



# FORUM NEWS 20

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## FUNDING AT LAST TO START ECOLOGICAL RESTORATION WORK ON ASCENSION

John Battle MP, Minister of State Foreign and Commonwealth Office announced in his speech to the All Party Parliamentary Group for Wildlife Protection on Monday 26 March 2001 that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office was making available additional funding of £500,000 to support a two-year project, to be implemented by the RSPB and the island's administration, to restore the seabird breeding colonies on Ascension Island.



Pair of Ascension Frigatebirds *Fregata aquila* on Boatswain Bird Island

Mr Battle said "This project will be managed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), whose national and international record on major habitat projects gives me confidence of success. The aim is to remove threats to the famous Wideawake Fairs – Ascension's breeding colonies of the Wideawake Tern; to make the whole island secure from introduced predators so that other spectacular seabirds like the Ascension Island Frigate Bird (illustrated above) and the Brown Booby will be able to expand from offshore Boatswainbird Island to the main island; and to support the development of sustainable nature tourism – including the magnificent Green Turtle beaches – as a key part of Ascension's future prosperity.

This project is long overdue. Sadly, little attention was paid to conserving Ascension's natural heritage during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The seabird colonies of this remote tropical Atlantic island should now be restored closer to their earlier size and diversity of species. Taking measures to repair damage by invasive species is an important commitment under the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). That was one of the big achievements of the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio."

Ascension covers an area of almost 100 sq km, is home to the Ascension Frigatebird *Fregata aquilla* - an endemic species that is declining in number. Ascension is also home to other seabirds including sooty (also know as wideawake terns) and fairy terns, red-footed boobies and white-tailed tropicbirds. It is also important for a variety of rare plants, fish and invertebrates and is one of the world's most important breeding sites for green turtles.

In order to restore this important island, the RSPB will fence-in livestock to reduce the spread of invasive plants, like the Mexican thorn, which was accidentally introduced in the 1980s and which provides food and cover for rats. Measures will be taken to remove

other introduced species such as feral cats which have decimated the island's seabird and turtle populations. It is hoped that further funds will be raised to eradicate rats. The RSPB will also employ a conservation officer to ensure that the island's environment is conserved and enhanced.

RSPB International Director, Alistair Gammell said: "Conservationists have been campaigning to protect Ascension's wildlife for many years, during which time introduced species such as feral cats and black rats have been responsible for the death of many thousands of seabirds

and baby turtles. These species have been responsible for the extinction of two bird species (a flightless rail and a night heron) and the decimation of seabird and turtle colonies. We welcome the FCO's support for this initiative to restore this island to its former glory." FCO minister John Battle said: "This visionary project will not only protect Ascension's wildlife for future generations, it will also support the people of one of the UK's smallest overseas territories through sustainable tourism."

Ascension Island's Administrator, Geoffrey Fairhurst, added: "On the 500th anniversary of Ascension's discovery, we are proud to be able to repair the damage done over the years and to make the island, once again, the most important seabird-breeding colony in the South Atlantic."

The Forum congratulates FCO on finding the resources in this case. The lack of a budget line for UK to fulfil its international commitments by major conservation projects has been highlighted in Ascension where, under current UK Government rules, there is are no permanent local citizens to share the responsibility. The Forum hopes that UK Government will look towards the development of a fund to allow for other major OT needs.

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## BRITISH INDIAN OCEAN TERRITORY: RAMSAR REVERSAL

The repercussions rumble on of last November's court decision requiring UK Government to allow the former inhabitants of the Territory to return. All people of good will wish the Ilois well in their desire to return to their islands of origin (see *Forum News* February 2001) and all interested in conservation of the Chagos Archipelago hope that it will remain worthy of World Heritage listing. Are the two desires compatible? Yes, think the Friends of the Chagos.

The BIOT and British Governments are undertaking careful and important studies of the feasibility of re-settlement. Rightly so, for there are many imponderables, ranging from the long-term effects of global warming on water supplies to the viability of economic activity relying on the Archipelago's northern atolls. The trouble is that care of the environment cannot be put on hold pending the outcome of the feasibility studies. Yet that would be the effect of accepting Government views put to the Forum at their meeting on 1 March 2001.

In 1997 the BIOT Government undertook to list Ramsar sites within a year and in three subsequent annual statements described progress towards achieving this commitment. On 1 March 2001 the Forum was instead told that the planned sites would be held in abeyance, with the idea of designation 'if and when circumstances permit'. The Friends of the Chagos have put it to government that this line is contrary to their longstanding commitment to treat the Chagos with no less strict regard for natural heritage considerations than places actually nominated as World Heritage Sites; human activities, they say, should be adapted to the exigencies of the site, not the other way about. They have also pointed out that the Ramsar principle of 'wise use' coincides with the interests of the Ilois: its main requirement is 'sustainable utilisation for the benefit of mankind in a way compatible with the natural properties of the ecosystem'. Watch this space!

Nigel Wenban-Smith Chairman, Friends of Chagos, UKOTCF British Indian Ocean Territory Working Group

## PITCAIRN DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

In February the media in New Zealand and UK revealed major development proposals for the Pitcairn Islands. A consortium of New Zealand businessmen had put their \$50 million project to the Islanders who, after initial doubts, indicated interest in pursuing the proposal. If this proposal comes to pass, it will not only represent the most radical change in the Pitcairn way of life since the Bounty mutineers settled in 1790, but will also carry major environmental risks.

