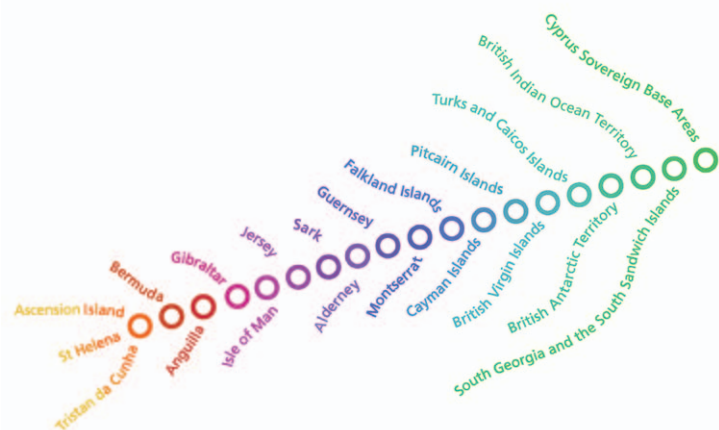


FORUM NEWS 43

MARCH 2015

• www.ukotcf.org

Sustaining Partnerships: a conference on conservation and sustainability in UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island communities, Gibraltar, 11th to 15th July 2015



Gibraltar will host an international environmental conference from 11th to 15th July 2015, with a focus on UK Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small islands.

Book in March to secure your place. Bookings may become unavailable after this month.

The conference is being organised by the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum and HM Government of Gibraltar, with the support of the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society. It will be the sixth such conference, following the first held in London in 1999, the second in Gibraltar in 2000, the third in Bermuda in March 2003, the fourth in Jersey in October 2006 and the fifth in the Cayman Islands in 2009. The proceedings of the Gibraltar, Bermuda, Jersey and Cayman conferences can be seen at www.ukotcf.org

The conference will provide a forum for government environmental bodies, NGOs and commercial organisations to discuss key conservation issues, to highlight success stories, exchange ideas, and to forge partnerships. It is hoped that Overseas Territories, Crown Dependencies and other small island communities that share similar environmental problems will benefit from learning about one another's history and experience of planning and delivering conservation initiatives.

The overall aim is to draw on similarities and differences in experience across the territories, to provide insights into common challenges, leaving participants better equipped to address local needs.



The Rock of Gibraltar from the airport, on the isthmus.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF

The core of this conference will be six half-day workshops. Each will address a topic (which will generally cover also several other cross-cutting themes, such as invasive species and climate change). In the course of discussions over several years, involving UKOTCF's regional working groups and other fora, many suggestions for conference topics have been discussed with partners. The topics selected attempt to cover those most needed as priorities, bearing in mind also other opportunities to discuss various topics. The topics are:

- Implementing Biodiversity Action Plans in the context of Environment Charters, Aichi Targets etc, and including environmental monitoring
- Conservation and Sustainable Use of Terrestrial Resources
- Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Resources
- Renewable energy and waste-management
- Using informed decision making to manage development sustainably (including physical planning, environmental impact assessments etc)
- Environmental education & awareness

These six main sessions will be supported by a 2-hour session by each of UKOTCF's regional working groups (Wider Caribbean, Southern Oceans, Europe Territories); on this occasion, attendance at these will be open to all conference participants. These should give the opportunity to discuss topical issues as well as taking regional perspectives on the main session topics and other matters. On the first morning of the conference, one session will be devoted to a field-visit (with a choice between a marine/coastal focus

{given the likely seasonally viewable features} and a visit to the Upper Rock); these visits have the triple purpose of: introducing some local issues to participants; giving the chance to recover after long travel; and allowing participants to get to know each other to make the later sessions highly effective.

It is planned also that the final main session of the conference will include participants at decision-making level, including ministers. It is envisaged that this will start off by presentations from each session of its conclusions and recommendations.

Depending on the timing of participants' departing flights, there may also be an opportunity for an optional tour on the day of departure.

These items have been organised into the following programme. This outline programme is provisional. It will be amplified and updated periodically on the web-site (www.ukotcf.org). Please note that the schedule may change up to the last minute.

	<i>Saturday 11th July</i>
Afternoon	Arrivals & Registration
Evening	Opening Reception, followed by opportunity for informal meetings over dinners organised by participants themselves
	<i>Sunday 12th July</i>
From 06:00	Breakfast available
07:00 – 09:00	UKOTCF Wider Caribbean Working Group (open to all on this occasion)
09:30 – 12:30	Field visit, to marine and coastal ecosystems around Gibraltar or terrestrial ones
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 18:00	Implementing biodiversity action plans in the context of Environment Charters, Aichi Targets etc, and including environmental monitoring
18:15 – 19:30	Poster session (Posters will be available throughout much of the conference, but this will be an opportunity for poster authors to be present at their posters to discuss them with other conference participants.) Followed by opportunity for informal meetings over dinners organised by participants themselves
	<i>Monday 13th July</i>
From 06:00	Breakfast available
07:00 – 09:00	UKOTCF Southern Oceans Working Group (open to all on this occasion)
09:00	Conference photograph
10:00 – 13:00	Conservation and Sustainable Use of Terrestrial Resources
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 18:00	Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Resources
Evening	Possibly reception, followed by opportunity for informal meetings over dinners organised by participants themselves
	<i>Tuesday 14th July</i>
From 06:00	Breakfast available
07:00 – 09:00	UKOTCF's Europe Territories Working Group (open to all on this occasion)
10:00 – 13:00	Renewable Energy and Waste-management

13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 18:00	Using informed decision making to manage development sustainably (including physical planning, environmental impact assessments etc)
18:30 - 1930	Films from the Britain's Treasure Islands project (linked to following day's session on Environmental Education and Awareness), followed by opportunity for informal meetings over dinners organised by participants themselves
	<i>Wednesday 15th July</i>
From 06:00	Breakfast available
07:00 – 08:45	Clinic on signing up to Multilateral Environmental Agreements
09:15 – 12:15	Environmental Education and Awareness
13:00	Lunch
14:00 – 18:00	High-level session, including short summaries from other sessions, discussion, speeches and closing
19:30 - late	Departure (and later return) by coaches to the Conference Dinner in the spectacular St Michael's Cave, inside the Upper Rock of Gibraltar
	<i>Thursday 16th July</i>
	For those leaving in the afternoon, there will be the opportunity for optional tours in the morning. Others may be involved in the one-day workshop on Environmental Impact Assessment.
	<i>Friday 17th July</i>
	For those leaving in the afternoon, there may be the opportunity for optional tours in the morning.

Participants should plan to arrive in Gibraltar on Saturday 11th July and leave on Thursday 16th July 2015 (apart from certain individuals involved in related meetings before or after the conference). It may be possible for those wishing to stay longer to book rooms via the conference at the conference rate. If you wish to do so, please contact UKOTCF.

A booking form is available on the UKOTCF web-site (www.ukotcf.org). It is recommended that this be completed and returned as early as possible, to secure places. Places for certain options may be filled by March. Accommodation needs to be booked **before the first week of April**. (After this date, we will investigate late requests, but rooms may not be available; it is a busy time in Gibraltar.) You will be advised as soon as possible whether a place is available. In order to secure your booking, the full payment will be due in March.

