

FORUM NEWS

CONSERVATION NEWS 15. UK DEPENDENT TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM DECEMBER 1997

First AGM for New Style Forum

This issue of *Forum News* includes the Annual Report. The first Annual General Meeting of the Forum under its new structure was held at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew on 1st October 1997. It was a very busy period, with a meeting of the Wider Caribbean Working Group on the previous day, the inaugural meeting of the South Atlantic Working Group in the morning, a Forum business meeting in the afternoon, and the AGM with presentations in the evening. We were particularly pleased to welcome at these meetings representatives of some of our Associate Members, or other visitors, from the St. Helena, the Cayman Islands, the Falkland Islands, Montserrat, Anguilla, Tristan da Cunha, and Gibraltar. The rest of this issue of *Forum News* is no smaller for this and includes a wide range of articles.



Gibraltar – Upper Rock Nature Reserve.

Commerce and Countries Line up to Discuss the Future of the Remaining Dependencies

A major conference is to be held in London on Wednesday 4 February 1998 at the Queen Elizabeth Conference Centre to debate the future of the remaining British Dependent Territories in the 21st century and a keynote address will be given by the Foreign Secretary, the Right. Honorable Robin Cook MP.

Mr Cook will present a major policy statement concerning the future relationship between HM Government and the Dependent Territories in the wake of the eruptions of the Soufriere hills volcano in Montserrat.

The Conference aims to highlight the various constitutional, economic and social issues facing the world's dependent territories, in particular the British Dependent Territories.

Delegates will include economists, academics, environmentalists, industrialists, diplomats and the legal and tourist profession..

The Forum will be represented and will exhibit a display featuring environmental projects and biodiversity in the Dependent Territories.

For further information about the conference, please contact Alison Cornell or Susan Eastoe at the Dependent Territories Association, 31 Great Peter Street, London, SW1P 3LR Tel: 0171-222 2121

Team visit Montserrat to check status of Oriole

In October, responding to a request from the Montserrat Government, a joint RSPB and Jersey Wildlife Preservation Trust team flew to the island to assess the effects of volcanic activity on several key species. This included the endemic Montserrat Oriole and the Mountain Chicken (a frog found only here and Dominica). Pyroclastic flows have destroyed the 'bamboo forest' on the slopes of the Soufriere Hills – the Oriole's main habitat, so the team concentrated on the remaining Centre Hills population. Here it is estimated that only 50–100 pairs of Orioles remain. They assessed the feasibility of establishing a captive population of the Oriole, and other species to safeguard them against further volcanic activity. Unfortunately the team were unable to get a good assessment of the current status of Mountain Chicken population as none were seen. Although the team considered that for the time being, the Centre Hills were relatively safe for the Oriole population, the long term effects of ash and acid rain deposits from the volcano are not known. Indeed, this deposition could pose a serious threat to the ground dwelling Mountain Chickens. A detailed assessment is recommended of key species, leading to a monitoring programme on the health of the forest which could act as a trigger for the implementation of a captive programme if conditions worsen..



Juvenile Mountain Chicken.

In this issue...

- Darwin Initiative Funding Enables DT Botanists to Attend Kew Course.
- Anguilla's Sea Turtles on the Road to Extinction & Turtle News.
- The British Ecological Society.
- Commerce and Countries Line

Up to Discuss the Future of the Remaining Dependent Territories.

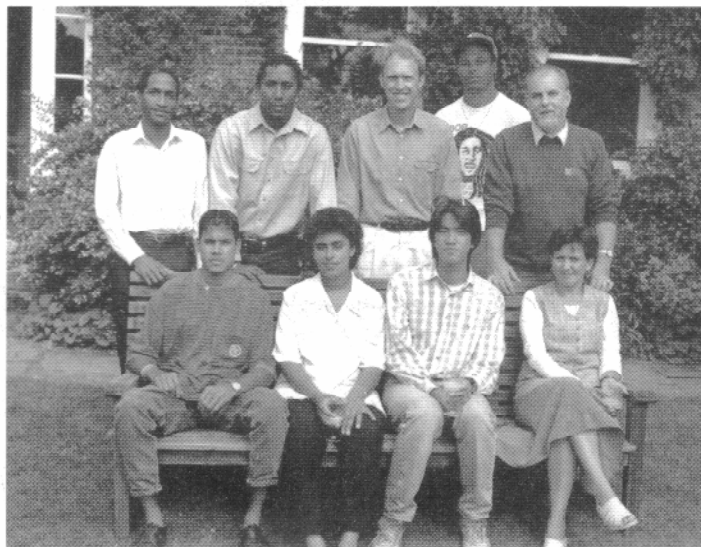
- Ramsar Convention – Progress.
- Team Visit Montserrat to Check Status of Oriole.
- Publications.