The development would potentially involve three islands in the Pitcairn group. On the tiny uninhabited atoll of Oeno, 90 miles to the northeast of Pitcairn, a 1200-metre airstrip would be constructed if the plan proceeds. This airstrip would have to stretch out into the pristine lagoon. It would be the main access point for tourists, for whom a 30-bed hotel would be constructed also on the 60 hectares of land. Presumably outsiders would staff the hotel. How the thousands of seabirds nesting on this atoll would react to the intrusion remains to be assessed. Nor is it yet clear how the unique molluscs of the lagoon would cope with the changed water-flow and, possibly, the hotel's effluent. From Oeno, visitors would be taken to two other islands in the group. On the World Heritage Site of Henderson Island, a 20-bed 'Environmental Protection Facility' is planned. This facility appears to be a hotel under another name. The presence of any such permanent structure coupled with a jetty to improve access through the reef must increase the chance that alien plants and animals will establish themselves on Henderson. The fact that the raised coral island of Henderson is remarkably free of such aliens is one of the reasons for its World Heritage status. Another is the large suite of endemic plants

and animals, most famously the flightless Henderson Rail, one of a handful of flightless rail species remaining on earth.

On Pitcairn itself there would be a small tourist lodge and also another airstrip. Such an airstrip would probably be constructed in an area already cloaked with weedy vegetation, and would therefore not be especially damaging environmentally. It would also reduce the Islanders' isolation and increase access to medical help, which would

be welcome, as would the tourist income.

The company is seeking exclusive development rights to Oeno and Henderson. But Alistair Gammell, International Director for the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, has asked the British Government to make it clear that these islands "are not for sale"(see next page for RSPB comment).

The company is also proposing a fish processing facility on Pitcairn, in return for exclusive access to the 200-mile fishing zone around the Pitcairn Islands. At this stage the conservation community in the UK and New Zealand would be pleased to see environmentally sensitive developments on Pitcairn that would enhance the Island's economic prospects. But the community is also pressing the British Government to ensure that any developments on Oeno and Henderson are subject to the most rigorous scrutiny. If these uniquely lovely places were spoilt, the entire world would be the loser.

Conservationists have expressed regret to UK Government on the lack of guidance on strategic planning to the Pitcairn Islands, the lack of support and the limiting of involvement to a reactive response to external proposals.



*Pitcairn Islanders working on the beach*



## TOURISM DEVELOPMENT THREATENS WORLD HERITAGE SITE

### Pitcairn Island wildlife and culture under threat

The RSPB has written to the UK Government, expressing outrage over a New Zealand company's plan to develop islands in Pitcairn, one of the UK's Overseas Territories. Pitcairn Island is best known as the place where Fletcher Christian and the other Bounty mutineers settled with their



Polynesian brides. The current, dwindling population of about 50 people is descended from them. The islands of Henderson and Oeno are both uninhabited.

Henderson Island is a World Heritage Site with many endemic plants and invertebrates. It has three bird species unique to the island: the flightless Henderson rail, the beautiful Henderson Lorikeet and the Henderson fruit-dove. The Pitcairn warbler is found only on Henderson and a few neighbouring islands. (Also the Henderson Petrel was recently split from its nearest relative.)

Oeno is a tiny pristine coral atoll with unique marine life living in its lagoon and many nesting seabirds. An airstrip would occupy a large proportion of the island if the development went ahead. Alistair Gammell, RSPB's International Director said today "We support Pitcairn islanders in their wish to have an airstrip on Pitcairn, which would do much to develop and sustain the Pitcairn community and a hotel for tourists on the island would also bring income and provide local employment. However developing hotels and other infrastructure on Oeno and Henderson, both of which are uninhabited islands of global importance for biodiversity, is unacceptable."

He continued: "The development of these uninhabited islands would not provide employment for Pitcairn islanders, who would more than be fully employed at any facility on Pitcairn itself. Development would inevitably damage these two islands and possibly lead to the extinction of endemic species. We call on the UK Government to quickly make clear that, whilst they welcome proposals for Pitcairn itself, Oeno and Henderson islands are not for sale and are off-limits to developers."

Alistair Gammell, RSPB International Director  
+44 1767 680551

## WILDLIFE SMUGGLERS ARRESTED IN GRAND CAYMAN

Three wildlife smugglers were deported from the Cayman Islands on 2<sup>nd</sup> March after having spent a month in prison awaiting trial. The three came under suspicion when a local resident alerted the National Trust for the Cayman Islands. He remembered concern over collecting by the same individual in the mid 1990's. After inquiries and further report the Trust learned that the three men were posing as academic researchers while collecting live reptiles in considerable numbers, but they had made no recent contact with local officials and had not been issued with export permits.

In a closely coordinated operation involving the Trust, the Department of Agriculture, Customs, Immigration, Department of Environment, Civil Aviation, Royal Cayman Island Police and the private security firm Intelsec, all possible routes for illegal export were monitored and the men were followed until they checked in at the airport. Bags seized by customs contained 930 endemic Grand Cayman anole lizards, 140 curly-tailed

lizards from the Bahamas and 112 curly-tailed lizards from Grand Cayman. In smaller numbers there were other reptiles and amphibians, marine life, terrestrial invertebrates and a collection of bromeliads, cacti and ferns. CITES restricted material included 4 endemic ground

boas, and 13 endemic banana orchids, all from Grand Cayman.

The Cayman Islands are to be congratulated in their united effort to capture and convict the three smugglers and to be able to release all the Grand Cayman wildlife. By publishing the picture of the three smugglers here and on the Forum Website we hope you will familiarise their faces. Keep their pictures on file and make sure that they cannot operate anywhere ever again.



*From left to right: Jurgen Geisler, Harald Endig and Joachim Schmidt preparing nooses for catching lizards.*

Full story and more pictures on the Cayman National Trust Web site: [www.caymannationaltrust.org](http://www.caymannationaltrust.org)

# FUNDING AND FAILURE TO FUND ENVIRONMENTAL WORK FOR THE OVERSEAS TERRITORIES

The FCO Environment Fund for the Overseas Territories has successfully funded a variety of projects. A selected list of projects funded in the financial year 2000/2001 is given below. It is intended that project information be published on the FCO and UKOTCF websites as soon as possible. Priorities for the future of the fund will include projects reflecting the priorities of the environment charter and those aimed at building capacity to produce environmental legislation.

