

FORUM NEWS

CONSERVATION NEWS 3

NGO FORUM FOR THE UK DEPENDENT TERRITORIES

FEBRUARY 1990

PARROTS AND THE DEPENDENT TERRITORIES

Parrots are now recognised as one of the most threatened families of birds in the world. Of the 330 species of parrot, no fewer than one hundred are considered to be at risk with over 70 of these in immediate danger. ICBP has identified parrot conservation as a priority area for its work during the coming years and is running a 'Protect the Parrots' campaign. Habitat loss and trade are the two main threats to parrots and both are being tackled by the campaign. ICBP has established a Parrot Fund to support this work and is calling for a 'habitat tax' payable on all parrots sold legally in UK pet shops.

Although the UK Dependencies hold only two parrots, a significant international responsibility lies with the UK since both of these birds are under threat of global extinction. Conservation plans are being made for the species and it is hoped that the Forum will be involved in the implementation of this work.

The Henderson lorikeet *Vini stepheni* is found only on Henderson Island in the

Pitcairn group. The island is now designated as a World Heritage site, so this species, together with the island's other endemic fauna and flora, should be afforded the protection it deserves. The wildlife of Henderson remains little known but a major expedition will soon mount the first year-round study of this unique island (see below).

The other parrot of conservation concern found in the Dependent Territories is the Cuban amazon *Amazona leucocephala*. Of the five subspecies of the Cuban amazon, one - from the Isle of Pines - is already extinct; the Cuban race is at risk and declining; the Bahamas race remains in small, stable populations on two islands but has been lost from at least four others. The other two forms are found in the Cayman Islands. *A. leucocephala caymanensis* is found in Grand Cayman where, in 1986, it was estimated over 1300 birds existed, making this the largest population of the Cuban parrot anywhere. By contrast, *A. leucocephala hesterna*, which is now found only on Cayman Brac, probably has the smallest population of this species and in 1986 it was estimated that only about 50 remained.

Together, the two parrot subspecies in the Caymans are likely to prove highly significant in the conservation of the species. The conservation needs of these birds must

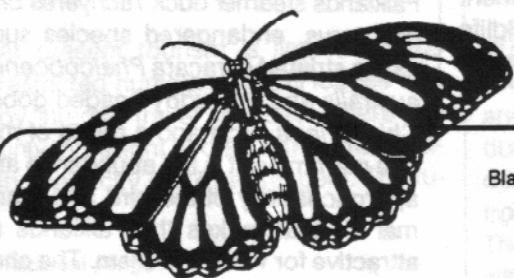
be understood and acted on immediately, particularly for the Cayman Brac subspecies which is now critically endangered. Conservation actions proposed so far include the use of nest boxes and reintroduction to Little Cayman, from where the birds were lost in the early 1980's as a result of a hurricane.

Tony Juniper, ICBP Parrot Conservation Officer

AFTER THE HURRICANE

Hurricane Hugo which swept through the Caribbean on 17 September last year devastated the island of Montserrat. 98% of the houses were damaged and nearly a quarter of the island's 12,000 inhabitants was left homeless. The island's infrastructure has been destroyed. The disaster has left areas of natural habitat severely damaged. There is an urgent need to rehabilitate the fragile natural environment as part of Montserrat's restoration.

The Montserrat National Trust has assessed the environmental situation and is appealing to all regional and international conservation agencies to give whatever assistance is possible to sustain the rehabilitation process. One of the most urgent needs is to repair damage to the area of the proposed



Black-veined tiger

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National Park, to designate the Park's boundaries and enact protective legislation. The mountain peaks of the Park were formerly covered in lush vegetation - now reduced to stubble. The area is further threatened by the reintroduction of slash-and-burn activities on unstable mountain slopes. The preservation of forested areas on Montserrat is of great importance in protecting water supplies, maintaining the island's natural heritage and retaining the attraction of the 'Emerald Isle' for tourists.