Darwin Initiative Funding Enables DT Botanists to Attend Kew Course

The second course in Cultivation and Conservation of Threatened Plant Species was held at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew last summer. Funded by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative Programme, this course was again targeted at UK Dependent Territories four of which were represented. Input from the Forum Secretariat and members, Fauna & Flora International, World Wide Fund for Nature, and the World Conservation Monitoring Centre helped ensure another successful course which we all hope contributes towards building conservation capacity in the UK Dependent Territories.

Following a similar curriculum to the 1996 course, a good balance was maintained between practical horticultural training, academic studies and field trips to a variety of nurseries and conservation organisations in the UK.

Participants interacted well and enjoyed a varied social calendar fitted in around their studies. Strong relationships



Back row from left: Damien Dondé (Seybelle), Lloyd Gumbs, Assistant Landscape Manager at Cap Jaha Resort in Anguilla and an active collaborator with the Anguilla National Trust, Colin Clubbe (Kew), Eyan Bryan, Head Gardener at the J.R. O'Neal Botanic Gardens in Tortola, British Virgin Islands & Stewart Henchie (Kew). Front: Kevin Eden, a gardener at Grand Cayman's Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park, Cynthia Williams, one of the Nursery Team in the St. Helena Agriculture and Forestry Department's Endemic Section, Wicky Lee (Hong Kong) and the Forum's Sara Cross

were developed over the eight weeks and everyone looks forward to following progress over the coming months and years.

We are still aware that several UK Dependent Territories are working under such severe constraints that it was not

possible to release suitable staff for the course, and there are several Territories who have not yet been able to participate in this programme. In the hope that we can rectify this situation we will be running another course at Kew from 6 July to 28 August 1998 and scholarships will again be available to facilitate course attendance. We are particularly keen to hear from those dependent Territories which have so far been under-represented.

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;
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Turtle News

Dorothy Evans, Secretary of the Forum's South Atlantic Working Group writes:

"On my recent visit to Ascension Island in May and June 1997, I was very pleased to have the opportunity to revisit the Two Boats school. I joined in their activities and again experienced the children's enthusiasm and interest in their environment. This time, one of the highlights of my visit was to receive a beautiful copy of the Turtle News. I was delighted this had been produced as a result of a study the younger students had made on one of the most unique features of their island – the annual visit to Ascension beaches of the giant green turtles to lay their eggs before making their long return journey back to their homeland of

TURTLE NEWS

Issue 1234

February, 1997

A LIFE IN THE DAY OF A TURTLE

It's 8 o'clock and I have been

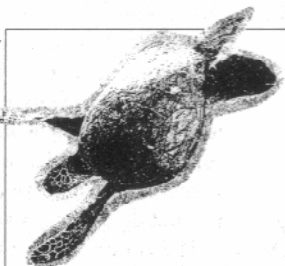


swimming for sixty days from Brazil. The date is Friday the 5th of February 96 and I have another twenty miles to go until I reach Ascension Island to lay my eggs.

I ate before I started the journey and I ate on my way. Oh, I can see some nice weed down there for my breakfast I'm going down and get some because I'm starving. First I have to take a deep breath to go under the water to get the weed. Yummy, this tastes nice it tastes better than turtle grass, but I have to move on or I'll be late for the breeding season. So off I went, I swam for 4 hours, I stopped for

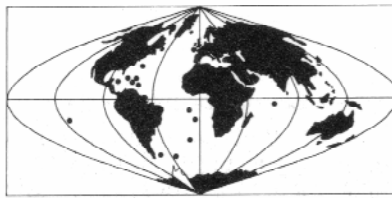
lunch at midday and ate as much as I could then I carried on with my journey until I came to Ascension.

It was night and it was safe to come out of the water. I crawled slowly up the beach and when I was above sea-level I dug a hole. There were other turtles laying eggs as well. When the hole was big and deep enough I laid my eggs, it took me 10 to 15 minutes to lay all my eggs and I buried them and went back into the sea.



Interviewed by Phillip Stevens.

Brazil. Combining the students' imaginations with their serious study of these amazing creatures has resulted in an attractive, lively and informative piece of work both for the writers and readers. I hope that this idea will "catch on" and that other children, in other environments, will produce their own News that can be distributed to others. As a start, the Turtle News has been sent to St. Mary's School on Tristan da Cunha. Wouldn't it be exciting in return to read Crayfish News or Albatross News from the children there? And what about Rockhopper News from the Falklands, or Wirebird News from St. Helena?"