Acknowledgements

The organisers are grateful for contributions to the funding and other support of the conference from:

HM Government of Gibraltar

UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum

Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society

UK Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs

UK Joint Nature Conservation Committee

Treweek Environmental Consultants

Conference venue

The conference will take place mainly at a modern international hotel in Gibraltar. Accommodation, breakfast, lunch and meetings will be held at the hotel, although a few events and the conference dinner will be held elsewhere. There are a range of options at the hotel and nearby for participants to buy dinner on those days where this does not form part of the programme. Some information on these will be supplied in the conference pack. It is envisaged that informal groupings over dinner may be one way in which groups of conference participants can explore matters of common interest. Please note that the rooms and public spaces of the hotel are non-smoking environments.

Conference format

The duration of this conference will be one day shorter than that in 2009, i.e. 4 full working days, with travel on the days before and after. It is impossible to address all topics adequately in a

conference of this length. The topics have been selected on the basis of wide consultations over recent years via the regional Working Groups and other means. Sessions devoted to main topics will be approximately 3 hours long, allowing for these priority topics to be addressed at reasonable length. Contributions should be concise to make best use of this. In order to develop an integrated programme, speakers will be invited. However, all participants will be invited to offer posters if they so wish.

All talks and posters will be published in the Proceedings, and will need to be re-written and submitted (in advance of the conference) for this purpose.

Booking

A booking form is available on the Forum's web-site (www.ukotcf.org).

UKOTCF Montserrat workshop on Environmental Impact Assessment

In January 2015, UKOTCF organised a workshop in Montserrat to help Montserratians steer their future development as they work to replace the capital, Plymouth, destroyed by volcanic eruptions in 1997.

UKOTCF and Montserrat are grateful to international EIA expert and long-term friend of the Forum, Dr Jo Treweek, for donating time out of her very busy schedule to lead this workshop. This was organised by UKOTCF's Mike Pienkowski and Catherine Wensink, in conjunction with Sarita Francis (Executive Director, Montserrat National Trust and new UKOTCF Council member) and Gerard Gray, Stephen Mendes and Tracy Lewis (respectively, Director and personnel of Montserrat's Department of Environment).



Sarita Francis addresses the opening, with other speakers: Gerard Gray, Hon Claude Hogan, and (chairing) Mike Pienkowski (right). Photo: Catherine Wensink, UKOTCF

The workshop opening was honoured with the presence of all four Ministers of Montserrat Government (elected in September 2014), including Premier Hon Donaldson Romero, as well as many other senior and technical personnel from government, NGOs and business. In opening the workshop, Honourable Claude Hogan, Minister of Agriculture, Trade, Housing, Lands & Environment, committed "the Government of Montserrat ... to pursuing the best environmental standards for the Island. We are aware that the island is ecologically rich, possessing species found nowhere else in the world. We are also cognizant that we, as a government and people of Montserrat, must be responsible stewards and strike an amenable balance between our use of available resources for ourselves and to ensure a sustainable environment and economy for the island for future generations. Our children and their children must be certain of a share of Montserrat and that is why Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) are so important."

He added that "The Government of Montserrat and the Montserrat National Trust welcomes the continued support from NGOs such as the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, who have been supporting us for the past 20 years. We look forward to this continued cooperation – and indeed for it to be strengthened even further. The MNT itself has been working in collaboration with our Ministry of Agriculture and the Environment for the past 43 long years, and we thank the expatriate community for standing as stalwarts with that erstwhile body now under the esteemed Directorship of Mrs Sarita Francis. After 43 years, they truly need a real Museum-looking building at Little Bay, so we are supporting that quest."



Hon Minister Claude Hogan opens the workshop. Photo: Catherine Wensink, UKOTCF

UKOTCF personnel greatly appreciated comments from other ministers that they see EIAs and associated techniques as crucial in their own areas of responsibilities.

Minister Hogan concluded: "The Government of Montserrat wants to set an example in this area of sustainable development planning through the use of EIAs. We value the expert help being provided through this workshop. It will ensure that our natural heritage is considered through the planning and implementation processes, whether for housing, alternative energy, roads, communications or our proposed new hospital. I therefore urge everyone to participate purposefully to make the most of this opportunity over the next two days."

Participants heeded the Minister's urging, and took active and enthusiastic part in the workshop discussions over the following two days.

The Minister's commitments were broadcast on Montserrat and Eastern Caribbean radio. The workshop featured on the main



*A light-hearted moment in a workshop session, shared by (from left) Dr Jo Treweek, Minister Claude Hogan, Director of Agriculture Melissa O'Garro, Director of Environment Gerard Gray, and Stephen Mendes.
Photo: Catherine Wensink, UKOTCF*

Montserrat Radio News on three nights, and a 30-minute extended informal interview with Jo, Catherine and Mike was broadcast in full on another programme. These also gave an extended interview to the *Montserrat Reporter*.

The workshop had originated in a meeting between UKOTCF officers and senior FCO personnel, in September. FCO had highlighted Montserrat's urgent request for Environmental Impact Assessment training and had asked if UKOTCF could organise such a workshop. Mike had investigated local interest in a brief visit to Montserrat in October, when he had been in the region

for the Guadeloupe conference (see page 8 in this issue of *Forum News*).

Mike had met Montserrat's new Minister of the Environment at the Guadeloupe conference, and had several lengthy discussions with him. The Minister had expressed concern at the recent and unnecessary destruction (approved before the new Government took office) of Piper's Pond, Montserrat's last remaining lowland wetland, and expressed great support for the EIA workshop, linked with the need for Montserrat to have an effective sustainable development strategy.

Arrangements were well advanced when funding anticipated from previous conversations was found to be no longer available for this workshop, although all still wanted the workshop to happen. As UKOTCF does not like to go back on commitments, it decided to proceed with the workshop, using donated specialist time and its very limited resources.

Catherine and Mike used the visit also to strengthen links with other Montserratian partners whom they had helped design projects and seek support, and discuss plans for several future activities, as well as work on a new bird and heritage guide. Montserratian partners have asked UKOTCF to produce this, based on their successful guides produced in 2014 for the Turks & Caicos Islands (see page 5 in this issue of *Forum News*). The purpose is to raise awareness of the global importance of Montserrat's unique wildlife, and to encourage sustainable tourism to support Montserrat's small businesses and its economy generally.

UKOTCF and TCI National Museum open Wise-Water-Use Garden

Following its work on rainwater harvesting for the botanic gardens with Montserrat National Trust, and continuing with its environmental education work in TCI, UKOTCF has worked with its partner, the Turks & Caicos National Museum (TCNM). This included work to design and resource a project to develop a garden displaying traditional crops and native medicinal plants irrigated with rainwater, thus reducing the need for fertilisers and city water produced via desalination powered by imported diesel.

The project aims to help TCI decrease dependence on water that is produced by expensive and environmentally costly diesel-powered desalination and promote awareness of the environment, as well

as to use local traditional plants and methods to make the best use of this water. The new wise-water-use garden demonstrates rainwater harvesting from roofs, garden irrigation and use of native and other medicinal plants adapted to local conditions, and is situated at the TCI National Museums historically accurate recreation of a typical 1800s Caicos family dwelling at its site in Providenciales.