UK Government's 1999 White Paper on the Overseas Territories announced both the FCO's Environment Fund for Overseas Territories and a fund in the Department for International Development (DFID) to support work in UKOTs in recognition that they were largely excluded from support under the Global Environment Facility, despite UK's contribution to this. DFID had not yet implemented this OT Global Environment Programme (OT GEP). Due to a wide range of cut backs in DFID, the Overseas Territories Unit has been asked to cut £8m over three years. Emphasis in cuts is in programmes not yet started. One of the funds to suffer is the OT GEP fund, which has now been postponed, even though it had been finally approved internally early in the year. This decision will be reconsidered in a year's time.

News of this announcement was met by much frustration, particularly for the more impoverished territories of Anguilla, Turks & Caicos Islands, St Helena, Tristan da Cunha, Pitcairn and Montserrat, all of which have island ecosystems that support wildlife found nowhere else. Developmental pressures are intense in all these territories and include such proposed developments as a cruise-ship port for Turks and Caicos, airport and hotel complex on Pitcairn and the clearing of mangroves for tourist facilities in the Caribbean.

At meetings with Government, the Forum recalled that this fund had been a White Paper commitment, announced two years earlier at the same time as the FCO's fund, but never put in place. Whereas the FCO fund had been operative throughout that time, DFID have spent time and funds on consultants, and have asked the OTs and NGOs similarly to contribute their own limited resources to consultations and the preparation of proposals – resources now wasted.

The UK Department of the Environment, Transport & the Region's (DETR) Darwin Initiative will be 10 years old at the World Summit on Sustainable Development next year, corresponding with the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Particularly in recent years, the Darwin Initiative has funded several important projects in UKOTs. Full details can be found on DETR's web site: [www.environment.detr.gov.uk/darwin](http://www.environment.detr.gov.uk/darwin).

## FCO ENVIRONMENT FUND FOR THE OVERSEAS TERRITORIES (EFOT) Some of the projects approved in Financial Year 2000-2001

### **Title: *Breath of Fresh Air* video and DVD**

Purpose: To spread greater awareness of the rich biodiversity of the UK's Overseas Territories and to inform and motivate those involved in conserving and managing sustainably their natural living.

E.T.V. Productions made a *Breath of Fresh Air* for the FCO in video and DVD format. The theme is the rich biodiversity of the UK Overseas Territories, picking up key topics from a conference organised by FCO and the Forum at the Zoological Society of London (chaired by Nick Ross): Introducing the Overseas Territories; marine ecosystems (coral reefs, mangroves); Tourism – threat or promise?; planning for sustainable development. There is a moving message from Sir David Attenborough about the fragility of the Overseas Territories' precious natural heritage; and the video ends with the London Community Gospel Choir in an exciting rearrangement of Joni Mitchell's *Big Yellow Taxi*.

### **Title: Teaching Support pack for *A Breath of Fresh Air* video/DVD**

Purpose: To provide secondary schools and environmental organisation in the Overseas Territories with material to help them use the video/DVD *A Breath of Fresh Air* to raise public awareness of environmental issues. The support packs will also be presented to other small island countries and territories to encourage them to share their experience of environmental issues with the UK Overseas Territories.

Anyone interested in further information about the support pack should contact Environment Policy Department FCO (Environment@fco.gov.uk)



*Martin Drury of the National Trust speaking at Calpe 2000*

### **Title: Gibraltar Calpe 2000 Conference (Gibraltar 28 September to 1 October 2000)**

Purpose: Support for a major environmental conference in Gibraltar to enable wide participation from the UK's Overseas Territories (see report in *Forum News* 19).

Details: [www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org) and [www.gibraltar.gi/gonhs](http://www.gibraltar.gi/gonhs)

### **Title: Database Module on Conservation Areas in UK Overseas Territories**

Purpose: To provide access to and use of information on conservation of areas (both terrestrial and marine) in the UK Overseas Territories.

This module, whose development is in progress, will assist in the recording of areas of conservation interest to raise awareness of their value and facilitate protection measures; encourage the development of open

consideration of development proposals by planning authorities and the participation of local people by making information readily available; assist in compiling the reports required under international conventions; help exchange information on best practice between UKOTs (and elsewhere) on site-management and avoiding negative impacts.

Website: [www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org)



**Title: Natural History of St Helena and Ascension (Book)**

Purpose: To support the publication with extensive colour illustrations of a comprehensive study of the natural history of St Helena and Ascension as a key resource for the better understanding and management of the natural living resources of these remote Atlantic islands

**Title: Falkland Islands Freshwater Lake Sediments and Environmental Change.**

Purpose: To study the freshwater lakes of the Falkland Islands with reference to biodiversity, climate change and water quality of freshwater lakes in the Falkland Islands; and build capacity for the understanding and monitoring of freshwater habitats in the islands.

**Title: Falkland Islands Rat Eradication Pilot Project**

Purpose: To conduct a pilot project to eradicate rats from four small islands, providing a baseline for estimating the feasibility of mounting major rat eradication campaigns in other parts of the Falklands.

Related website: Falklands Conservation: [www.falklands-nature.demon.co.uk](http://www.falklands-nature.demon.co.uk)

**Title: Henderson Island World Heritage Site Leaflets**

Purpose: to provide advice to yacht parties landing on Henderson Island on how to ensure that their presence does not damage the fragile ecosystems of this remote and uninhabited World Heritage Site.

Related website: UNESCO World Heritage Centre: [www.unesco.org/whc](http://www.unesco.org/whc)

**Title: Green Turtles on Ascension**

Purpose: To set up the infrastructure for monitoring the turtles on Ascension by island residents, building a warden network with associated interpretative facilities for visitors to the breeding colonies.