UK Dependent Territories Conservation Forum Annual Report 1996/1997

Chairman's Report on behalf of the Executive Committee 1996/97

This report formally covers the period from the conversion of the Forum from an unconstituted association to a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee in June 1996, to the end of the financial year in June 1997, but includes some items before and after.

This period has seen major developments, both in restructuring the Forum and in facilitating conservation activities in the Dependent Territories. Since the end of the Darwin Initiative Grant, and the launch of the Forum's publication, *UK Dependent Territories: A Conservation Review* in the spring of 1996, the Forum has been able to maintain the momentum gathered, and begin to implement some of the recommendations from the document.

A priority initiative is to continue to build on past success, and place the Forum on a more secure footing. This necessitated the production of a sound business plan and occupied a great deal of time throughout 1996, but importantly progress in implementing it was undertaken in parallel. Membership from supporting organisations increased, through the joining of the British Microbial Biodiversity Association, British Ecological Society, British Ornithologists Union and the National Trust (for England, Wales and Northern Ireland). Constructive meetings with the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office were held to improve arrangements for regular meetings between the Forum and UK Government to make these more effective for all parties involved.

The Forum has embarked on restructuring its own operations to improve further the service to our Associate Members in Dependent Territories. In particular, we are reorganising our successful model of Working Groups to a regional grouping. As local NGOs gain strength, we believe that this approach will be helpful, in assisting Associate Members to exchange relevant experience, in helping represent their views in UK, and generally in coordinating support where they require it. As

a consequence, some future conservation activities will be included in the Working Group reports, while this report becomes more restricted to the necessary but perhaps less exciting developmental, administrative and general matters!

I must, however, mention one field project. That is the biodiversity study in a Caribbean dependency, which the Forum was instrumental in establishing.

Shortly after Montserrat was chosen for this study, volcanic activity started there. Those of us present at the planning meetings in Plymouth in 1996 little knew how great would be the

challenges to our Montserratian friends and colleagues. Despite the increased eruptions, they have continued biodiversity work in accessible areas. For our part, the Forum looks forward to working more with the Montserrat National Trust as soon as conditions allow.

Our *Conservation Review* was supported by the UK Government's Darwin Initiative. A major future activity will be to liaise closely with our partners to ensure that this is kept up to date, and that it is used to promote and monitor important conservation activities. Linked to this, we have advised Governments in the UK and the Dependent Territories on conservation matters, and advised Governments and NGOs on the funding of priority work. Furthermore, in consultation with its Associate Members, the Forum has been active in identifying the need for, and developing, a wide range of projects.

The Forum and its members have developed plans on major projects relating to the Pitcairn Islands, British Indian Ocean Territory, Falkland Islands, Tristan da Cunha, St Helena, Ascension, Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, and Turks & Caicos Islands. It has assisted with

major conservation issues or the application of international agreements relating to the Cayman Islands, Bermuda, Gibraltar, Falkland Islands and the British Indian Ocean Territory.

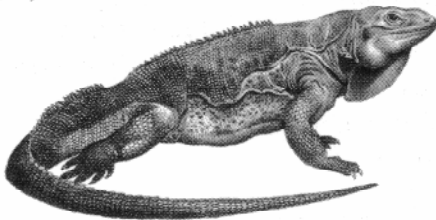
We have continued to disseminate information through *Forum News*, have established a presence on the world-wide web and developed, in partnership with Associate Members in the Dependent Territories, a major project to link the Forum, these partners and schools in the Dependencies through the internet. This project was well received but has not yet been funded. Funds are to be sought.

The progress made has depended on a great many people and organisations. This is far from limited to the members' representatives and the Executive Committee, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank two retiring members of the Committee, Treasurer Miles King and Mark Day, for their contributions. The Committee would also like to record its thanks to the coordinator, Sara Cross, on whom a great load falls. We are pleased to acknowledge the continued financial and other support of our UK member organisations, and note particularly the additional help in this period from RSPB and WWF-UK.

It is important not just to report progress, but to look forward to future priorities. In one sense, the Forum suffers from its own

success in that demands for its services far outweigh its present resources.

To try to meet this increased demand, we have already started an investigation into additional sources of core funding, and this will continue. On other matters, we will be reviewing with our Associate Members the best ways of confirming the relationship with them, and agreeing upon the responsibilities this would entail. The Forum will review and monitor conservation needs, and identify sources of support for priority projects across the Dependent Territories as a whole and in individual areas. We are examining how best to focus the efforts of the Forum in support of the needs of our Associate Members and the Territories in which they lead



conservation efforts.

