

# FORUM NEWS

CONSERVATION NEWS 14. UK DEPENDENT TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM December 1996

## News from the Forum

### Forum becomes a registered charity

A core objective in 1996 has been to establish the Forum as an organisation in its own right. In June the Forum became officially registered as a company, limited by guarantee, and in October, was approved as a registered charity, number 1058483.

### Forum membership grows

We are delighted to welcome two more organisations to the Forum; the British Microbial Biodiversity Association (BMBA) and the British Ecological Society. The Forum now has 12 supporting member organisations combining expertise, support and ideas to assist conservation in the UK Dependent Territories. A profile of the BMBA follows later in this newsletter.

### Forum 1996 meetings

Four Forum meetings between members and interested individuals were held in 1996. Members also met twice with the UK Government, which provided an opportunity to represent Dependent Territory concerns, and push forward the development of conservation projects. We were delighted to welcome colleagues from the Dependencies to meetings this year, with the attendance of representatives from St Helena, the Falkland Islands, the Cayman Islands, Gough Island Wildlife Reserve Advisory Committee and Gibraltar. We hope that our meetings in 1997 will again benefit from this direct input from the Dependencies. If any environmentalists from the Dependencies are visiting the UK at the end of January, or in mid-May, and would like to attend, then please contact the Forum Co-ordinator for details.

## DT Botanists attend Kew Darwin Initiative Course



From left to right: Sinead Doherty, Mike Sinnott (Kew), Colin Clubbe (Kew), Benson Man Chung Lee, Vanessa Thomas, Mike Maunders (Kew), James Boatwain, Stuart Henchie (Kew), Dunstan Groom, Sara Cross (UK Dependent Territories Conservation Forum).

The first course in Cultivation and Conservation of Threatened Plant Species was held during the summer at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. Funded by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative Programme, the first two courses are targeted at UK Dependent Territories. With the aid of the Forum Secretariat and with input from several Forum Members a course programme was developed at Kew which provided a good balance between practical horticultural training, academic studies encompassing the essential elements of horticultural and conservation theory, and field trips to nurseries and conservation organisations including the World Conservation Monitoring Centre in Cambridge. Topics such as propagation, germination, conservation biology, protected areas management, re-introduction strategies, international conventions and computer literacy were studied, debated, discussed and more!

Representatives from five UK Dependent Territories attended this first course. Pictured left after receiving their certificates are Sinead Doherty, Research Assistant with the Falkland Islands' Department of Agriculture; Benson Man Chung Lee, Conservation Officer at the Kadoorie Farm and Botanic Garden, Hong Kong; Vanessa Thomas, Head of the Nursery Team in the St Helena Agriculture and Forestry Department's Endemic Section; James Boatwain, Forest Ranger with the Ministry of Agriculture, Montserrat; and Dunstan Groom, the Nursery Supervisor at Grand Cayman's Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park. As well as successfully surviving the rigours of the course they all enjoyed the diverse sights and activities of a UK summer.

Both participants and tutors benefited from the exchange of ideas, techniques and experiences, and from interactions with students at Kew. The strong relationships which developed bode well for future collaborations to conserve the world's biodiversity.

The 1997 course will be held at Kew from 7th July to 29th August. We would like to encourage more Dependent Territories to release suitable staff for the 1997 course, and to facilitate greater participation we are investigating an exchange programme. We would be pleased to hear from anyone with any suggestions. Further details about this and future courses can be obtained from: Colin Clubbe, Co-ordinator of Graduate Studies, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Richmond, Surrey, TW1 3AB; Tel: +44 (0)181 332 5637, Fax: +44 (0)181 332 5610, e-mail: C.Clubbe@rbgkew.org.uk

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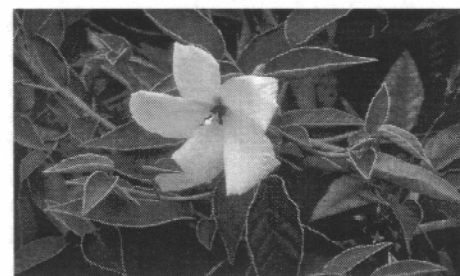
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St Helena ebony *Trochetiopsis melanoxylon*, rediscovered in 1980 (Philip Ashmole).