The Garden was opened on Thursday 12 June 2014 by the Governor, His Excellency Peter Beckingham. Interpretive signage explains the natural water systems in TCI, how the wise-water-use garden works, and how everyone can help conserve water. The project is linked to the *Wonderful Water* curriculum and course, developed by UKOTCF with the TCI Education Department, and already in use in the Islands' schools.

Visitors to the site will be able to find out about the use of the 'three-sisters' crop systems used by both the original Taino Indian inhabitants and again in the post-plantation era. This was centred on beans (to capture nitrogen so avoiding the need for artificial fertilisers), corn (which also provided support for the beans), and sweet potato or pumpkin (also to provide ground cover, minimising water-loss).

The Wise-water-use Garden is a joint initiative by RBC Royal Bank, Turks & Caicos National Museum (<http://tcmuseum.org>), and UKOTCF. Officially opening the garden, Governor Peter Beckingham said: "This illustrates the fascinating gardening practices which were traditional in the Caicos Islands for hundreds of years. Given how relevant these still are today, I welcome this collaboration between a local non-profit, its UK-based non-profit partner, and an international commercial organisation."



Cutting the ribbon to open officially the Wise-Water-Use Garden are (left to right) Mrs Sanfra Foster, Manager RBC TCI; HE Governor Peter Beckingham, Mrs Patricia Saxton, Director Turks and Caicos National Museum, and Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF. Photo: Ann Pienkowski

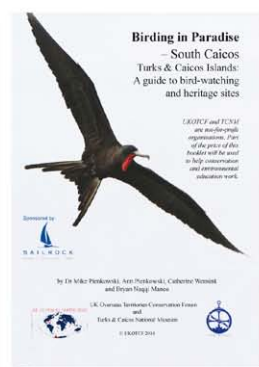


Two of the interpretive signboards, with the developing wise-water-use garden in the background. Photo: Ann Pienkowski

Patricia Saxton, Director of the Turks & Caicos National Museum Foundation, expressed her appreciation of RBC and the project partners, noting that the Turks and Caicos National Museum is focused on historical and environmental conservation. In its Grand Turk headquarters, the Museum, its Botanical Garden and its Science Building rely only on rainwater-harvesting and air-conditioning run-off for water-provision.

Dr Mike Pienkowski, Honorary Executive Director of UKOTCF said: "The Wise-Water-Use for Gardens Project will raise awareness of water-supply issues, encourage water-saving measures, and demonstrate the use of rainwater-harvesting for food-crops and of native plants in landscaping as significant measures to save water."

Guide-books for bird-watching and other heritage-sites published – on sale in TCI and by mail or download from UKOTCF



Guide-books to bird-watching and other heritage sites in the Turks and Caicos Islands have been published by UKOTCF and its partner, the Turks & Caicos National Museum. Birding in the Turks and Caicos is covered in this *Birding in Paradise* series of booklets, one for each of the main islands, and includes maps, photos, local features, illustrations, and information.

UKOTCF has been helping governmental and non-governmental conservation organisations in TCI for the last 18 years, and the book authors have been involved personally throughout this period. These booklets describe where to go birding in the Turks and Caicos and where to view some of the other heritage features. Each book (of between 48 and 60 pages, with full colour maps and photos) contains:

- Forewords by the TCI Director of Environment and Maritime Affairs (Kathleen McNary Wood) and the TCI Director of Culture (David Bowen)
- Note about supporting conservation of the natural and cultural heritage
- Introduction about the purpose and nature of the booklet
- Practical information about getting there, facilities (in more detail for the family islands than for Providenciales, which has this information available in many other publications), other sources of information etc
- Heritage and wildlife tours around various parts of the island, in total covering most of the island. On most islands, this is a driving route (with some optional bits of walking) linked to the map
- Maps of the island, showing recommended routes and main features
- Sections on visiting some special features of each island
- Fully illustrated sections on the water-birds, land-birds, and sea-birds of each island are either integrated in the tour or

included as separate sections

- A little section on simple geology, which helps understand the landscape
- A section on geography and history.

Booklets may be purchased at many local outlets in TCI and via the link below, either as printed versions sent by post, or as downloadable pdf versions, designed to suit tablets but readable on computers and any other device that can read pdf files. (A free pdf-reader application is available from Adobe <http://get.adobe.com/uk/reader/>.) Pricing is in GB pounds, but your credit card supplier will convert this to your local currency in your statement. www.ukotcf.org/birding-in-Turks-and-Caicos/birding-in-turks-and-caicos.cfm

From a review by Tony White in the Bahamas/TCI Bird Report: *TCI is ... often overlooked as a birding destination, but it has a variety of easily seen Caribbean specialties (It is the only place outside Cuba where you can see the Cuban Crow.) and a comfortable, well-developed infrastructure. ... a new series ... "Birding in Paradise" ... together cover all the accessible islands in the territory. They are excellent and could be used as prototypes for guides to other Caribbean islands. I have birded on islands covered by three of the five booklets. The new guides cover all the birding sites I know and more. I look forward to visiting the remaining islands and new sites on the islands I have already visited. These books will make my birding much easier and more successful. The booklets are each about 50 pages long and contain detailed maps, numerous photos of the local birds, instruction on how to get to local birding sites, and brief summaries of island geology and history. My one criticism is that they do not contain a checklist of TCI birds. Perhaps this is available separately; I do not know. ... Enjoy birding in paradise.*

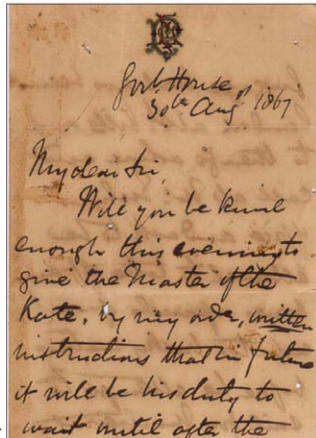
Montserrat Endangered Archives Project Launch

The award of a grant from the British Library to the Montserrat National Trust (MNT) to address endangered archives on Montserrat was particularly important, as Montserrat's irreplaceable archives have suffered from challenging natural climatic conditions including hurricanes, and from volcanic eruptions. The Endangered Archives Project was launched officially in November 2014, at the MNT Museum in Little Bay. Speakers at the launch included the Premier, Hon. Donaldson Romeo, HE Governor Adrian Davis, and President of MNT, Mrs Dulcie James (above right).



The project will first identify the archives, their locations and condition. Priority materials will be selected for scanning and digital storage. Nigel Sadler, the archivist, advising the project, will train at least two people to handle the documents properly, and to undertake the scanning and recording. Some very interesting information is already being uncovered and saved, like the 1942 voter's list and (illustrated right) correspondence from the 19th Century.

UKOTCF's co-ordinator, Catherine Wensink, worked with Bob Conrich (Anguilla Archaeological & Historical Society), Nigel Sadler (consultant archivist) and the Montserrat National Trust on the preparation of the successful application. Both MNT and AAHS are Associate organisations of UKOTCF.