Administrator of Ascension Island: [www.ascension-island.gov.ac](http://www.ascension-island.gov.ac)  
Darwin Initiative – Turtle Project: [www.seaturtle.org](http://www.seaturtle.org)



*Green turtle*

**Title: St Helena Millennium Gumwood Forest**

Purpose: To create a new forest based on a flagship endangered endemic tree and as a focus for community involvement in the restoration of degraded environment on St. Helena

**Title: Training in conservation of native St Helena plant species**

Purpose: To support a St Helenian for two weeks of individual study at Kew Gardens.

**Title: Gough Island Invasive Weed Eradication**

Purpose: To carry out an urgent programme to eradicate an invasive weed, *Sagina procumbens*, threatening the native ecosystems of the Gough Island World Heritage Site.



*Planting trees in the Millennium Forest, St Helena*

**Title: British Virgin Island Beach Survey**

Purpose: To provide training for the use of beach survey equipment in the BVI.

Report of Results: Training in the use of beach survey equipment was given from 6 December 2000 to 28 February 2001.

**Title: Cayman Islands Brown Booby Colony**

Purpose: To prepare a management plan for the Brown Booby Colony.

[www.caymannationaltrust.org](http://www.caymannationaltrust.org)

**Title: Cayman Island Blue Iguana Conservation Plan**

Purpose: To produce a detailed census of the remaining wild population of Grand Cayman Blue Iguana *Cyclura lewisi* and to hold a workshop leading to the preparation of a management plan to protect this flagship species.

[www.caymannationaltrust.org](http://www.caymannationaltrust.org)

**Title: TCI Cheshire Hall Environmental Centre**

Purpose: To undertake preparatory work to plan the development and funding to convert Cheshire Hall Plantation into a major ethnobotanical and cultural eco-tourist attraction for the island, with offices, facilities and sustainable funding source for the Turks & Caicos National Trust

**Title: Montserrat Botanical Biodiversity**

Purpose: To survey the botanical biodiversity of Montserrat following the effects of the recent volcanic activity; and to prepare simple guides and visitors to key trees and flowers on the island for use by residents and visitors.

Related websites:

Coventry University School of Natural and Environmental Sciences: [www.coventry.ac.uk](http://www.coventry.ac.uk)

Montserrat National Trust Website: [www.montserrat-natltrust.com](http://www.montserrat-natltrust.com)



## SOME OF NORTH AMERICA'S RAREST BIRDS IN TURKS & CAICOS ISLANDS

Following on from biodiversity survey work undertaken in November 2000 (*Forum News* 19, p.4), further visits were made to Middle Caicos by scientific specialists in January 2001 (when insects, bats and plants were targeted for survey) and April (birds). The bat work raised important issues to be considered in the management plan to be drafted under this Darwin project. A school visit (featuring a live bat) was very well received, and Bryan Manco



*The tiny - and noisy -Blue Gray Gnatcatcher, one of the characteristic birds of the woodlands and scrub. This one has just captured an insect*

(the local Project Officer) clearly relishes such opportunities to involve the local community in the work of the project.

Whilst the importance of the wetlands is increasingly well known, the dry woodlands had not been noted for their wildlife. However, it is now clear that birds here make themselves obvious only in the one or two hours just after dawn and at certain times of year. The study has found that these woodlands support important breeding populations of characteristic local birds, some widespread but others found in no or few other places (such as the Bahamas, Cuba or Hispaniola); these include Thick-billed Vireo, Bahama Woodstar hummingbird, Greater Antillean Bullfinch and Cuban Crow. In addition to these, the woodlands are vital wintering areas for some North American breeding populations. These birds may also be more obvious in April-May than at other times, because they spend a lot of time feeding to fuel their migrations to the breeding grounds. Among the most important finds during the recent field-work were several Kirkland's Warblers. This is one of the most threatened bird species of the region, the world population consisting of only about 3000 individuals. They breed only in a restricted habitat in one part of Michigan, USA and spend the non-breeding season in largely unknown locations in the Bahamas and TCI. Dr Mike Pienkowski, Forum Chairman and organiser of the ornithological work, noted "It is now clear that the woodland on Middle Caicos is important to the survival of this species and for the continued well-being of many others. Indeed, it is likely that the scrublands and woodlands throughout TCI are of much more importance to wildlife than generally realised. All too often they are regarded as waste-lands but we should be much more careful in how these areas are treated during the Islands' development."

Apart from undertaking the basic survey work, the work is also developing survey methods that will be easy for others to use in the future. In this way, even those new to such studies should be able to contribute to keeping a watchful eye and ear on the future of the wildlife for which the islands are uniquely important.

The Darwin Initiative project on "Developing biodiversity management capacity around the Ramsar site in the Turks & Caicos Islands" is run by the Turks & Caicos National Trust, the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum and CAB International. It is funded largely by the UK Government's Department of the Environment, Transport & the Regions. For background, see [www.ukotcf.org](http://www.ukotcf.org): click Territories on the side-menu; click Turks & Caicos; the link to the newsletter is at the bottom of that page

### Turning research into conservation action in TCI

Taking forward the results of the Darwin Initiative work formed a major element of recent planning work by the Turks & Caicos National Trust. This was to enable the Trust to take forward the conservation management of the major Ramsar wetland and other important areas. The emphasis was on implementing effective conservation management, with full participation of the local communities via sustainable small businesses. Trust Council Members and Officers, together with representatives of the Forum, participated in 10 days of intensive meetings in March to plan the forward development of the Trust. This included a full-day workshop with Council, meetings with colleagues in Government, including the Governor, the Ministry of Finance and the Investment agency, as well as the environmental departments, and many days of detailed planning and proposal writing.

This built on substantial progress in the capacity and achievements of the Turks & Caicos National Trust. Its Annual General Meeting in November 2000 featured its second Annual Report under its new management. Both the Governor and the Chief Minister spoke warmly about the National Trust, which thanked the Forum and its member organisations for the support that has helped the Trust along this successful path. A few weeks earlier, the Governor had arranged for the Trust Executive Director and Committee to give a presentation to TCI Government Ministers, leading to further joint working between Government and NGO to the benefit of the Islands' heritage.