We have not been alone in thinking that Britain is, at times, a little absent-minded about DTs. The events of recent months have raised the profile and, while the causes of this have not always been good in themselves, it is important not to lose this focus of attention. 1997 saw the transfer of sovereignty of Hong Kong. We are pleased to have been able to give some assistance in the past to conservation issues there, and wish our colleagues well for the future. Just when the news media had been erroneously telling the public that this was the last British Dependency, Montserrat's volcano issued a painful reminder that this was not the case. Noises of a different sort were heard from St Helena. The new British Government was thrown in at the deep end, and is itself not happy with its reaction.

The Foreign Secretary has announced a review of the Dependencies in time for the

meeting of the Dependent Territories Association early next year, at which the Forum will be represented. The Forum had already drawn to the attention of UK Government that its support for environmental matters in the Dependent Territories was in danger of falling down between its domestic spend and its international support. The Forum is seeking also to contribute to the wider review.

The Forum has also taken the initiative in promoting the designation and management of wetlands of international importance in the Dependent Territories. Domestically, the British Government has done well in listing such sites under the "Ramsar" Convention, but designation in Dependent Territories represents a sadder tale. Much of the groundwork has been undertaken and there is considerable interest locally in many cases. The meeting of the Parties to Ramsar in early 1996 placed

some emphasis on coral reefs and other tropical wetlands. The next meeting of the Parties is in Costa Rica in 1999. To help progress, the Forum plans to strengthen further its contacts with the UK Government Departments which take a lead in these various issues and this will be done, as appropriate, at the level of regional working groups or by the Forum as a whole.

This is a report to the network which constitutes the Forum. So, I would like to end by congratulating everyone for their efforts, whether in member organisations, working groups, other organisations, specialist advisers or whatever. It is because of your efforts that the Forum is the authority it is on Dependent Territory conservation issues. We will continue to strive to fulfil a major role of the Forum in making known this source of skill and expertise as a wider source of advice and assistance.

Report of UKDTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group

The first meeting of the Wider Caribbean Working Group (WCWG) was held on 8 July. A second was held on 30 September. The Group covers the five Caribbean Dependent Territories, Anguilla, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks & Caicos Islands and British Virgin Islands, and Bermuda.

Michael Gore was appointed Chairman and Chris Ninnes Secretary. The Chairman has notified the Governors and representatives of NGOs in the DTs of the establishment of the WCWG and outlined its objectives. Detailed plans are now being developed.

These will fall within the general terms of reference established for Forum Working Groups. It includes the following roles:

- Promoting the objectives of the Forum to the six Dependent Territories in the region.
- In liaison with the Forum Co-ordinator, extending contacts with Governors and Associate Members, to encourage the development of local NGOs, good conservation policies and actions.
- Facilitating contacts between the Dependencies in the field of conservation.
- Producing, or arranging for the production of, material for *Forum News* and the Forum's web site to keep it up to date with developments in the Dependent Territories.
- Extending links with Governors and departmental officers in the West Indian and Atlantic Department, Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the responsible department for the six territories.
- Promoting adherence to international conservation treaties and practices.
- Producing at least annually an update on conservation measures and issues in each of the Territories.

The Forum's database will be developed for instant access to information on conservation activities and problems in each of the Territories.

This is being based on the existing personal and electronic contacts between the Chairman of the Working Group, the Co-ordinator of the Forum and the Dependent Territories. Forum members are already pursuing these contacts in

There is much to be done if the Dependent Territories in the region are to bring their conservation practices up to international standards. In the Cayman Islands development projects are allowed to proceed with little consideration for the long-term effect on the environment or the effect on international opinion of projects established to promote tourism, e.g. a "swim with the dolphins"

operation using wild-caught animals in an unsuitable site. On TCI a proposed huge cruise liner facility would have a major effect on the environment and might encroach on a Ramsar site. A hotel development in Bermuda threatens a unique cave system. The on-going disaster in Montserrat combines with previous habitat loss to human activities, to threaten the extinction of one endemic bird species and several reptile subspecies (though a rescue operation is planned). Some local NGOs urgently need development help. So there is plenty to do.



Grand Cayman Parrot: *Amazona leucocephala caymanensis*.

person, linking in with planning and project management visits by WWF (to Montserrat, Anguilla and Cayman), FFI and Kew (to BVI and Anguilla) and Forum officers (TCI and BVI). All this is a prerequisite to further development, particularly fundraising.

These visits partly reflect work already in progress, stimulated by previous activity by the Forum and its members. This includes the biodiversity study on Montserrat (see Executive Committee report), the development programme for Anguilla's National Trust, support for conservation of Cayman's wetlands and monitoring of its endemic parrots, nature trails on TCI, and advice on conservation initiatives, development impacts or project proposals on BVI, Cayman and Bermuda.