The impact of the hurricane is graphically portrayed in a book *Hugo versus Montserrat* which includes impressions in the form of interviews, poems, press extracts and photographs (see publications section on back page). In the book Howard Fergus, historian and Speaker of Montserrat's Legislative Council, writes:

"Rebuilding has to include a speedy reforestation programme. The denuded hills and widespread loss of trees and foliage have already noticeably altered the climate of the country. It is simply hotter without the cooling effect of the trees. Equally important, the streams in the hills have lost their vegetation cover and are subject to greater dehydration with obvious adverse effects on the water supply."

The priority of the aid agencies has understandably been on housing and rebuilding Montserrat's roads and harbour. The UK government has committed around £4 million in emergency relief aid to the island, concentrating on the restoration of power supplies, provision of building materials and assessment and technical assistance in re-

building work. Funds have also been earmarked for a review of the public sector post Hugo. No money has been spent on environmental rehabilitation as yet, but ODA recognises the need for an environmental assessment in consultation with FAO and other donor agencies.

In another contribution to rebuilding on the island, leading rock stars and the music industry have generously responded to the need for emergency funds through the production of an album, *After the Hurricane - Songs for Montserrat*, by Chrysalis Records. All the money raised by sales of the record is being donated to provide new homes.

Members of the Forum are funding conservation activities in Montserrat in the wake of the hurricane. WWF-UK continues to fund work relating to the establishment of Montserrat's National Park which is being coordinated by the Montserrat National Trust. This is a three year project which is fundamental to the development of conservation on the island. ICBP British Section is providing funds for an emergency survey of the hurricane's impact on Montserrat's endemic fauna and forest habitats which will be carried out in March. This follows one of the recommendations of the Montserrat National Trust that post-hurricane evaluations of selected animal and plant species be conducted by international experts.

In the aftermath of the tragedy, the redevelopment of Montserrat must lay the basis for the long term conservation of the island's natural environment through effective forestry and wildlife policies. The Forum offers its assis-

tance in the coordination of voluntary conservation efforts and hopes to make a positive contribution to environmental rehabilitation of the island.



WILDLIFE TOURISM IN THE FALKLAND ISLANDS

Forum chair, Tony Hare, recently visited the Falklands at the generous invitation of Falkland Islands Tourism. Here are some of his impressions on an aspect of conservation with potential for many of the Dependencies:

"Having been briefed by Roger Wilson of the Falkland Islands Foundation, I was ready for an interesting wildlife experience. But I was unprepared for the ease with which wildlife can be observed in the Falklands. During my short visit I was able to view a number of the Falklands' endemic birds including Falklands steamer duck *Tachyeres brachypterus*, endangered species such as the striated caracara *Phalcoboenus australis* and the ruddy-headed goose *Chloephaga picta* and a range of marine mammals. It is the abundance and approachability of the bird and mammal life that makes the Falklands so attractive for wildlife tourism. The challenges - as is always the case - are the accommodation of the effects of observer pressure with wildlife needs and the co-existence of conservation with other land uses.

Tourism is catered for by a string of well-run comfortable lodges, which afford easy access to wildlife sites. The lodge-keepers are knowledgeable about the local natural history and are most helpful with visitors' queries.