## AUSPB yields £122,000 for Dependent Territories Conservation

This year nine environmental projects from the Dependent Territories were awarded a total of £122,235 in funding from the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Assistant Under Secretary's Projects Budget (AUSPB). The Assistant Under Secretary (International Organisations) currently allocates an annual tranche of his budget to environmental projects, and invites applications through Governors' offices in the Dependent Territories. The Forum played an active role in the process this year, ensuring that information about the fund was sent to Dependent Territory conservation groups, commenting on draft proposals: reviewing applications and making its own recommendations to the Environment, Science and Energy Department (ESED), who co-ordinate the budget.

### Projects funded this year:

The Anguilla National Trust received £9,000 for the production of a wetlands field guide; an Ascension Island project received £15,500 to control the Mexican Thorn Tree *Prosopis glandulosa*, a threat to indigenous plants and turtle nesting beaches; Bermuda received £2,000 to develop the production of nesting cavities for hole-nesting seabirds; Gibraltar received £23,000 to establish Bruce's Farm

Conservation Centre in the Upper Rock Nature Reserve; Hong Kong received £18,000 towards a schools environmental education pack; Montserrat National Trust received £18,100 in emergency support, owing to the volcano crisis; a Pitcairn Islands project received £19,980 for a vegetation inventory and conservation work; St Helena received £8,655 for improvements to the island's plant conservation nursery; and the Turks & Caicos Islands received £8,000 towards a feral cat trapping programme, with a view to protecting its endemic rock iguana *Cyclura carinata*, on Little Water Cay.

### Suitable Projects for AUSPB funding

The AUS budget is intended for discrete projects, which can be completed within a year. The range of projects is varied and includes: projects from developing countries; those which follow up the UN Conference on Environment & Development; biodiversity projects; sustainable forestry projects; projects involving environmental education; recycling projects; wildlife conservation projects; income generation projects with spin off environmental benefits, such as wetland creation; and projects addressing pollution problems. This list is not exhaustive, and projects of

merit that fall outside these criteria may also be approved. The Forum remains ready to advise and discuss the development of applications prior to submission, please contact the Co-ordinator if you would like to discuss a possible project.

### AUSPB Environment Tranche 1997/98.

It is not yet clear how much funding will be available under the environment tranche for 1997-98. A new timetable for applications and procedures is being introduced to improve administration of the budget and increase the time available to complete projects. A standard format will be introduced for proposals. Governors' Offices will be notified of application criteria, and invited to submit applications for the 1997-98 tranche in November. The closing date for bids will be 15th January 1997 and successful projects will be announced at the beginning of April 1997. Projects must be completed by 31st March 1998. Proposers are encouraged to submit their projects through the British Embassy/Governor's offices in the country where their project is located. For details of project criteria or for further information, please contact Sue Gedes in ESED; Tel: +44 (0)171 210 0436, Fax: +44 (0)171 210 0447.

## British Microbial Biodiversity Association: a profile

BRITISH MICROBIAL BIODIVERSITY ASSOCIATION



The British Microbial Biodiversity Association (BMBA), has recently joined the Forum as a supporting member. Founded in 1996, the BMBA grew from a UK Research Council funded Montserrat Extremophile Expedition. The effectiveness of a consortia of UK research laboratories indicated the need for a more formalised association of laboratories working on biodiversity.

### Significance

Micro-organisms have colonised every niche on the planet, from subterranean rock strata to Antarctic ice. They are also involved in virtually every living process on earth (from human digestion to the ageing of rocks) and therefore play a critical role in all life processes, the importance of which cannot be under-estimated. However, fewer than 10,000 different microbial species have been isolated and characterised by microbiologists.

### Mission Statement

The British Microbial Biodiversity Association aims to provide a linkage between and within UK universities and bio-industries in order to promote the investigation, preservation and rational exploitation of global microbial biodiversity.

