term protection with international support. These continue to be the Trust's underlying objectives.

The first Chagos Management Conservation Plan was put in place by the Government in the past year and a new Scientific Advisory Group is being nominated to advise on implementation. Some key aspects of the plan are:

- The management of extensive fully protected areas based on the principle that an appropriate block of 30% of habitat is strictly conserved for the survival of the habitat as a whole is likely (for example for fisheries it would allow for recovery and supply of new stocks).
- A system of regular monitoring and rapid response to problems.
- The conservation, and in some cases restoration, of the Chagos Archipelago as an intact and resilient coral reef system.
- The conservation or restoration to carrying capacity of the populations of globally threatened or regionally significant populations of native species including seabirds, turtles, sharks, crustaceans, reefs, corals, reef and other fish, and some island plants.

For monitoring and scientific work, a major, ship-based research group visit will take place in 2006. This is being organised by Warwick University with active support from the Government, CCT and other organisations. For further information please contact: sheppard@bio.warwick.ac.uk.

For habitat restoration, Fauna & Flora International have received a grant from the Overseas Territories Environment Programme for removing invasive black rats from Eagle Island, the second largest island in the Chagos Archipelago. CCT has been in contact with FFI and RSPB about this project over a long period. Seabirds, hatchling turtles, CITES-listed coconut crabs and other species will benefit.

Working with partner organisations in the Chagos area is clearly important for the CCT and UKOTCF, as for the BIOT Administration. We welcome the recent advances in this co-operation, facilitated by OTEP. CCT also welcomes partner organisations and individual members in the United States where it is creating a Branch. CCT's Representative there is Frank Stewart, who knows the area very well since he was a medical doctor on Diego Garcia. He can be contacted at RuthandRed4@msn.com

The tsunami's effect on Chagos was limited. Some islands were damaged in places but none badly. The defences were natural and largely intact. There is an article on the subject in CCT's *Chagos News*.

Report of UKOTCF South Atlantic Working Group

Four meetings have been held during the year 2004-05, in April, August, October 2004 and February 2005.

The Group brings together a dedicated number of key individuals with considerable knowledge of conservation issues in the South Atlantic. We particularly welcomed the South Georgia Association as a new participant (represented by Keith Holmes and then Ron Lewis-Smith), but regret that we are to no longer have any presence from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, due to re-assessment of workloads. We intend to maintain informal contact with desk officers as appropriate. We are very grateful to Frances Marks for continuing to provide administrative support to the Group on a voluntary basis.

Our members remain in close touch with the South Atlantic Territories, and we have benefited from first hand reports of visits. In particular the visits of Mike Pienkowski, Forum Chairman, and Sarah Sanders (RSPB) to St Helena and to Ascension, have proved particularly informative.



Inspecting the historic building and steam engine that will form key parts of St Helena's flax museum.

Protection of seabirds and the marine environment has again featured highly and frequently on our agenda. Illegal fishing in the waters of Ascension, St Helena and Tristan da Cunha continues to be of particular concern. Through its Overseas Territories, the UK is responsible for fishing zones covering much of the South Atlantic, but these are operated independently and in some cases without an effective licensing system. The Group feels that improved conservation effort would be achieved if the South Atlantic fisheries could operate with greater co-ordination and co-operation, and with UK Government contributing more, in recognition of its international commitments. Some of the best areas, such as sea-mounts, are being fished-out by illegal activity. We have urged urgent action to address the fisheries issue - in the waters around Tristan seabirds already under threat continue to decline. We were delighted that in April 2004 the UK ratified the international Agreement for the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, and included the Overseas Territories of the Falkland Islands, South Georgia and British Antarctic Territories, but we are impatient for Tristan to be added to

this list. To this end, the Forum network has secured much volunteer assistance to save work by UK Government, but looks to UK Government to find resources for those remaining few tasks which must be done by officials. This Territory above all others desperately needs this initiative. We note with interest that much work is being undertaken to implement ACAP in the Falkland Islands including a census of the Southern Giant Petrel.