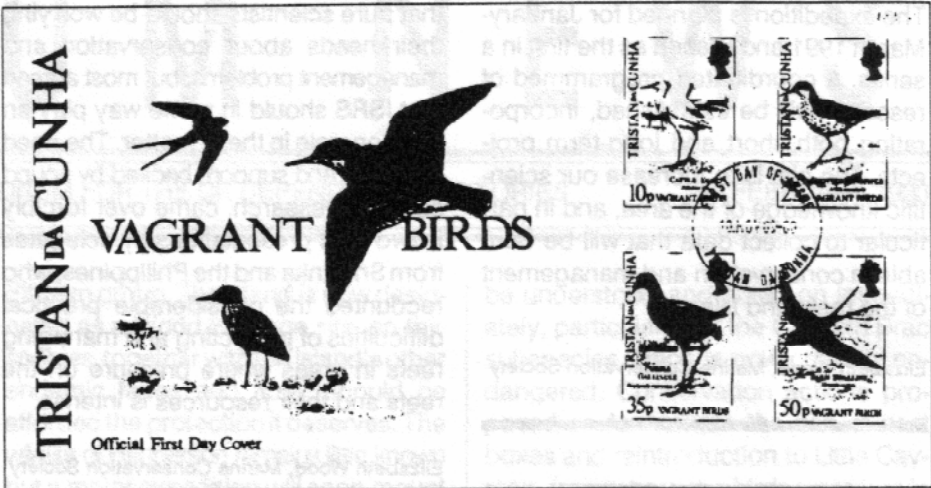
To a degree visitors are free to wander among the wildlife. It is easy, for example, to approach penguin colonies and wader and wildfowl breeding areas. Attention needs to be focused on the extent to which visitor disturbance is detrimental to wildlife. It is not always easy to assess the effects of disturbance as this requires systematic observation and monitoring over the medium term. Some species definitely are sensitive to disturbance; incubating giant petrels, for example, will readily desert if disturbed, and any bird put off its nest by visitors is liable to lose its eggs to ever-alert striated caracaras.

As wildlife tourism increases in the Falklands, and particularly if and when South American links are re-opened, a need for increased visitor management may arise. Two practical approaches may be:

- Lodge managers could personally issue leaflets to visitors about behaviour near wildlife.
- 'Honeypot' sites could be established, for example, at single penguin sub-colonies, or on stretches of beach with abundant marine mammals, to cope with the majority of visitors. They could have clearly marked walkways where visitors could observe wildlife easily, and they would allow suitable species to become accustomed to limited disturbance. If 'honeypot' sites were to absorb the majority of visitors, the numbers of people visiting more sensitive sites would be kept relatively low.

At present tourism is limited by the restricted number of small lodges and by internal travel facilities - there are only three light aircraft with a total seating capacity of 27 passengers. The fu-

Macaroni penguin



ture for wildlife tourism looks bright, however; the Falkland Islands Government are reviewing conservation legislation and with the generally positive attitude to wildlife on the part of landowners, the finance generated by tourism should be an important factor in the sustainable development of the Falklands."

LEATHERBACK TURTLE SURVEY IN THE BRITISH VIRGIN ISLANDS

Dr. Gillian Cambers, the Conservation Officer of the Ministry of Natural Resources and Labour, BVI, has been conducting a survey of the nesting beaches used by the leatherback turtle *Dermochelys coriacea* over the past two years. She reports that:

"The survey has concentrated on the two more developed islands Tortola and Beef Island. Results of surveys conducted in 1987, 1988 and 1989 show a decline in the number of recorded nests from nine in 1987 to none in 1989. These numbers compare dramatically with historical reports of as many as six turtles nesting per night in the 1920's. While the reasons for the decline are numerous, and while the decline is viewed with concern by the BVI Government, it is felt that there is a need to extend the survey to less developed islands such as Anegada and Jost Van Dyke. Plans have been drawn up to conduct a more extensive survey in 1990 and funds are being sought from the World Wide Fund for Nature (UK)."

NEW PROTECTED AREAS IN THE TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS

The Turks and Caicos Government officially recognised eight additional national parks, reserves and sanctuaries at an Executive Council meeting on 21 September 1989. This paves the way for formal designation of a Ramsar site covering parts of North, Middle and East Caicos. The Turks and Caicos Islands now have a total of 28 protected areas covered by legislation.

CHAGOS ARCHIPELAGO: REEF RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The Chagos Archipelago (British Indian Ocean Territory) is acknowledged as one of the richest reef areas in the world, of considerable scientific and conservation interest. At its centre is the Great Chagos Bank, the largest atoll in the Indian Ocean. Scientific work was last carried out in the area in 1978/79, during a Joint Services Expedition, and included ecological studies of selected reefs. However, a considerable amount of work remains to be done. The Marine Conservation Society is developing a survey and research programme, in conjunction with the Gaia Quest Trust, which will provide boats and other logistical support.