Turks & Caicos Endemic Iguana: *Cyclura carinata carinata*.

Report of UKDTCF Pitcairn Working Group

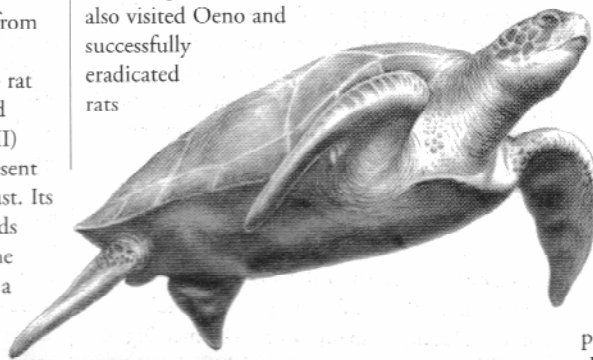
Two major field projects were undertaken during the period covered by this report. In the near future, activity of the Group will depend particularly on the outcome of the plant conservation project.

1. Rat eradication. Thanks to funding from ODA (now Department for International Development) and WWF-UK, a 6-person rat eradication team from New Zealand-based Wildlife Management International (WMI) under the leadership of Brian Bell was present in the Pitcairn Islands from April to August. Its task was to eliminate rats from three islands in the group, namely Pitcairn itself and the atolls of Ducie and Oeno. This will bring a number of advantages to the Pitcairn Islanders, as well as creating safe breeding havens for the large (but depleted) populations of seabirds, notably petrels.

Although the rugged extent of the Pitcairn terrain was a surprise to the WMI team, grids were successfully cut and the first laying of bait was undertaken in late June and early July. It was immediately obvious that this had a massive effect on the rat population that was exclusively *Rattus exulans*. Bodies could be smelt. More positively, Pitcairners were amazed at the lack of rat damage to fallen fruit. Somewhat delayed by persistent wet weather, a second period of bait laying followed in late July. After this, there was very little sign of rats. Where sign was noted, further poison was laid.

Although it is too early to be completely certain, there is a good possibility that Pitcairn is now rat-free. In addition all feral cats were eliminated from the island.

During the Pitcairn work, the team also visited Oeno and successfully eradicated rats



Green Turtle: *Chelonia mydas*

from that atoll. However the difficulties of weather and terrain met on Pitcairn meant that rat eradication on Ducie was not attempted during the present phase of work. This task will be undertaken during a return visit in November.

Throughout the programme, the Islanders have contributed not only hospitality but also labour. The endeavour became very much a community project, which augurs well for future conservation initiatives on the island.

2. Plant Conservation. Thanks to major funding from the Foreign and Commonwealth

Office plus a number of lesser grants, a team of four botanists under the leadership of Dr Steve Waldren of Trinity College, Dublin, left for Pitcairn Island in June. The team is still in the

field at the time of writing but has already reported 8 new higher plant records for Pitcairn. The group will undertake a detailed survey of the island's highly restricted endemic plants and their associated invertebrates. The outcomes of this work will include:

- Complete vegetation survey of Pitcairn Island.
- Assessment of the vegetation cover of important watersheds.
- Species recovery plans for threatened plants.
- Development of propagation techniques for threatened plants.

The Islanders and Dr Waldren will be discussing how preservation of the threatened plants can be integrated with the Pitcairn way of life. For instance, how can the conservation objectives be met without hindering the Islanders' vegetable and fruit gardening, and while enhancing the cultivation of miro (the prized carving wood) on Pitcairn. In the long-term, the conservation management of Pitcairn, aiding Her Majesty's Government to meet its commitments under the Biodiversity Convention, is not likely to be expensive. A couple of salaried Islanders trained and then working as conservation officers are required.

Report of UKDTCF St. Helena Working Group (and Establishment of South Atlantic Working Group)

This will be the last report of the Forum's St Helena Working Group. In the last few months, consultations have been in progress on how best to support partners in the South Atlantic. This included a meeting involving the St Helena Working Group members and those involved in other South Atlantic Dependencies. This was a very positive gathering, and all agreed that the common challenges led naturally to a South Atlantic Working Group, combining the participants of the previous St Helena Group and the different experiences and skills of those from other islands. The Forum has confirmed the request to disband the St Helena Group and create a new South Atlantic one. The Forum will ensure that this builds on past successes.

The following is a summary of the group's collective endeavour together with an outline of the key background issues involved. However, it is important to stress that this group consists of 22 individuals the majority of whom are engaged in their own conservation efforts for St Helena and/or Ascension. Such individual contributions include major publications such

as Beau Rowlands' forthcoming book – *British Ornithologists' Union Checklist on the Birds of St*



Sooty Tern

Helena, field research, equipment procurement and training assistance.