### Objectives

- To promote scientific interest and investigations in microbial biodiversity within the scientific and bioindustry communities.
- To provide a UK forum for intellectual interaction and research collaboration in the study of microbial biodiversity.
- To establish a consortia of laboratories and expertise within the UK, capable of responding rapidly to the needs of Government, public bodies and environmental organisations with respect to scientific advice and/or research into national and international problems relating to microbial biodiversity.
- To provide capability to access habitats that are not readily accessible, for the purpose of ecological study or biotechnological exploitation in collaboration with local communities.

- To provide an established basis for accessing research funds in the fields of environmental and biodiversity studies.
- To promote international awareness of the significance of biodiversity research.

Further details about the BMBA can be obtained from: Professor A. Atkinson, Chimaeron Ltd, 8, Centre 1, Lysander Way, Salisbury, SP4 6BU, UK; Tel: +44 (0)1722 415026, E-mail: [chimaeron@dial.pipex.com](mailto:chimaeron@dial.pipex.com) The BMBA's internet pages are at: <http://gepasi.dbs.aber.ac.uk/BMBA/bmbaf.htm>

## WWF Grants Programme

WWF-UK has a small grants programme for support of conservation initiatives in the UK Dependent Territories. Priority is given to projects which promote the conservation of biodiversity and assistance to non-governmental organisations working for conservation in the Dependencies. Please write to Sally Nicholson at WWF-UK, Panda House, Weyside Park, Catteshall Lane, Godalming, Surrey, GU7 1XR, UK, for application forms or to discuss projects.

## Conservation of Dolphins in Gibraltar

Publicity in the UK national press has highlighted problems facing dolphins in the waters surrounding Gibraltar, the Bay and Straits of Gibraltar and the Mediterranean. Evidence suggests the capture and mutilation of these mammals by Spanish fishermen, for exploitation of fins and tail flukes, and as a misguided defence of declining fish stocks. Unsubstantiated evidence suggests that dolphin meat is sold in some local markets. These allegations should be investigated to establish the nature and severity of the problem.

The Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS), through its Marine Section, has been assessing the situation and reports of mutilations and strandings affecting common dolphins *Delphinus delphis* and striped dolphins *Stenella coeruleoalba*. Other causes of death have been noted, ranging from natural causes to pneumonia (the latter is causing concern since predisposition to this syndrome is unknown).

The Helping Hand is a Gibraltar-based registered charity, that deals with marine related problems in the straits and Bay of Gibraltar, and works closely with the GONHS. The primary role of the Helping Hand is to research the activities of dolphins, provide a database for marine conservation societies worldwide and to conserve these mammals in this important site. The Helping Hand has been monitoring dolphin deaths and mutilations in

the area. Over the last two years mutilation numbers have increased creating alarm amongst conservationists in Gibraltar and the surrounding area.

The Helping Hand have set up a long term monitoring programme using their research vessel *Nimo* to investigate the welfare and distribution of dolphins. It is envisaged that it will provide a geographical distribution map of dolphins in the area. From this data, local population and migrant numbers can be calculated accurately, the relationship of dolphins to whale movement can be logged, and a cross reference system will be developed to catalogue dolphin strandings, deaths, mutilations, population numbers and the impact of marine environmental factors that affect dolphins. The focus of the research is to identify problems and work towards a solution through remedial action.

Collaborative work is underway between Helping Hand and the Recuperation of Marine Species Centre in Malaga, Spain (CREMA), which covers the whole of the territorial waters off the coast of Gibraltar. The Helping Hand charity is also looking at providing free facilities and services to overseas research students. Students from UK and European Institutions will be provided with facilities for research into dolphins. Paying clients will be taken to sea to experience these mammals at close quarter. This will provide some funds for the upkeep of the *Nimo*.

### Requirements

Together, GONHS and the Helping Hand Charity are seeking funds from the UK, EU and overseas to further scientific knowledge and protect the habitat of dolphins within the Straits of Gibraltar.