Photos:
Montserrat National Trust

Cayman National Conservation Law Implementation

After more than ten years of dogged effort by the Cayman Department of the Environment and its many supporters, the National Conservation Law was enacted in December 2013. The law is complicated and has many aspects, so implementation is likewise a complex business.

After some necessary amendment to ancillary laws, the Cabinet commenced Parts 1 and 2 of the National Conservation Law on 12th September 2014. These are the administrative parts of the law, so the Department of Environment has now been able to have the National Conservation Council (NCC) appointed, and to start work on the various other processes and mechanisms that will need to be put in place.

The NCC is broadly representative, including members from each of the Districts on Grand Cayman and a representative of the Sister Islands, specialists in various conservation areas, such as avifauna, and key Government officials. The Council is meeting regularly and has had its first public meeting. Here, the *Guidance Notes* for agency consultation with the Council were approved and the Department of the Environment's role in development review formalised.

The NCC has retained the right to decide whether or not an EIA will be required for a particular development, based on a Technical Review and recommendation from the DoE. Drafting instructions or EIA Regulations which were developed by the DoE have also been approved by the Council for transmission to Cabinet.

The NCC has also recently recommended that Parts 3 (protection of land), 4 (protection of wildlife) and 6 (enforcement and penalties) of the law, as well as Section 50 (regulations making powers for Cabinet) and the Schedules be commenced; so Cabinet papers are being drafted to put those recommendations to Cabinet for a decision.

It is heartening to see conservation work in Cayman finally being put into a proper legislative and administrative construct, and UKOTCF once again offers congratulations and encouragement to those engaged in this vital effort.

Wetlands Preserved on Cayman Brac

The National Trust for the Cayman Islands has purchased 10 acres (4 ha) of wetlands, known as The Marshes, in Cayman Brac – in a bid to protect some of the last remaining wetlands on the island. The funds for the purchase were raised by the Brac District Committee of the Trust and the Trust's Land Reserve Fund. A series of herbaceous and woody wetlands, The Marshes is home to a variety of plant species and wildlife.

This project was especially important to the Brac District Committee because the only remaining animal sanctuary on Cayman Brac – the Salt Water Pond – was recently de-gazetted by the legislature. Estelle Stillin, chairman of the Cayman Brac District Committee, spearheaded the project. The plan is that The Marshes will become a nature reserve.

Paul Watler, environmental programmes manager of the National Trust, noted that “there's not a lot of wetlands for Cayman Brac to begin with, which means just a little protection will support every water-bird on the list that's ever been recorded there.” The water-levels vary with the seasons, from a range of smaller ponds in the wet season, to a drier landscape in the dry season which still provides provisioning for water-birds, crabs and smaller invertebrates on which the birds forage. Water-birds commonly found in Cayman Brac include the West Indian whistling duck, black-necked stilt, brown booby, belted kingfisher and a variety of herons and egrets. The habitat harbours a wide range of local plant life, including the buttonwood and red mangrove. The Marshes area is also home to species of crabs and shrimps not likely to be found elsewhere on the island. There have been several sightings of an unrecorded species of red shrimp at the aptly named Red Shrimp Hole near The Marshes.

The Trust's plans for the site include researching the red shrimp, removal of invasive species from the site, and replacing them with natives. Another possibility is a viewing deck for bird-watching enthusiasts.



The wetlands of the newest nature reserve on Cayman Brac
Photo: The Caymanian Compass

East Caicos Mega-Port Development Plan

East Caicos is the largest uninhabited island in the Caribbean. A recent habitat mapping project, funded by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) reported “East Caicos represents the largest continuous landmass in the Turks and Caicos Islands unfragmented by development, and as such is a critical reservoir of biodiversity on a community, genetic and species level.” The North, Middle and East Caicos Nature Reserve is also designated as a Wetland of International Importance (Ramsar Site). The Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, called the Ramsar Convention, is an intergovernmental treaty that provides the framework for national action and international cooperation on the conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources.

A review of existing and potential Ramsar Sites in UKOTs and Crown Dependencies was commissioned by UK’s Environment Ministry, Defra, and conducted by UKOTCF in partnership with governments and NGOs in the territories. This, and follow-up detailed assessments, concluded that the existing Ramsar Site of North, Middle & East Caicos should be extended to include the rest of East Caicos. This assessment is supported also by the global analysis of Important Bird Areas.

East Caicos is a superb complex of natural coral reefs, tidal flats, mangroves and marshlands, which provide a haven for wildlife, as well as the natural basis of the fisheries and tourism industries (*see below - photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF*). There are important caves and dry tropical forest. It is clear that the whole of this uninhabited island should be included in the Ramsar Site, and this



was recommended in the 2005 review of potential Ramsar sites conducted in partnership with TCI Government and NGOs.

However, this has not happened, hampered by lack of political will, and the idea of TCI politicians that East Caicos was ripe for built development. The Premier of the Turks and Caicos, Hon. Dr Rufus Ewing, and Minister of Finance, Hon. Washington Misick, first publically announced in 2013 the intention of TCI Government to develop a trans-shipping port and cruise-centre on East Caicos. The proposal includes a mega-cruise-port, mega-cargo-port and mega-yacht-port with resort facilities, duty-free shopping and other tourist attractions. In September 2014, the Minister of Finance stated that the \$19 million awarded to TCI from the EU Development Fund would go specifically to the development of the deep-water port, and that the development would be strategically located to include a second cruise-port.

The importance of East Caicos as the most unspoilt wetland complex in the region seems to be completely undervalued. Good governance would dictate that any major development such as this would require an open, transparent and public Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) - see also pages 9-10 of this issue of *Forum News* on international legal requirements. Sadly this has

not been the case in previous developments in TCI, and there are concerns that a proper EIA will not be conducted for the current proposal. However, as it has been stated that the EU funds are going to be used to kickstart this project, it is hoped that before any development occurs, a complete, transparent and independent EIA would take place, a requirement of EU-funded projects.

Such an EIA should take account of the ecosystem services East Caicos contributes to the broad economy of TCI, and include a costs-and-benefits assessment. Previous developments, carried out without environmental review, have seriously damaged the environment and economy of TCI. TCI needs sustainable development - its unspoilt environment is the basis of the tourism industry.

The UKOT governments, at the Joint Ministerial Council held in London in December 2014, agreed to take steps “to protect their rich and internationally important biodiversity and to raise awareness of the economic benefits of sound environmental management.” Does the East Caicos port development fit with this commitment?

Coral Reef Restoration Collaboration

Coral reefs throughout the world are under threat for many reasons, for example climate change, over-exploitation, invasive species and pollution. The threat lionfish pose to coral reefs is well known. Recent research has shown the importance of parrot fish in maintaining the health of the coral reef, and the impact on the reef by over-fishing of parrot fish. In the Caribbean, many countries are undertaking mitigation and restoration measures.