We have closely followed progress of the RSPB Darwin Initiative project on Tristan da Cunha aimed at developing a Biodiversity Action Plan. Many of our members attended a workshop in July to input into this process. Following our concern over the export of rockhopper penguins from Tristan in October 2003, we obtained an agreement from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office that guidelines to advise on the procedures for export of wildlife from Overseas Territories should be drawn up. We hope that these will be put in place in the very near future.

The building of an airport on St Helena has finally received government approval, though detailed plans are some way from being finalised. Following encouragement and support of the Group, a report on the invertebrates of Prosperous Plain by Philip and Myrtle Ashmole is now available to inform the airport's expected Environmental Impact Assessment. Resources to restore the very special and historic built heritage of St Helena are a particular problem. Many sources available to UK heritage projects are not available. This is an area outside the mainstream activity of the Forum, but we were instrumental in obtaining a small amount of grant aid to help with restoration of the Flax Mill, and will continue to support building heritage projects where we are able to do so – and lobby for UK funds to be made available to all its Overseas



Masked Booby drops into its nesting site on mainland Ascension.

Territories. The St Helena National Trust, now three years old, is to be congratulated on developing an impressive range of activities, but its somewhat precarious funding position is cause of some concern. The Forum Chairman and Ann Pienkowski have been helping the St Helena Government and other stakeholders to develop a strategy to implement

their Environment Charter. The result of this will be to develop a clear set of policies and guidance on taking forward protection of the island's biodiversity – the National Trust is a key player in this process.

On neighbouring Ascension Island (albeit 800 miles away), it was heartening to hear a great conservation success story with increasing numbers of seabirds returning to the mainland to breed, and no record of any feral cats following the major seabird restoration project run by the RSPB, with the Island's Conservation Centre. John Hughes of the Army Ornithological Society described the results of their 2004 visit and how these and past records will be integrated into Ascension's environmental database. We were delighted to congratulate Tara George (now Pelembe), Ascension Conservation Officer, on being given the Brian Marsh Award and Stedson Stroud, Assistant Conservation Officer, an MBE. The Forum's Chairman has worked with the Conservation Officer to draft a strategy to implement the Environment Charter.

The Group has continued to work on its regional funding bid to the EU for an invasive species project. This will now not only include St Helena, Ascension, Tristan da Cunha and the Falkland Islands, but also South Georgia. The project has been confirmed as qualifying for support in principle, and resources have been awarded for a feasibility study (expected to be completed by the end of 2005). The focus of the work will be on direct action to prevent the spread of and control importation of invasives, which have proved so damaging to the fragile, and precious, ecosystems of these remote islands.

We continue to encourage and advise the South Atlantic Overseas Territories on UK grant funding for environmental work and have noted with pleasure substantial support allocated to our region through the FCO and DFID Overseas

Territories Environment Programme. This is still however somewhat limited in both scope and value compared with the enormous challenges to be faced. From Defra, approval of a Darwin Initiative invertebrates project for the Falkland Islands was particularly pleasing. We continue to strongly join with others within the Forum to seek funding levels for



Alison Rothwell's RSPB/Darwin Initiative Project leader sets up camp on Tristan da Cunha during survey work

the Overseas Territories up to a level available for UK mainland wildlife protection.

As a Group we are agreed that greater efforts must be made to raise awareness of these very special places. Ways of increasing their profile and the biodiversity issues they face will be a key agenda item to address in the next twelve months.

Report of the UKOTCF Pitcairn Working Group

The eyes of the world were on Pitcairn Island during September and October 2004, when trials were held on the island. Six men were convicted but their sentences are in abeyance, subject to appeal and the resolution of various further legal issues. The sheer administrative and financial effort involved in the legal process inevitably had knock-on effects in other spheres of activity, not least conservation. However, the hope is that the 'dust will settle' and that Pitcairn will thrive in the future, possibly with improved infrastructure allowing more regular tourist visits.