*Turks & Caicos National Trust Council in working session with Forum officers*



The National Trust of the Turks & Caicos Islands and the Forum would like to thank British Airways for assisting with travel to TCI for Forum personnel's continuing programme to help the Trust increase its capacity to carry through its mission to "safeguard the cultural, historical and natural heritage of the Turks and Caicos Islands".

## **MONTSERRAT NATIONAL TRUST OPENS NEW FACILITY.**

Forum Director for Development Sara Cross and Colin Clubbe from partner organisation RBG Kew visited Montserrat in January this year. The visit was made at the request of the Montserrat National Trust, as a preliminary step towards looking at longer term strategic planning for the organisation, which is beginning to resurrect itself in the wake of the volcano. Despite half the island being evacuated in the late 1990s, and the Trust's Plymouth headquarters being destroyed by ash flows, the Trust has made phenomenal strides forward in the short time since eruptions have died down. Staff, Executive Committee members and volunteers have pulled together to establish a new headquarters in Olveston, and funds have been raised to convert a former residential home into an office, a natural history centre and the two and a half acre garden into a remarkable facility for the organisation. The Forum visit coincided with the opening of the new Natural History Centre. This extensive facility will house educational exhibits, information resources and provide a much needed public meeting space for a range of environmental and historical interests. The event was well attended and marked by speeches from the MNT President, Sarita Francis, MNT Director, Stephen Macnamara, H.E. the Governor, Anthony Abbott, Permanent Secretary for Natural Resources, Anne-Marie Dewar, and Sara Cross and Colin Clubbe from the UK. Plans are now being formulated to transform the garden plot at the rear of the Centre into a landmark botanic garden, representing plants of significance to Montserrat. It is hoped that the garden's potential can be maximised to create a wealth of educational information, as well as becoming a major visitor attraction.

The Forum visit also allowed valuable discussions with the Minister for Natural Resources Mr. Brunel Meade and the Director of Agriculture Mr. Gerard Gray on Montserrat's involvement in the OECS and UK Environmental Charters and the in country efforts over the last 12 months to put together an environmental strategy for the island. Discussions were also held with the Director of the Tourist Board on how Montserrat hopes to meet nature-tourism needs in the future, including collaborative projects with the National Trust and Forestry to establish trails.

Colin Clubbe, RBG Kew, C.Clubbe@rbgkew.org.uk  
or Sara Cross, UKOTCF, sara.cross@ukotcf.org

## **'FISH TEA' FOR THE ENVIRONMENTALIST'S SOUL!**

Making sure there's something left for future generations.'

The question with which I am faced is: how does one foster in the generations that will follow the desire to become responsible caretakers of the Earth's natural resources? As the Education Manager for the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, this is my mission. Children have long been recognised as the promise of our future and, for this reason, education is the hallmark of our work. But is it a case of 'mission impossible' given the pace of rapid development and uncharted growth? A new Trust educational resource is giving cause for optimism in the Cayman Islands.

Due to generous local sponsorship, the National Trust for the Cayman Islands recently released its first publication aimed specifically at the young people of the Cayman Islands. *'Fish Tea...A Collection of Caymanian Tales'* was written for them and is dedicated to them – the decision-makers of the future. The colourful stories, presented in print and audio CD, tell of Cayman's unique and diverse natural and cultural treasures. Readers are invited to see how Red Mangrove succeeds in saving the island paradise from Demon's evil plan; witness how Precious Parrot triumphs over a couple of would-be smugglers or join Lewi, the Grand Cayman Blue Iguana's, Extinct Species Support Group. The collection has been well received locally and incorporated into our National Curriculum as a key resource. In addition, the Trust has been lucky enough to have been able to donate class sets to every school on all three islands.

Entering into the historical tradition of storytelling means that the mission of the National Trust, *'to preserve natural environments and places of historic significance for present and future generations of the Cayman Islands'* will be passed on through the *'Fish Tea'* stories. We are hoping that, just as once grandmothers recounted tales on front porch swings, the message engendered in these charming local stories will capture the imagination of a new generation, ensuring that Cayman will step up to the challenge of protecting the irreplaceable and resist becoming a 'paradise lost'.

For more information about the *'Fish Tea'* tales, contact Juliet Austin at the National Trust for the Cayman Islands at (+345) 949-0121, e-mail: ntrust@candw.ky or log on to our web site at [www.caymannationaltrust.org](http://www.caymannationaltrust.org).

## **SEVERE STORM DAMAGE ON TRISTAN DA CUNHA**

News has just been received, 23 May 2001 that Tristan da Cunha had been blasted by 120mph winds. Jimmy Glass, Chief Islander phoned to say that communications were disrupted and that the electricity supply had been broken. A number of houses had lost their roofs; a quarter of the hospital had been destroyed including the theatre and X-ray machine. The Prince Philip Community Hall had also been severely damaged. The damage is still being assessed but funding to replace the satellite phone and X-ray machine will be the first priority.

# THE GOUGH ISLAND TERRESTRIAL INVERTEBRATE SURVEY (GITIS): A Darwin Initiative Biodiversity Survey in the South Atlantic

Gough, a cool-temperate island of around 65km<sup>2</sup> in the Overseas Territory of Tristan da Cunha, lies in the centre of the South Atlantic, approximately 350 km SE of the main Tristan island group. It is one of the least known regions of the UK's overseas territories and, besides the maintenance of a small meteorological station set up in 1956 and sporadic visits by sealers and whalers in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the island has remained relatively free of human influence. Whilst Gough has no native terrestrial mammals, amphibians or reptiles, it is a haven for marine mammals and seabirds. Avian biodiversity in particular reflects the comparative lack of human intervention on the island. With at least 22 species of seabird breeding on the island and two endemic land

birds to boot, the Gough Bunting and Moorhen, Gough is generally accepted as being one of the most important seabird colonies in the world. The obvious conservation significance of the island resulted in it being inscribed on the world heritage list in 1995.