Discussions during UKOTCF’s Wider Caribbean Working Group meetings led to the suggestion that people involved in coral reef restoration in the UKOTs should share experiences on projects, information and expertise. UKOTCF’s WCWG Secretary co-ordinated several Skype discussions and disseminated shared information, including a contacts list. The Central Caribbean Marine Institute (CCMI) volunteered to host a workshop for Wider Caribbean UKOT personnel. The necessary funds for travel and accommodation were built into a bid for Darwin Plus funding on coral reef research and restoration, which unfortunately was not successful. Funding for this workshop is currently being sought from other sources.

Meantime, UKOTCF’s co-ordinator, Catherine Wensink, received an offer from colleagues in the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA) for two funded places at the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network (GCRMN) workshop for representatives from the UKOTs. Kristi Foster from CCMI and Don Stark from TC Reef Fund attended this workshop, in Curacao in August 2014. Thad Murdoch from Bermuda was also at this meeting. These three reported back on the workshop findings to other stakeholders in the UKOTs, including representatives from Anguilla and BVI. The final workshop report has been shared with interested persons in the UKOTs, and it is hoped that this collaboration, both between UKOTs and with other Caribbean countries, will continue. The report had noted for the UKOTs that there was the need for funding, standardised methods for data collection, reporting and archiving, and communication across the region. Coral Reefs have huge economic value, in terms of ecosystem services. The challenges faced by small island states and UKOTs in looking after their coral reefs are huge, so co-operation in dealing with the issues is clearly very important. We hope that future collaborations can be resourced, and the UKOTs can continue to co-operate with the GCRMN.

‘Extinct’ Endemic Snail found in Bermuda

For decades, conservationists believed Bermuda’s endemic land snail *Poecilozonites bermudensis* was extinct, a victim of invasive predators which had been intentionally introduced to the island to control a troublesome garden snail. But now, around 40 years after its last sighting in the wild, a healthy colony of these snails has turned up in the heart of Bermuda’s capital city, Hamilton, in a damp and overgrown alleyway. Dr Mark Outerbridge, Bermuda Conservation Service’s Wildlife Ecologist, believes that the surviving population of the snail has been protected by its location – an urban situation isolated from the invasive species which had been introduced into garden habitats. “The fact that there was so much concrete around them probably saved them from the predators that we believe killed the vast majority of the population Island-wide.”



Dr Mark Outerbridge with *Poecilozonites*.
Photo: Bermuda Royal Gazette

The last recorded sighting of this endemic land snail was made in the early 1970s by Stephen J Gould, the well-known paleontologist, who had done his PhD as a young man on Bermuda and recorded them as being plentiful throughout the country. But, when he returned to Bermuda in the early 1990s, their

numbers appeared to have taken a dramatic plunge, to the point that he could no longer find one. A survey conducted in 1988 by two US scientists in Bermuda could find no living trace of *Poecilozonites bermudensis*. Later studies, in 2000, 2002 and 2004, seemed to confirm that the animal was extinct. Conservation Services is now working out a survival plan for this endemic, mainly focused on translocation to suitable sites which are now being identified.

MPASSE project (Management of Protected Areas to Support Sustainable Economies) in three UKOTs draws to a close

Work within this long-running part-EU-funded project, secured with UKOTCF support, officially ended on 31 December 2014 (apart from completing some let contracts and the complex reporting procedures).

The final stages of work in the Cayman Islands part of the project were highlighted in [Forum News 42](#) (page 9). This included the acquisition of a new protected area of tropical dry forest into which endemic Grand Cayman blue iguanas were released, the continuing of the ‘head-start’ rearing and release programme for these (the suite of conservation actions leading the species to be regraded from Critical Endangered to Endangered), and species recovery planning as well as novel interpretative work at the new reserve.

Works are being completed also in BVI, including three visitor centres at Sage Mountain National Park, Copper Mine NP and the Anegada iguana headstart facility. The internal content of the Anegada centre is now being planned.

The work in TCI has remained less complete. A major impediment to all the UKOTs involved had been the over-elaborate EU tender process, and the difficulty in getting tenders submitted, as well as other procedures disproportionately large and wasteful in relation to the size of the project. Tenders for many activities had needed to be re-launched on several occasions.

UKOTCF had, from the start of the implementation of the project, raised the issue of complex EU-tendering procedures which were not appropriate for small projects. Nevertheless, the project has achieved a great deal in two UKOTs.

Potential – and lack of potential – for future European Union funding for UKOTs

[Forum News 42](#) (page 13) reported UK Government’s optimism that the newly approved (€3 billion) budget phase (2014-20) of the LIFE programme (primarily intended for funding conservation within the European Union itself) might be open to UKOTs also. Unfortunately, the workshop organised by Defra revealed (as UKOTCF had expected) that the European Commission’s interpretation of the new rules means that it will be unlikely in the extreme that UKOTs will benefit, so that most experienced conservation bodies considered that there is no point in applying to this fund (except in the special cases of Gibraltar and the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas).

Some further news of the other expected fund for EU Overseas Countries and Territories was gleaned at the Conference in Guadeloupe, October 2014. This meeting was for Overseas Entities of the EU and followed on from the conference in Réunion in 2008. Both conferences were funded largely by the French Government, French Regions and the EU, and organised by IUCN and the European Commission. Unfortunately, many of the organisational problems of the 2008 conference were repeated this time (despite the early warnings by other bodies); this meant, for example, that flight-tickets did not reach several invited delegates from territories, including the nearest UKOT to Guadeloupe – which can actually be seen from there.

The conference consisted of parallel workshops, and participants had to opt, in advance, for one workshop and attend that for the entire meeting. The one on funding mechanisms, was ably chaired by Joseph Smith Abbott, now Deputy Secretary in the BVI Department of Environment (even though he had not been expecting to chair the workshop throughout the conference). Information on future funding intentions was extracted, with difficulty, from European Commission officials.

The details of the proposed successor to BEST are likely to be announced sometime in early 2015. The discussions in the workshop had concluded that small projects involving NGOs should be favoured. Many participants were irritated that European Commission officials and others made significant changes, in closed and unannounced meetings, to the conclusions agreed in open sessions.

A new species of bat for Gibraltar

A new species of bat to Gibraltar, the isabelline serotine *Eptesicus isabellinus*, was captured during a netting session at the Gibraltar Botanic Gardens.



This is one of the highlights of a collaborative study of Gibraltar's bats by the Gibraltar Museum and the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS), a UKOTCF member organisation, with the help of a team of specialists from the UK. The project, supported by the Ministry for the Environment, aims to establish a better understanding of local bats' habits and monitor resident and nonresident species over the next three years.

During the few days the team was in Gibraltar, various sites were visited, including caves and tunnels where roosts and colonies have been found. The isabelline serotine occurs north of the Sahara, from Morocco to Libya. It has also been found on the Canary Islands and it is present in the south of the Iberian Peninsula. The isabelline serotine is similar to its European counterpart, the serotine bat *Eptesicus serotinus*, though with a lighter coloured fur, ears and snout. This species favours habitats with dense vegetation and access to areas of water. It is believed to be a crevice-dweller.