Much work is needed if we are to conserve the marine life of this area. Little is known about the daily activities of these mammals within this area and it is the intention of GONHS to research the breeding cycle, the feeding habits and the effects of nets and other activities on the different species of dolphins. Funding is also required for tagging equipment to help understand the migration process of the dolphins. The alleged use of dolphin fins for export to the Far East also warrants investigation.

In order for this research to be carried out, funding in the order of £60,000 is needed. With this and the subsequent increase in the knowledge of marine biology, threats to the dolphin would be minimized and adequate protection measures could be put in place for the benefit of all. A detailed breakdown of how the funds will be employed can be obtained from Joseph Serra, GONHS (UK), c/o 155, Aboyne Road, London, NW10 0EY. For further details about the proposed research project please contact: Eric Shaw, c/o Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (Marine Section), The Field Centre, Jews Gate, Upper Rock Nature Reserve, P.O. Box 843, Gibraltar.

## British Indian Ocean Territory 1996 Expedition

Earlier this year, a six week expedition consisting of nearly 30 scientists and technicians, PhD students and helpers visited four atolls and offshore banks in the Chagos. The expedition team, led by Charles Sheppard of the University of Warwick, was supported by two 85 foot ketches. Permission to visit the islands had centred on the requirement by the authorities for a conservation management plan. Therefore, high on the expedition agenda was an assessment of the biogeographical position of the Chagos in the Indian Ocean; whether it is a stepping stone, a source or sink for species. The approach was largely one of molecular biogeography, using insects, turtles, reef fishes, corals and shrimp. It is expected that the degree of isolation or mixing with other regions can be quantified. Extensive biological surveys and traditional taxonomic and ecological work was also carried out for these and other groups of species.

A span of twenty years since the area was last visited for scientific survey meant that change over this period could be assessed. Changes on reef slopes, island vegetation and birds were assessed. The islands' natural Indian Ocean hardwood trees were found to be recovering gradually and replacing the coconut that was introduced when copra was a globally important product. A peat bog discovered 20 years ago was cored for analysis of its fossil pollen and hence pre-man vegetation. Nutrient exchange between island and reef was examined and several marine and island botanical and productivity projects, some coupled with remote sensing, are attempting to derive estimates of atoll-scale production. Changes on the reefs are slight or negligible. As far as the reefs themselves are concerned, Chagos is in an extremely healthy state. The same may not be the case for higher predators such as sharks, however. Quantitative information

is now being researched in old dive log books, but the once spectacular shark population seems to have all but collapsed. Given the levels of shark fishing in the Indian Ocean this is not surprising.

Several unexplained geological aspects of the islands and alleged reefs were examined, with fossilised rock, coral and soil recovered for dating. A *Porites* coring programme recovered cores for estimating past sea temperatures. This is important in Chagos, given that this region is now thought to be important in early stages of El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) events which drive the world's climate.

Because Chagos is the most remote part of the tropical Indian Ocean, further projects examined species and sediments for trace contaminants. The results will be used to determine background contamination levels of the world's equatorial regions.



## Research Programme for Gough Island Wildlife Reserve

The Gough Island Wildlife Reserve, declared in the 1970s, was registered on the World Heritage List in 1995, after the adoption of a management plan in 1994. An objective of this is "To encourage and facilitate research into the natural sciences". It further identifies that "priority for scientific research will be given to those proposals which will contribute to the environmental management of the island".

Since the adoption of the management plan there have been several applications to undertake research on the island. These have been dealt with on their merits, but in an ad hoc manner. It is now considered timely to produce a research programme for the next ten years or so, against which individual applications for research may be judged. More importantly, it will encourage the undertaking of research of value to the conservation management of the reserve.

Members of the Gough Island Wildlife Reserve Management Advisory Committee (GIWRAC) and scientists who have conducted biological research on the island have been canvassed for their opinions. The matter was discussed further in an informal meeting following on from this in Cambridge in July.