Whilst Gough's seabirds have long alerted ornithologists to the island's significance, Gough has also been the subject of past invertebrate

need to supply the island's small meteorological team. This work is carried out in collaboration between the University of Sheffield, UK, and the University of Pretoria, SA, and is being funded as part of the Darwin Initiative. Project fieldwork began in September 1999 and will run until September 2001. At the present stage over one million individuals have already been examined, the species lists for the island having already been dramatically increased. Samples are at present being examined by specialists in eight different countries. Around 30 new records for macro-invertebrate species have already been made (several of which are strong candidates for new island endemics) while dozens of smaller species, such as mites and copepods, are being

surveyed for the first time. The GITIS is also carrying out surveys of the diet of the one mammalian pest species unfortunately introduced to the island by early sealers, namely the house mouse *Mus domesticus*. Initial results have indicated that the diet of these animals does not appear to pose a present threat to any of the island's native species (although this does not preclude a larger historic impact on the island's fauna). However, the full conservation implications of the presence of introduced mice and invertebrate species will not be apparent until the end of the project.

The onset of the GITIS has heralded a welcome conservation renaissance on Gough. In 2000 an RSPB project to resurvey the island's bird populations began, while in the same year a successful FCO-funded project was carried out to eliminate the invasive weed *Sagina procumbens*. Whilst it will be some time before the full findings of the present research on Gough are published, we will endeavour to keep *Forum News* up to date with the ongoing work. Should anybody have particular questions concerning the project further information can be obtained from the author at the address below.

Dr A. G. Jones, GITIS project, BIOME group, Department of Animal and Plant Sciences, University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN, UK  
E-mail: [a.g.jones@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:a.g.jones@sheffield.ac.uk)

Dr A. G. Jones, GITIS project, BIOME group, Department of Animal and Plant Sciences, University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN, UK  
E-mail: [a.g.jones@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:a.g.jones@sheffield.ac.uk)



*GITIS field team, L-R Dr A. Jones, Ms C. Hanel, Ms Pumeza Skepe, Ms Linda Mabulu.*



*Gough Endemic Bunting,  
Rowettia goughensis*

surveys. The most notable of these was part of the Gough Island Scientific Survey of 1955-56. This expedition spent approximately 6 months ashore carrying out topological, meteorological, geological, botanical and zoological surveys. Invertebrate collections made during this period by (later Sir) Martin Holdgate have since provided the authoritative work on the island's invertebrate fauna.

The recent elevation of Gough to world heritage site status, combined with a growing awareness of the island's conservation importance, motivated the need to update Holdgate's records for Gough's invertebrate species. The GITIS was created as a vehicle to provide base-line species data for conservation purposes and, in particular, to identify threats to the island's native species and habitats from accidentally introduced species associated with the past and ongoing



*Tristan Wandering albatrosses Diomedea dabbenena*



## SEVERE DECLINE IN FALKLANDS BLACK-BROWED ALBATROSS POPULATIONS

Recent studies by Falklands Conservation reveal a dramatic decrease in numbers of Black-browed albatrosses breeding in the Falklands, which hold most of the world population of this beautiful bird. Breeding pairs have dropped by 76,000 from 458,000 in 1995 to 382,000 today. BirdLife International is now considering whether the status of the Black-browed Albatross should be amended from Near Threatened to Vulnerable in the light of this new information.

The most staggering decline of all, a loss of 41,200, is at the largest colony of albatross in the Falklands archipelago, on Steeple Jason Island, one of a chain of nature reserves to the north west of the islands. The results confirm a suspected decline reported last year on Beauchene Island, the second largest Falklands breeding site for albatross

Albatrosses have made headlines recently, attracting royal support from Prince Charles for their protection. They are globally under threat from long-line fisheries, which hook and drown the birds as they dive for the baited lines. "Illegal and unregulated fisheries around the world are having a disastrous effect on these birds" said Dr Nic Huin, albatross scientist working for Falklands Conservation and leader of the albatross census team. "This decline in the Falklands albatross population may well reflect the numbers of birds dying each year in Patagonian Shelf longline fisheries. It is essential that control is taken over unregulated fisheries and every possible mitigation measure put into place to stop this downward trend".

The birds breeding in the Falkland Islands travel vast distances during their winter migration. Recent satellite-tracking studies by Falklands Conservation have shown they are exposed to threats from longline fisheries in Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina and out into international

waters, for both toothfish and tuna. Dr Huin, who has been studying the albatross in the Islands for three years, adds "The safeguarding of these populations is something that requires a huge international effort. While every attempt can be made within the Falklands to protect them and their habitat, co-operation and international agreement will be needed to make this effective".

The latest figures are the result of a census of Black-browed albatross in the Falklands carried out during October and November 2000 as part of a 20-month investigation by Falklands Conservation to determine the reasons for the decline in the black-browed albatross population. A Falklands Conservation team of ship-based surveyors estimated the numbers of breeding birds at each site using photography, transects and direct counts for comparison. A major appeal has been launched to fund this study which has received support from the RSPB and Falkland Islands Government. A further £10,000 is still urgently needed to ensure completion of this essential research. Donations to the Appeal are welcomed. Credit card/ telephone donations should be made to 020 8343 0831. Postal donations should be sent to Falklands Conservation at 1 Princes Avenue, Finchley, London N3 2DA.