The expedition is planned for January-March 1991 and is seen as the first in a series. A coordinated programme of research will be established, incorporating both short and long-term projects. The aim is to increase our scientific knowledge of the area, and in particular to collect data that will be valuable in conservation and management of the reefs and islands.

Elizabeth Wood, Marine Conservation Society

HENDERSON EXPEDITION

An expedition is planned to the Pitcairn Islands to run from January 1991 to April 1992. The expedition will concentrate on Henderson but there will also be visits to the coral atolls of Oeno and Ducie. Planned in five three-month phases, scientists of all disciplines will join the expedition at Mangareva and pay a monthly fee.

Further details can be obtained from: M. de L. Brooke, Dept. of Zoology, Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3EJ, UK. Tel. 0223-336610; fax 0223-336676.

INTERNATIONAL SOCIETY FOR REEF STUDIES (ISRS)

The ISRS brings together reef scientists from several disciplines, with a mutual interest in coral reefs, ancient and modern. Meetings are held annually and the society produces a journal, *Coral Reefs*, and newsletter, *Reef Encounter*. The recent annual meeting (Marseille: December 14-16 1989) attracted around 150 participants, with scientific sessions on aspects such as coral reef diversity, bioerosion, sedimentology, coral biology and fluxes in coral reef systems.

Perhaps the most controversial session was a short workshop entitled "What should scientists be doing to effectively preserve biodiversity and improve the management of coral reef resources? - How can ISRS be involved to facilitate the efforts of scientists?". A few delegates seemed almost surprised

that pure scientists should be worrying their heads about conservation and management problems, but most agreed that ISRS should in some way play an advisory role in these matters. The need for action and support, backed by sound scientific research, came over forcibly in two brief presentations by delegates from Sri Lanka and the Philippines, who recounted the considerable practical difficulties of protecting and managing reefs in areas where pressure on the reefs and their resources is intense.

Elizabeth Wood, Marine Conservation Society

PUBLICATIONS

Hugo versus Montserrat

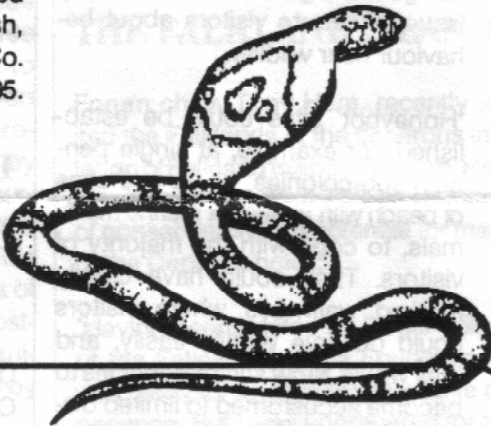
This is an account of the hurricane which devastated Montserrat in September last year, and is edited by E.A. Markham and Howard A. Fergus. It is published by Linda Lee Books, Dept. of English, University of Ulster, Coleraine, Co. Londonderry BT52 1SA, UK. Price £5.95.

All proceeds go to restoration work in Montserrat and specifically to the re-establishment of library facilities.

Environmental grants: a guide to grants for the environment from government, companies and charitable trusts

by Susan Forrester. Directory of Social Change (1989). Price £12.50.

This book provides an invaluable reference to sources of funds for environmental work. In the main it concentrates on funding for work within the UK, but should prove useful for those seeking financial support for conservation projects in the Dependencies.



Chinese cobra

Production of this news-sheet was supported by the British Association of Nature Conservationists (BANC), Fauna and Flora Preservation Society (FFPS), International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP) British Section, Marine Conservation Society (MCS) and World Wide Fund for Nature United Kingdom (WWF-UK).



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