The SEDS factor

The need for ODA's Sustainable Environment and Development Strategy (SEDS) to develop through its consultation, refinement and implementation process has proved the determining factor regarding the group's ability to carry forward conservation initiatives over the last couple of years. This

initiative was commenced in 1993 (with large Forum input) and has progressed at varying rates, largely as a result of insufficient funding support. Although funding constraints remain a problem, the SEDS process has realised an important advancement with the activation of the Advisory Coordinator for the Environment (ACE) post which is currently being filled by Dr Rebecca Rowe. With this development it is hoped that conservation efforts will be speeded up.

Working group developments

Because of the above SEDS considerations, the group has focused its energies on supporting the Forum's conservation strategy and associated core initiatives. These efforts have proved successful in helping St Helena and Ascension maintain a high profile in lobbying meetings with FCO et al. The group has also endeavoured to ensure that St Helena and Ascension receive due attention in any funding opportunities such as AUSB. The value of these efforts continuing, hopefully against a background of increased in-country conservation momentum, is clear.

Continued on page 4

A big problem the group has always experienced is the difficulty in physically meeting together. This is due to the members being so widely dispersed (including St Helena, the Netherlands and Scotland). This problem in getting together highlights the continued need for in-country email link up to the UK so that effective discussions can take place without the need for frequent gatherings, other than the Forum meetings.

Current and future developments

The group is currently being advised by Rebecca Rowe and the St Helena Nature Conservation Group as to how we might best

support in-country conservation efforts. Current project efforts include assisting with the production of a Darwin grant application aimed at providing essential equipment, materials and training necessary to establish an in-country invertebrate identification and specimen collection facility for the Island's 300 endemic invertebrate species. Group members are also active in the resubmission of the Internet and web site application to the National Lottery International Grants Programme. The establishment of a comprehensive central database (comprising publications, reports, maps, slide and specimen material) is seen as a continued action priority.

The need to assist the SHNCG compile a duplicate in-country database is also recognised as a priority.

Citizenship issues

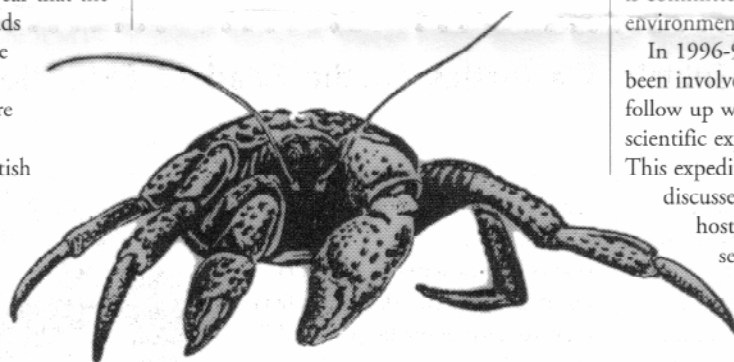
Although not strictly coming under the remit of the either the working group or the Forum, it would be impossible to ignore St Helena's ongoing citizenship issue. If successful, this initiative could bring profound concomitant conservation benefits for the Island's natural heritage. How might we best respond to this issue?

Report of UKDTCF British Indian Ocean Territories Working Group

The Forum agreed during the year that the Executive Committee of the Friends of the Chagos should also fulfil the functions of a Forum working Group for BIOT, in order to secure coverage of:

- A region in which no other British Dependent Territory exists.
- A territory where there is no local population (other than military personnel, plus support staff, on short-term assignments).

The Friends of the Chagos exist to promote knowledge of the Chagos and, especially, to ensure that the Territory's environment does not become degraded. They operate by assembling and disseminating information about the ecology of these reefs and atolls.



Coconut Crab: *Birgus latro*

They also draw to the attention of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (responsible for administering BIOT) any matters of concern. Notwithstanding the reservation of BIOT for defence purposes, the Administration

is committed to highly creditable environmental policies.

In 1996-97 the Friends of the Chagos have been involved in two main projects. First is the follow up work resulting from the first major scientific expedition to the area for 20 years. This expedition took place in January 1996 was discussed at a conference on 7th October, hosted by the Linnean Society. The second project is the preparation of a series of booklets on the natural history of the Chagos, of which the first two appeared last Spring.

In the year ahead, the main focus is likely to be on discussions with the BIOT Administration of the measures the latter are taking to deal with threats to the marine environment posed by illegal commercial fishing and by visiting yachts.

Officers & Contact Points

First contact on any issue should normally be to the Forum Co-ordinator.