Mr James Shipman, a bat specialist from the Berkshire and South Buckinghamshire Bat Group, explained that he is confident that

Gibraltar has all the characteristics to make it a prime site for bats, and that he expects the species-list for Gibraltar to increase as the study continues. "I am convinced that, not only are there more resident species here in Gibraltar, but there are indications that Gibraltar is a prime site for bat migration. It's a very exciting project where we are hoping to not only work on bats but also try to inform people about bats and how they are not 'scary animals' like many people believe."

The GONHS bat group, co-ordinated by Mr Albert Yome, welcomed this study which links in perfectly with the hard work they have been conducting over the past six years in monitoring bats in Gibraltar, as well as participating in International Bat Night as part of the Eurobats Agreement.

The Gibraltar Museum Cave Unit has been taking the group to different cave and tunnel sites around Gibraltar, which they have been monitoring over the years. Mr Stewart Finlayson, head of the GMCU, explained how it is a wonderful experience to be working alongside the GONHS and the team from the UK. "We hope this project will yield some excellent results shortly and are looking forward to this collaboration." Members of the public are encouraged to contact the team if they have found/ find any bats living within their homes. Many bats can be found within chimneys, attics and buildings. These animals should not be disturbed as they are protected under the Nature Protection Act, but informing the team would assist this project hugely.

For more information please contact:

The Gibraltar Museum: Mr Stewart Finlayson:

caving.unit@gibmuseum.gi – Tel: +1 200 74289

GONHS: Mr Albert Yome: bats@gonhs.org



Binding nature of Environment Charters and the need for EIAs upheld by Supreme Court

The Bermuda Supreme Court recently considered a challenge to the grant of a Special Development Order (SDO) which permitted development on previously protected land of high environmental value. Like many other jurisdictions, large developments which are considered to have great economic impact are subject to special procedures in which the Minister, rather than the planning authority, makes the decision to permit or deny the proposal. This SDO, known as Tucker's Point, had been the subject of considerable opposition, largely because the decision was taken with no environmental impact assessment, and with no opportunity for the public to review the proposal or give input to the decision-maker.

The Bermuda Ombudsman, Arlene Brock (who has now completed her term of office), carried out a review of the history and issues related to the Tucker's Point SDO in a special report, *Today's Choices/Tomorrow's Costs*, issued in February 2012. She took as her starting point Bermuda's commitment under the Environment Charter to weigh equally environmental and development considerations, and specifically to carry out environmental review in high impact projects. She noted the fact that the Charters are the means by which Britain complies with its international obligations, such as under the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Rio Declaration.

The Bermuda Government responded to the furore about Tucker's Point by changing the law to require that SDOs be approved by Parliament, but continued to maintain that the Charter commitments were 'aspirational' rather than actual commitments, and that somehow the law relating to SDO approval actually prohibited an environmental impact statement and public review. A campaigning NGO called the Bermuda Environmental and Sustainability Taskforce (BEST) challenged the Minister's approval of sub-division applications made under the SDO. BEST argued, based on *Today's Choices*, that an EIA was required. In addition, BEST argued that there should have been a consideration of changed financial circumstances (the receivership) before proceeding with development activity under the SDO.

The Chief Justice, Ian Kawaley, in the Bermuda Supreme Court held that the Bermuda Environment Charter was a bilateral agreement creating an international legal obligation on Bermuda's part. And he agreed with the Ombudsman that the idea of the commitments as 'aspirational' dilutes their legal status.

He also specifically decided that the idea the SDO procedure prohibited environmental review was wrong in law. The SDO did not preclude an EIA - which is a practice consistent with the Charter treaty obligations and general international law. He held that the planning authorities have an obligation to provide the best information possible in relation to a proposed development, and that, to the extent that the Bermuda Plan constitutes domestic law, then the Development Applications Board (DAB) discretion to request EIA should be consistent with the international obligations. Therefore there must be a rational reason to dispense with the requirement of an EIAs for major developments. The Court found also that subsequent finances could have been considered.

This was an historic victory for BEST, and a welcome confirmation that the Environment Charters are valid international legal agreements. The Supreme Court decision stated that:

1. EIA must be done for all major developments such as (i.e. not limited to) Tucker's Point.
2. There is a mandatory obligation to obtain the best quality information.
3. The best quality information is usually obtained through a full EIA.
4. In addition to the obligation to obtain best quality information, Bermuda has an international treaty obligation (Charter) to require EIA for major development projects. Moreover, EIA is now general international law. Therefore domestic legislation (such as the 2008 Bermuda Plan) must be consistent with these two sources of international legal obligations to require EIA.
5. Although the exact content of the EIAs is for the Ministry, not the Court to determine, convincing reasons must be given if a 'full' EIA is not done.

As noted in several fora, Environment Charters have been agreed for almost all UK Overseas Territories, in generally similar terms. There is no reason to suppose that the now settled obligations for Bermuda do not apply equally to other UKOTs.

South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands stakeholder meeting; rat eradication and recent successes

The annual stakeholder meeting at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office took place in September. In the meeting, FCO and Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands (GSGSSI) both outlined their strategies for the Islands, to be updated in 2015. Other discussions included the science strategy, fisheries, restoration efforts, heritage conservation, communications/outreach and tourism. UKOTCF personnel attended the meeting and, in light of its previous work on conservation linked to tourism in other UKOTs, suggested that the tourists-as-advocates for the environment role could be more developed in the future strategy; this was echoed by the International Association of Antarctica Tour Operators (IAATO).

The remarkable work of the South Georgia Heritage Trust in habitat-restoration by rat-removal was also discussed at the meeting; regular updates can be found also at www.sght.org. The remaining third of the Island is being baited between February and April 2015. Post-eradication monitoring will be undertaken in 2017 to assess whether all rats have been removed. The project has already had significant results insofar as a nest of pipits have already been found in an area which was baited (see below). A significant rise in both land- and sea-bird populations in the coming years is expected. Judging by this, the birds will not waste any time.

The restoration team received an award from the Darwin Initiative in 2014 to continue these efforts, but further support is still needed to complete the removal of all rodents from the entire island: www.sght.org.

STOP PRESS: News just in from SGHT of the discovery of the first South Georgia Pipit nest (below) in an area cleared of rodents by the Habitat Restoration Project. The nest was spotted at Schlieper Bay on the South coast of the North-West baiting zone at Weddell Point. This area was treated in May 2013 as part of Phase 2 of the project. The nest, containing five chicks, was discovered by none other than Sally Poncet, a former member of Team Rat and expert on the wildlife of South Georgia. This thrilling news shows the rapid impact of the Habitat Restoration Project on this potentially endangered species, found only on South Georgia.



Photo: S. Poncet

Montserrat *Blue Halo* project

Following the request from the new Chief Fisheries Officer, Alwyn Ponteen, through Montserrat's representative to the UK, Janice Panton, during the reception held to launch the EAC report (see *Forum News* 42: 14-15), UKOTCF has been working with the Fisheries Department to raise their capacity to manage their fisheries resources sustainably. In doing so, it introduced the Fisheries Department to the Waitt Institute.