### Further Information

Ann Brown: Falklands Conservation, UK Secretary, Tel & Fax: +44(0)20 8343 0831 e-mail: [ann@falklands-nature.demon.co.uk](mailto:ann@falklands-nature.demon.co.uk)

Becky Ingham: Conservation Officer (Falklands Islands)

Tel: + 500 22247 e-mail: [conservation@horizon.co.fk](mailto:conservation@horizon.co.fk)

Falklands Conservation WebSite:

[www.falklands-nature.demon.co.uk](http://www.falklands-nature.demon.co.uk)

## A NEW INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT TO PROTECT THREATENED SEABIRDS

Negotiations were successfully concluded on the text of a new international treaty, the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels (ACAP) in early February 2001, following a week-long meeting hosted by the South African Government in Cape Town. Attending countries came from both the Northern and Southern Hemispheres, including several from South America. Both albatross and petrel range states and nations with fishing fleets that interact with these highly threatened seabirds were represented.

Albatrosses have the highest proportion of threatened species of any bird family, making them the most imperilled of all the world's seabirds. Up to 26 species of albatross and petrel could become extinct unless firm steps are taken to reverse the destructive effects of uncontrolled longline fishing, pollution, habitat degradation, human disturbance of breeding sites, and introduced diseases and predators. Of the 24 species of albatross, 21 species have declining populations, or have populations of unknown status. About 50% of albatross populations contain fewer than 100 breeding pairs, making albatrosses extremely susceptible to random events or even low levels of mortality.

When all the species of albatross and seven species of petrel from the Southern Hemisphere were listed on the Appendices of the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species, it was a recognition that urgent international cooperation was needed to improve their threatened conservation status (see *Forum News* 18). Following the listings, governments, led by Australia and others in the Valdivia Group of Southern Hemisphere Countries for the Environment, embarked on discussions to develop the Agreement. The Cape Town meeting followed on from an earlier negotiation meeting held in Hobart, Australia in July 2000.

The Agreement, which includes an Action Plan, describes a number of conservation measures to be implemented by signatories to the proposed Agreement. These include research and monitoring, reduction of incidental mortality in fisheries, eradication of non-native species at breeding sites (especially introduced predators such as rats and cats), reduction of disturbance and habitat loss, and reducing pollution.

Mark O'Sullivan, Head of the UK Delegation, stressed his Government's commitment to the Agreement. He said, "We are delighted to have been able to offer support for this important meeting, and at the successful outcome of the negotiations". Mr David Pritchard, representing BirdLife International at the meeting, was also pleased with the outcome of the negotiations. He called for countries to begin implementing the terms of the Agreement immediately, without waiting for the formality of entry into force.

The governments of South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom sponsored the Agreement meeting in Cape Town.

John Cooper, Avian Demography Unit, University of Cape Town, [jcooper@botzoo.uct.za](mailto:jcooper@botzoo.uct.za)

## SUSTAINABLE FARMING IN GUERNSEY

The maintenance of sustainable and traditional agriculture in island communities is becoming increasingly difficult, faced with the globalisation of trade in agricultural products. Industrialised and large-scale farming can supply these products at a price well below the cost of production in most small island communities.

The Channel Islands characterise many of the problems faced by island communities. Production and marketing costs are high due to high transport charges and the distance from mainland markets and consequently island producers must look to their own population to consume their produce. The industry accepts that there must be an equitable balance between environmental protection, wildlife conservation, economic viability and social values in a sustainable agricultural system. Taking cognisance of changing consumer attitudes several farmers are changing to organic milk and vegetable production following the introduction of a conversion scheme.



*Small field system of farming in Guernsey*

### Farming in Guernsey

Agriculture in Guernsey is traditionally dairy farming. It is constrained by insularity and by the particular nature of the island, which is characterised by small fragmented farms, small fields with traditional hedge banks, and an absence of security of land tenure. Urban development has resulted in farming being carried out in very close proximity to dwelling houses. In this situation farming is said to maintain the 'green lungs' – the green spaces - for the urban community.

The community has supported dairy farming because it has preserved a more traditional way of life, the Guernsey island breed of dairy cow and a working semi-natural landscape. Without agriculture as a viable industry to utilise and maintain the open land, there would be an insatiable demand for industrial, office and housing development on the open spaces. Even the development of large gardens change the 'feel' of the island from one of a relatively open landscape to that of a manicured urban community. But the increasing size of farms and improving efficiency has led to growing concerns about environmental degradation and water pollution, whilst others are becoming increasingly concerned about the welfare of animals in intensive farming systems.

In the future, agriculture will be as much concerned with the conservation of wildlife habitats and bio-diversity within the island, and the genetic survival of the island breed of cattle, as it is with the production of milk and locally produced dairy products.

### Farming with Wildlife in Mind

Wildlife conservation is dependent upon the continuity of less intensive farming practices. The island has resolved to prevent further environmental degradation, the loss of bio-diversity, and pollution of water, soils and air. The Agriculture and Countryside Board is promoting a Countryside Management Scheme. This voluntary scheme encourages each farmer to take part in a 'farm bio-diversity action plan', to undertake a 'manure management plan' to store and spread waste in an appropriate manner, and to calculate an annual 'farm nutrient budget' to monitor surplus nutrients and avoid water pollution. Although voluntary, the scheme is so attractive that all dairy farmers supplying milk to the States Dairy have joined the scheme.



*Guernsey cows*



## The Agriculture and Countryside Board's Policy

The Board's policy includes several elements in a new 'Farm Management Contract'. This includes the following elements:

1. A contract to supply a known annual amount of milk to Guernsey Dairy.
2. A Dairy Quality Assurance Scheme to ensure milk is produced in an appropriate environment to meet known hygienic quality objectives.
3. An implementation plan to work towards the proposals contained in the Manure Management Plan over an agreed time scale. Grants and farm loans are available to help farmers to make the necessary investments in slurry storage.
4. The Guernsey Countryside Management Scheme. Farmer should agree to co-operate in the provision of a Biodiversity Action Plan and to implement it. The plans will be monitored and revised annually to maintain and enhance wildlife and countryside conservation.
5. Farms must not exceed an annual maximum stocking rate of 2.0 livestock units (equivalent to 2 dairy cows) per hectare on the available grazing and forage conservation areas.
6. Field boundaries and hedge banks have been identified as the most important individual habitat on farmland and as such specific management prescriptions have been included in the initial farm contracts.
7. Farm records of fertiliser, slurry and pesticide use will be kept.
8. An agreement to co-operate in the calculation of a 'farm-gate' nutrient balance. This will take account of the input of purchased fertilisers and feeds and the output of milk and other crops from each farm.
9. Improved animal welfare. Provisions to ensure the continued delivery of high standards of animal welfare will be agreed and monitored.