### Research Programme

The following fields of research were identified as being of highest priority:

#### 1. Inventory studies:

These are required for indigenous and alien vascular plants, bryophytes and macro-invertebrates and are to include an inventory of species, distribution, habitat use and abundance. The support of specialised taxonomists and a full year's stay on the island are prerequisites. Censuses of numbers and distributional studies of breeding seabirds and seals are also required, as well as a detailed study of the introduced house mouse.

#### 2. Species studies:

The following flagship species were identified, based on knowledge of their vulnerable conservation status; three species of albatross (especially the near-endemic wandering albatross), the southern giant petrel, the two endemic landbirds (a moorhen and a bunting) and the southern elephant seal. With the exception of the l



*Yellow nosed albatross Diomedea chlororhynchos identified as a flagship species for research on Gough Island.*

landbirds, all are thought to be deleteriously affected by factors at sea, most especially long line mortality in the albatrosses and giant petrel. Studies should also require at least a full year's stay on the island followed by annual monitoring, and should include aspects of population trends, distribution at sea, diet and foraging ecology.

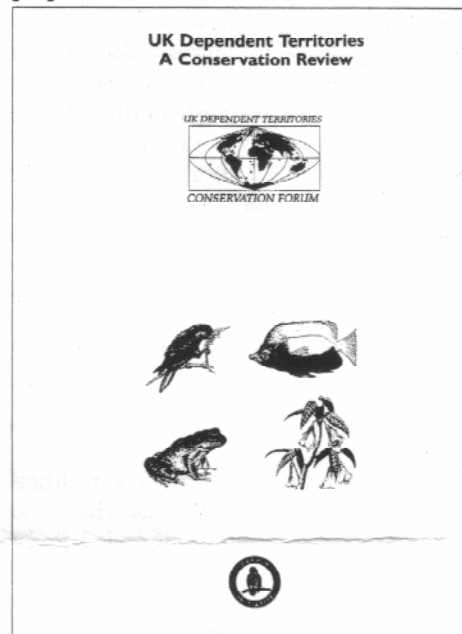
A more detailed document, expanding on these research themes will be circulated in draft form to members of GIWRAC and to interested scientists for comment. A final version will then be submitted via GIWRAC to the Administrator and Island Council of Tristan da Cunha for approval and adoption. The research programme should then receive publicity, to encourage research applications, and efforts should be made to investigate both logistic and financial support. It is hoped that a joint agreement may be possible between a South African and a UK University to conduct research at Gough. Realistically it is considered that annual research parties of a minimum of two (for safety reasons) and a maximum of four scientists should be aimed for in the first full year on the island. The logistic support of the South African National Antarctic Programme (for both transport and accommodation ashore at its meteorological base) will also need to be obtained.

## Publications

### UK Dependent Territories: A Conservation Review

Compiled by Sara Cross & Sara Oldfield. This document is the result of two years research and collaboration with UK and Dependent Territory conservation groups, academic institutions and individual experts. Published with support from the Darwin Initiative, the Review outlines what UK non-governmental organisations believe should now be done to implement practical conservation measures and what the Forum itself will do over the next five years. The Review is divided into four sections: Section 1 describes the Dependent Territory work of the Forum and its supporting members; Section 2 focuses on conservation groups in the Dependencies; Section 3 outlines priority actions to further conservation activities in the Dependencies over the next five years; Section 4 contains an analysis of the recommendations for conservation projects to be carried out in the Dependent Territories.

Published by UKDT Conservation Forum: ISBN 0-9527196-0-6; 80pp, £10.92 inc p&p.



Production of *Forum News* is supported by:

British Association of Nature Conservationists (BANC)

British Ecological Society (BES)

British Microbial Biodiversity Association (BMBA)

British Ornithologists' Union (BOU)

Fauna & Flora International (FFI)

The National Trust

Plantlife

Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew,

Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

World Conservation Monitoring Centre (WCMC)

World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-UK)

Zoological Society of London (ZSL)

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The next issue will be produced in Spring/Summer 1997

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### Comments Welcomed

We welcome any comments, information or articles which may be of interest from Forum News readers. Please forward these to Sara Cross at the address on this page.