The Waitt Institute aims to “ensure ecologically, economically, and culturally sustainable use of ocean resources. It partners with governments committed to developing and implementing comprehensive, science-based, community-driven solutions for sustainable ocean management. Their goal is to benefit coastal communities while restoring fish populations and habitats. Their approach is to engage stakeholders, provide the tools needed to design locally appropriate policies, facilitate the policymaking process, and build capacity for effective implementation and long-term success.”

Following their first project in the Caribbean, the *Blue Halo Barbuda*, has led to comprehensive new laws for the coastal waters around the island.

In February 2015, the Waitt Institute announced, via a press release, two new site where they will work – Montserrat and Curaçao.

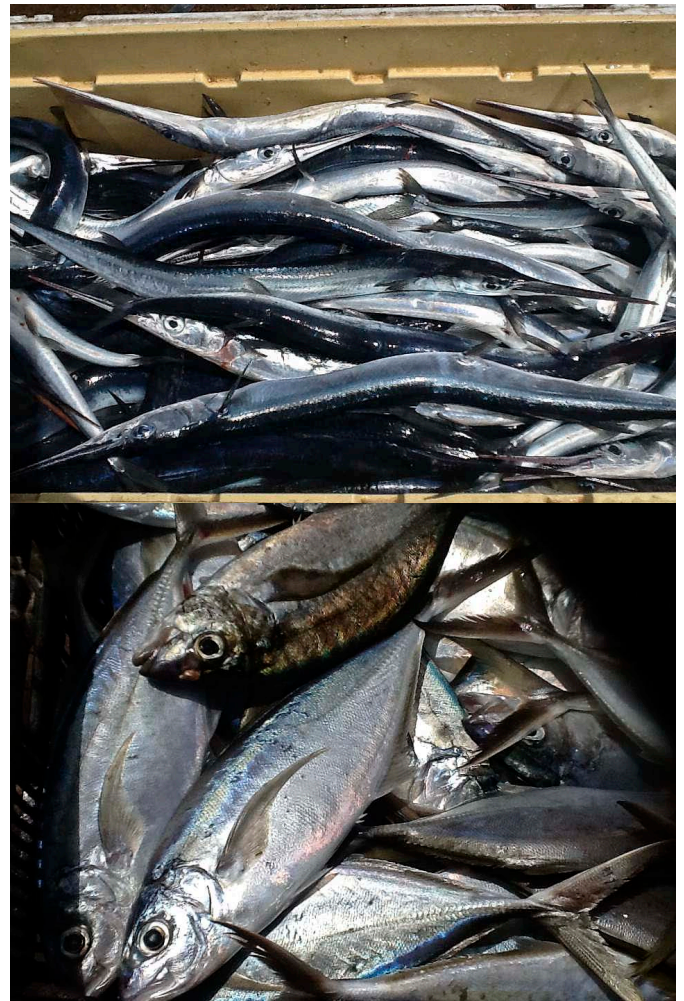


Above: Fisherman lands his day's catch of approximately 375 lb (170 kg) of needle fish. Another aspect of the project is being assisted by Succorfish, a UK-based provider of global GPS tracking systems and marine and maritime vessel monitoring systems (VMS). The initiative will enable the collection of accurate data on how Montserrat's ocean resources are being utilised in order to inform future fisheries management.

Photos: Montserrat Fisheries Department



Above: snapper; top right: gar/needle fish, the most numerous species landed; lower right: jacks. Photos: Alwyn Ponteen



“We’re thrilled to be building relationships that emphasize science and community priorities,” said Dr Ayana Elizabeth Johnson, Executive Director of the Waitt Institute (<http://www.waittinstitute.org>), regarding the memoranda of understanding signed with the Montserrat Government. “Barbuda was just the beginning of a Caribbean-wide effort to rebuild fisheries and improve coastal livelihoods.”

The initiative has been welcomed locally. Local fisherman Carlton O’Garro said, “Montserrat is on the move and is rising to the challenge to improve the governance and management of the ocean.”

The Honorable Donaldson Romeo, Premier of Montserrat said, “We recognize that it is in our benefit to work hard for healthy oceans in order to sustain our vital fish stocks, the marine life and biodiversity, and of course the livelihoods of our communities.”

UKOTCF continues to support the Chief Fisheries Officer in order to raise capacity for sustainable management of marine resources and met with him during two visits to Montserrat (see elsewhere in this edition, pp 3-4) to discuss some of his concerns.

Gibraltar announces new fishery regulations

Forum News readers will have followed the recent efforts to ensure the sustainable management of marine resources in Gibraltar (see *Forum News* 40: 9-10; *Forum News* 41: 1-2). In October 2014, the Laws of Gibraltar website (www.gibraltarlaws.gov.gi) published the Tuna Preservation Regulation 2014 and, on 1st January 2015, the Marine Protection Regulation 2014 and the Nature Protection (Designation of Marine Nature Area) Order 2014. These were based closely on the recommendations of the study commissioned by the Government of Gibraltar through UKOTCF.

Physical Planning Policy change in Cyprus Sovereign Bases Areas

On 15th January 2014, Appendix O of the 1960 Declaration concerning the administration of the SBAs was amended. Appendix O of the 1960 Declaration states that: “Her Majesty’s Government declares that their intention is not to develop the SBAs for other than military purposes and not to establish commercial, civilian etc., establishments except for military purposes”. The new text in Section 6 states that the United Kingdom will not itself develop in the bases although “civilian or industrial enterprises will be allowed where consistent with the planning zones and planning policies set out in Section 1”.

It has been suggested that the President of the Republic has given people the impression that development can happen anywhere with the exception of MOD controlled land. However, the agreement provides for the creation of planning zones within the areas, which will not mean development everywhere. The zoning needs to take into account environmental legislation and the designated or candidate Special Protection Areas or Special Areas of Conservation (SPAs/SACs).

Reports from several partners in Cyprus suggest that there is some concern that development might impact on the environment, for which still so little is known; consequently, there is uncertainty of what the impact of this will mean. One comment was that: “one of the first sites likely to come under pressure is the ‘gravel pits’ area on the west side of the Akrotiri peninsula, which is one of the best areas for breeding waders, and which could easily be placed into the category of “abandoned land”, rather than be rated (as it should be) high-nature-value land which should not be developed.

There are also some concerns as to whether the environmental legislation, and the need for a process of Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment, will be taken into account properly before any planning zones are imposed. The other tool that currently safeguards the sensitive areas is the Appropriate Assessment that needs to be undertaken for any project, which is within an SAC/SPA.

The Sovereign Base Areas Administration addressed some of these concerns by providing some written answers to the questions they received on its website www.sbaadministration.org

In addition, the Department of Town Planning and Housing (DTPH) and the Sovereign Base Areas Administration agreed, at a public meeting in July 2014, to make maps showing the status and some basic facts about the Base Areas widely available, together with maps of proposed Candidate Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). The public was asked to provide comments and suggestions on these. These are available on the [SBA website](http://www.sbaadministration.org).