## Conclusion

The Agriculture and Countryside Board's Policy is likely to evolve in the future. It is likely that there will be much greater emphasis on environmental concerns, the conservation of landscape and wildlife, enhanced animal welfare, organic production and food safety. It is also likely that there will be further moves to break the link between production and the payment for environmental and conservation benefits. The payment of agricultural subsidies will be conditional on each farm's compliance with the approved practices.

Farmers will not be able to achieve all these major changes to their farming practices overnight. It will require substantial changes to the management of their farms and require considerable assistance and advice. The Guernsey Agriculture and Countryside Board is well aware that it will need to provide continued information, encouragement and advice to help farmers to make the necessary improvements.

Andrew Casebow

Agriculture and Environment Adviser

States of Guernsey Agriculture and Countryside Board.

## NEW CARIBBEAN BAT INFORMATION EXCHANGE E-GROUP

Interested people in the Caribbean area have joined together to form a Caribbean-bats group email group. This group is for the exchange of scientific and anecdotal information about the study of bats in the insular Caribbean. It is moderated by Lois Blumenthal of the Cayman Islands and includes scientists who visit various islands to do studies, as well as conservation groups and students in St. Lucia, Bonaire, Puerto Rico, Jamaica, Martinique and many other French, Dutch, Spanish and English-speaking islands. The forum is conducted in English.

Information is being exchanged about symposiums and special events as well as studies being carried out on various islands and the launching of public awareness campaigns, proper exclusion of bats from roof spaces and the building and erection of bat houses. This is a very lively discussion group and a wonderful new tool for conservationists and scientists all over the Caribbean.

To join the group simply send an e-mail to: Caribbean-bats@yahoo.com If you would like to learn more about the Caribbean-bats group, and read the archive of letters please visit <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Caribbean-bats> It will be necessary first to have your application approved by the e-group moderator. This is quickly and easily done and will take only one day or less. Lists are not sold or traded and do not result in a deluge of junk mail.

I would love to export what we have learned here to other Caribbean Islands where it is applicable. Please contact me, Lois Blumenthal at [bats@candw.ky](mailto:bats@candw.ky), through the website, or at [blu@candw.ky](mailto:blu@candw.ky) for help in beginning a bat conservation programme or to exchange information.

## ANGUILLA BIRDS

Birds are getting a big publicity boost with the publication of a new and colourful identification card by the Anguilla National Trust.

The cards are printed on plastic and illustrate most of the species commonly seen on the islands. The colour pictures are taken from "The Birds Of the West Indies" with the generous permission of the US Fish and Wildlife Service "Winged Ambassadors" Programme and the cards have been funded and produced in the UK by RSPB and Archmain Communications.

To accompany the cards, RSPB has produced a "Field Checklist of the Birds of Anguilla" and a much more detailed "Annotated Checklist" which summarises all the known records of the 133 species that have been seen there.

Copies of these publications are available from the Anguilla National Trust or from Global Programmes Department at RSPB.

These publications are the result of a series of visits to Anguilla by RSPB staff in the last 18 months that are expected to continue in 2001. Julian Hughes and Steve Holliday, who have done most of the editing, both told *Forum News* how delighted they were to be able to go somewhere where there were lots of birds to see and where almost anyone could contribute new species to the list in a day's birding.

The Annotated Checklist is available on the Forum's website.

Anguilla National Trust, P O Box 1234, the Valley, Anguilla British West Indies

Email: [axanat@anguillanet.com](mailto:axanat@anguillanet.com)



# Friends of the UK Overseas Territories



*Empowering people to  
conserve their heritage*

The Forum has always had institutional members, and is now forming a group of individual members to support our work. As a recipient of the Forum News, you will know how important the Forum's work is, and recognise the wisdom of the Forum's strategy for conservation of the treasure trove of biodiversity to be found in the Overseas Territories: support of local conservation organisations. We support local organisations because they create a sense of ownership of the resources to be protected and they create pride in the local people in their own national treasures. They are the most effective environmental educators, and unlike international bodies, they will always be there.

Some Overseas Territories have no tradition of NGOs, and in some cases, local people may lack the expertise to establish and run these organisations. Almost everyone needs help in accessing the few international funding sources that are available to the Overseas Territories. The Forum empowers local people and gives them the tools and information they need to do the work themselves.

## Five good reasons to become a Friend

- ✓ You know how valuable and vulnerable are the environmental treasures held in the Overseas Territories.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ You believe the Forum's approach in empowering local people is the best long-term solution for the preservation of heritage resources which enrich us all.
- ✓ You care about what is happening in the Overseas Territories and want to be kept up to date through regular copies of *Forum News* and the Forum's *Annual Report*.



- ✓ 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 to NGOs in the UKOTs.

## Join us...

I wish to become a Friend of the Overseas Territories at the following support level, and enclose my cheque made out to the UKOTCF for that amount:

 £15 £50 £100 £500

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Please clip or copy this form and mail to Frances Marks at the address shown below.

Correspondence to: Frances Marks, Forum Co-ordinator, 15 Insall Road, Chipping Norton, OX7 5LF, UK

Tel/Fax: +44(0) 1608 644425 Email: [fmarks@ukotcf.org](mailto:fmarks@ukotcf.org)

WEB-SITE: <http://www.ukotcf.org>

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