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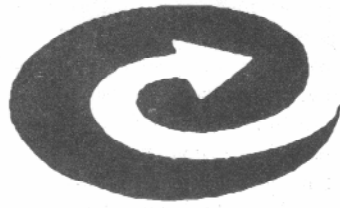
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The British Ecological Society

Founded in 1913, as a learned Society the BES is the oldest of its kind in the world. An independent, registered charity it receives no outside funds. Its aims are to promote ecology through publications, conferences and research. Such findings are used to educate the public, and influence policies which involve ecological matters, as a basis for nature conservation, environmental management and sustainable development. Our 5,000 worldwide members include teachers, local authority ecologists, research scientists,



The British Ecological Society

conservationists, naturalists and environmental consultants. Indeed anyone interested in ecology is welcome to join.

The BES has nine special groups working in aquatic ecology, conservation,

forests, computing, tropical ecology, genetics, ecophysiology, teaching and mires. Grant schemes covering funding for small ecological projects, expeditions, research travel and attendance at Society meetings are available. More information about the BES and current news is available on our web site at <http://demon.co.uk/bes>.

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Anguilla's Sea turtles on the Road to Extinction

Extinctions on small islands like Anguilla are frightening to contemplate. The overriding cause of decline of sea turtles is that we have harvested them and their eggs with impunity for over a thousand years. As technology improved after World War II more were taken, first by nets and later by spear guns, mainly for food and shell.

In Anguilla, the most abundant nesting species is the Hawksbill, although evidence suggests that Green and Leatherback turtles also occupy our waters. Hawksbills are the smallest of sea turtles (adults rarely exceed 200 lbs). They are at home in coral reef habitats and feed on reef invertebrates, mainly sponges. Over the centuries the reef-sheltered beaches of Anguilla have nurtured tens of thousands of Hawksbill eggs. Baby Hawksbills, like all sea turtles, swim quickly offshore to avoid predatory fishes. They spend the first few years of their lives in the open ocean often thousands of miles away.

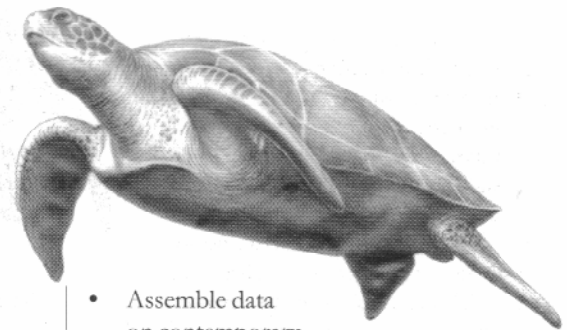
Juvenile Hawksbills do not return to coastal Caribbean waters until they are about 10 inches in shell length, when they leave the open sea, and take up residence in coral reefs. However, they don't remain settled moving from one foraging ground another in search of food. They travel widely throughout the Caribbean Sea, and the waters of dozens of nations, before reaching sexual maturity at 25 – 30 years of age. After mating, the female returns to the beach where she was born often swimming hundreds of miles. Sadly, few survive the journey and many are netted or speared before they reach "home".

Sea turtles are a shared marine resource. Fishermen have been killing turtles for far too long. Data indicate that there are fewer than 50 nests per year on the beaches of Anguilla, a number which translates into fewer than 10 nesting turtles per year! We are deeply concerned that this tiny population is on the brink of extinction, and the Anguilla National Trust has enlisted the support of the Wider Caribbean Sea Turtle Network (WIDECAST) to assist in mobilising our citizenry to the conservation of sea turtles. WIDECAST has been working to focus governments of the Caribbean on a unified agenda of scientifically sound conservation for six highly migratory species of endangered sea turtles. The Network has helped to co-ordinate 36 Caribbean nations to develop recovery action plans for sea turtles.

In May 1995, Anguilla passed a 5 year moratorium on Sea Turtles. In order for it to be effective, the moratorium has to remain in effect for at least one generation which for sea turtles is 25 – 30 years. We must discipline and dedicate ourselves to this long term goal, and protect our sea turtles.

The Anguilla National Trust has recently received a joint grant from the United Nations Development Programme's Global Environment Forum Small Grants Programme and WIDECAST for sea turtle conservation work.

The project is designed to:



- Assemble data on contemporary status and distribution of sea turtles in Anguilla;
- Enhance community awareness and involve citizens in conservation of marine turtles; and
- Increase the capacity of local institutions to design and implement scientifically sound sea turtle conservation and management programmes.

This is a crucial first step in ensuring the survival of Anguilla's threatened sea turtles. It provides an excellent opportunity to increase community participation and involvement at a local level. Several local people will also be able to subsidise their incomes through research and data collection.