To improve the infrastructure, a 2 million Euros European Union grant was allocated to building a new breakwater, restoring the jetty in Bounty Bay and rebuilding the road up the Hill of Difficulty. Work on the project started in February 2005, unfortunately without any Environmental Impact Assessment. Meanwhile consultants were engaged to assess the feasibility of tourist development, and the Working Group not only commented on environmental issues that needed attention should more tourists visit, but also offered to assist, for example, with the production of literature to enhance the visitors' enjoyment of Pitcairn.

A consequence of the trials was that the detention facility on Pitcairn was enlarged. This expansion necessitated a relocation of the plant nursery. This shift seems to have happened without major damage to the plants being nurtured. The value of the nursery was dramatically illustrated by the case of *Abutilon pitcairnense*, a species only re-discovered in 2003. The single re-discovered plant was destroyed in 2004 by a landslide at Tedside. Thus it is thanks to propagation in the nursery and at Trinity College, Dublin, that the species now survives at all. At the time of writing, Noeleen Smyth has returned for her third and final PhD-related visit to the island, hoping to develop more detailed proposals concerning how to replace rose-apple with native plants, a process that will need to continue for decades.

Following publication of the Henderson Management Plan in May 2004, the trials inevitably diverted attention away from getting the Management Committee up and running. It is hoped that this pause will soon be overcome.

Friends of the UK Overseas Territories

Four good reasons to become a Friend

1. You know how valuable and vulnerable are the environmental treasures held in the Overseas Territories.
2. You understand that the only way to guarantee their protection is to build local institutions and create environmental awareness in the countries where they are found.
3. You care about what is happening in the Overseas Territories and want to be kept up to date by regular copies of *Forum News* and the Forum's Annual Report.
4. You understand that the Overseas Territories are part of Britain, and therefore are not eligible for most international grant sources – but neither are they eligible for most domestic British ones, so help with fundraising is essential.

I wish to become a Friend of the Overseas Territories at the following support level: <input type="checkbox"/> £15 <input type="checkbox"/> £50 <input type="checkbox"/> £100 <input type="checkbox"/> £500	
I wish my company to become a Corporate Friend at the following support level: <input type="checkbox"/> £150 <input type="checkbox"/> £500 <input type="checkbox"/> £1,000 <input type="checkbox"/> £5,000	
Name of individual Friend or contact person for Corporate Friend _____	Friends subscriptions can now be paid by credit/debit card as well as by UK cheque. This means that payments from various countries can be made easily; your card company will handle the exchange and include the equivalent in your own currency in your regular statement. Either: <input type="checkbox"/> I enclose my cheque made out to UKOTCF for the amount indicated above Or: Please charge the amount indicated above to my card: <input type="checkbox"/> American Express <input type="checkbox"/> Delta <input type="checkbox"/> JCB <input type="checkbox"/> MasterCard <input type="checkbox"/> Solo <input type="checkbox"/> Switch <input type="checkbox"/> Visa Card Number _____ Expiry date: <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> / <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> (month/year) If used: Valid from <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> / <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Issue number _____
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Send to: UKOTCF, Wits End, Radbones Hill, Over Norton, Oxon OX7 5RA UK Fax +44 1733 569325	

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Photographs courtesy of Ruedi Abbuehl, Colin Clubbe (RGB Kew), Tara Pelembe, Mike Pienkowski, Sarah Sanders (RSPB), Marine Turtle Research Group, Bermuda Environment Service.

Membership

The current UK members of the Forum are:

British Ecological Society; British Microbial Biodiversity Association; CABI Bioscience; Fauna & Flora International; Herpetological Conservation Trust; Marine Turtle Research Group; The National Trust; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; Royal Society for the Protection of Birds; Royal Zoological Society of Scotland; 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:

Alderney Wildlife Trust; Anguilla National Trust; Ascension Conservation Centre; Ascension Heritage Society; Bermuda Audubon Society; Bermuda National Trust; Bermuda Zoological Society; Chagos Conservation Trust; 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; Isle of Man Wildlife and Conservation Division; Manx Chough Project; Montserrat National Trust; St Helena National Trust; National Trust of the Turks & Caicos Islands.