For more information, please contact Karen L. Eckert PhD, Executive Director WIDECAST, 17218 Libertad Drive, San Diego, California 92127 USA Tel (619)451 - 6894 Email widecast@ixc.netcom.com or the Anguilla National Trust, P.O. Box 1234, The Valley, Anguilla, BWT Tel:(809) 497 - 5297 Email: axanatl@candw.com.ai

Ramsar Convention: Wetlands of International Importance – Progress.

The Forum has noted the emphasis placed by the 1996 Conference on progressing the listing and protection of tropical wetlands, especially coral reefs and mangroves. Although domestically UK has made good progress in the listing of wetlands of international importance, 26 years after the Convention was signed in 1971, only two sites are currently listed in UK's Dependent Territories. The Forum has provided its support to correct this and thus welcomes the recent commitment by HM Government to add the British Indian Ocean Territory to UK's ratification of the Ramsar Convention and to list wetlands of international importance for BIOT before the end of 1998. We are pleased to have helped with this, through our partner organisation, the Friends of the Chagos.

At the AGM of the Friends of the Chagos on 7 October 1997, Mr. Bruce Dinwiddie, HM Commissioner for the British Indian Ocean Territory, launched the new Conservation Policy for the Territory. The final paragraph of this policy reads:

"19. Furthermore, the BIOT Administration undertakes, by the end of 1998, to:

- (i) ask the UK to arrange to have the provisions of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, especially as Waterfowl Habitat, 1971, (Ramsar Convention) extended to BIOT, and propose possible sites for listing under Ramsar;
- (ii) designate Strict Nature Reserves as defined by the IUCN classification system, e.g. the rat free islands of the Great Chagos Bank, the three islets to the north of Diego Garcia, and all the islands to the east of Moresby and Fouquet in the Peros Banhos atoll;
- (iii) consider designating Marine Protected Areas as a further measure to protect the reef fisheries; and
- (iv) introduce controls to regulate unauthorised visitors to the Territory who arrive by sea."

The next conference takes place in Costa Rica in 1999. In common with other parties, UK will need to report on listings, actual and potential changes to Ramsar sites and the state of wetlands listed or not. The Forum takes every opportunity to promote Ramsar designations and related conservation. For example, the Forum welcomes the interest shown to it by the Government of the British Virgin Islands for Ramsar designations. We are pleased to assist in progressing these. Many potential sites throughout the Territories were identified in a report in

1992.

However, the Forum notes with concern proposals for a major intensive tourism development adjacent to and potentially affecting one of the two currently listed Ramsar wetlands in UK's Dependent Territories: North, Middle & East Caicos, in the Turks & Caicos Islands. The proposed development apparently involves major earth and sea works. This appears to be quite incompatible with commitments under the Ramsar Convention as well as potentially damaging to wildlife, fisheries and local communities. The Forum is urgently seeking reassurance on the state of this proposal and the investigations into its potential impact. The Forum remains ready to assist investigations of more appropriate developments which would be compatible with UK's treaty commitments.

Publications: Bird Atlas for the Falkland Islands

Falklands Conservation is pleased to announce publication of the *Atlas of Breeding Birds of the Falkland Islands* by Robin & Anne Woods - a milestone in the study of birds of these islands. It is the first atlas of breeding birds for any South American country. It shows the importance of the Falklands archipelago as a haven for species that have declined dramatically in southern South America.

Many Falkland bird populations, seabirds in particular, are of international significance. The Islands support over 80% of the world population of Black-

browed Albatross. They remain the most important site in the world for Rockhopper Penguin and hold the bulk of the world population for landbird species such as the Ruddy-headed Goose and Black-throated Finch.

The Atlas is based on records from about 160 observers who sent reports equivalent to more than 550 Breeding Birds Survey forms over a period of 10 breeding seasons between 1983/84 and 1992/93. The results are substantial, considering that this country of 4,700 square miles (12,200 km²) has a small permanent human population of only about 2,200.

"This book is an important and timely contribution to our knowledge of the status and conservation requirements of breeding birds in the Falklands. Future development plans and the environmental policy for the Islands and surrounding seas must ensure that the critical wildlife habitats identified are secured" said WWF UK (whose funding has supported the costs of this publication).

Atlas of Breeding Birds of the Falkland Islands by Robin & Anne Woods
246 X 171 mm; c200pp; case bound and jacketed. ISBN 0 904 614 60 3. Price £25.00 (+ £2.00 post and packing). Anthony Nelson (Publishers) P O Box 9, Oswestry, Shropshire, England SY11 1BY. In association with Falklands Conservation. For further information contact: Ann Brown, UK Secretary at UK Office as above. Email: info@falklands-nature.demon.co.uk

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