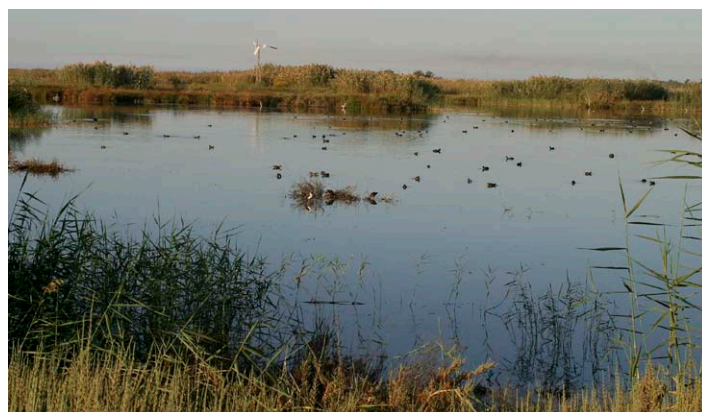


Above: Akrotiri Salt Lake Photo: Thomas Hadjikyriakou.

Top right: Greater Flamingoes over Salt Lake

Second right: Freshwater marshes in Western SBA,

Third right: Migrant shorebirds feed in seasonal ponds between Salt Lake and the shore. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF



New Akrotiri Environmental Education Centre opens

In November 2014, the Administrator of the Sovereign Base Areas and the Minister of Education and Culture for the Republic of Cyprus opened the new Environmental Education Centre in Akrotiri (*photos below: AEEC*). Since opening of the original facility in 2004, the Centre has received over 75,000 visitors, including tourists and school groups, but has largely been utilizing a rented building. With new premises and fully-interactive interpretative materials, the Centre’s ability has been enhanced to focus on its main objectives. These are: environmental education, research and ecotourism. UKOTCF hopes to arrange for students to work with associate organization, the Akrotiri Environmental Education Information Centre, as it has done for the last few years (see, for example, *Forum News* 41: 18; 42: 13).



UK strategies for helping conservation in the UKOTs/CDs and relations between JNCC and NGOs and update

As previously reported (*Forum News* 42: 13), UKOTCF has been working together with other UK non-government organisations and JNCC to “develop an agreed framework of priorities to complement UK Government’s ‘UK Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy’ or any revision of it.” Whilst this would not seek to “replace the strategy of any UKOT or Crown Dependency (or seek to impose such a strategy)” it would “be informed by any of these that are available.” The purpose of such a grouping is “to help UK Government agencies and NGOs to determine how to deploy their limited resources to help conserve the biodiversity heritage of the territories, and to aid acquiring further such resources,” in support of those working in the UKOTs and CDs.

The group had now met four times. By the second meeting, chaired by UKOTCF’s Honorary Executive Director, JNCC had a new Chair, Professor Chris Gilligan, who has a strong background in UK Government scientific committees. It was encouraging that he wished to make progress on the matter of the joint meetings.

Early on, UKOTCF had offered to try and collate initial information on what activities are currently being undertaken, what opportunities there are and potential areas of collaboration – as a basis for attempting to organise these into some priorities.

It did this using the results of the consultation it did for a similar exercise in 2011 in Aichi targets and priorities for conservation (see *Forum News* 18: 4).

So far, the NGOs have contributed their views, and input from the statutory bodies is being sought. JNCC are working on their priorities and Defra has put out a tender to commission work on theirs. The latter was expected to be complete by the summer.

The fourth meeting agreed the need for a sub-group to undertake the first re-sorting of priority areas suggested by members of the wider group. This re-sorting is to be into the priority themes identified by the main group, as modified by the sub-group. This is to be linked to the Aichi Goals or Targets. The main group discussed the possibility of some sort of workshop drawing in a wider set of stakeholders in order to ensure that the priorities were robust. This was also one of the main agenda items of the sub-group.

The sub-group met in January 2015 and agreed on a set of priorities linked to the Aichi targets, and discussed the organization of a workshop planned for the spring.

Environmental Audit Committee and UK Government Response

The Government response to the EAC report (see *Forum News* 42: 12, 14-17) was published in March 2014. The full response can be seen at: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmselect/cmenvaud/1167/1167.pdf>.

The defensive nature of the report was disappointing to both the Committee and conservationists. There are constraints under which UK Government Departments are working given the spending budget cuts. This is so much so that the DFID UKOT environment officer post, already reduced to half-time, has now been removed entirely. Further cuts for Defra are expected also.

Nevertheless, accepting many of the reasoned recommendations of the Committee, based on clear evidence, would not have had cost implications. Much of UK Government’s position is based on its claim that the environment in UKOTs is not its responsibility. UKOTCF (and the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee also) has always said that, whilst UK Government can devolve whatever subjects it wants to the UKOTs, it cannot delegate responsibility. UK Government’s approach to the environment in UKOTs contrasts with its hard line on financial matters – which have exactly the same constitutional relationship as the environment with regard to devolved issues. There seems to be some inconsistency in UK Government’s position.

In a meeting to review the work of the Environmental Audit Committee in the last Parliament, which UKOTCF attended, the Chair of the Committee, Joan Walley MP, reflected that, during their inquiry, it was evident that UK Government does not accord enough importance to biodiversity in the UKOTs.

UKOTCF has certainly paid attention to the recommendation of the Committee, including its endeavours to work with institutions, skilled volunteers (see Volunteer article on page 17, and other

articles involving volunteers on pages 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14 & 16) to raise capacity, and to highlight the extraordinary biodiversity of the UKOTs (see 14), and continues to work with the All Party Parliamentary Group for Biodiversity’s Overseas Territories Policy Group.

Joint Ministerial Council meeting

The Joint Ministerial Council took place 4th-6th December 2014 in London. UKOTCF were invited to attend the reception on the last day.

In preparation for the meeting, the UKOTs were asked to report on progress towards the road map. The reports from BVI, Cayman, Montserrat, St Helena and Tristan were made available and can be seen at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/2014-overseas-territories-joint-ministerial-council/about>

Environmental sections of the JMC communiqué reporting the meeting said::

We acknowledge the important steps taken by Overseas Territories to protect their rich and internationally important biodiversity and to raise awareness of the economic benefits of sound environmental management. We welcome the contribution made by the UK Darwin+ funding stream to support environmental projects in the Territories. Territory governments welcome the UK’s continued provision of this critical source of funding for environmental projects in the Territories.

Territory governments are committed to implementing robust environmental protection legislation, where not yet in place. We welcome the publication by Overseas Territories’ governments of roadmaps setting out plans to

deliver their environmental commitments and renew the commitment for Territories to develop these roadmaps where they are outstanding. The UK will continue to support environmental protection in the Territories, including through provision of technical advice, expertise and support for Territories in identifying and accessing EU funding streams for environmental projects. We will also support Territories, through the Waste & Resources Action Programme, to develop waste management strategies, where these are not already in place.

We commit to work together to support the Overseas Territories in taking further steps to provide legal protection for endemic species and, where applicable, to join the UK's ratification of Multilateral Environmental Agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity. Where such agreements are already in place we commit to work together to ensure the requirements are met.

We welcome progress made in those Territories with emerging industries towards establishing sustainable fishing industries and recognise the success of others in meeting international standards of compliance. We renew our commitment to ensuring that robust legislation and sustainable practices underpin fisheries management regimes in the Territories.

The Territories are prioritising work to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change. We recognise progress made in several Territories to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, including wind farm construction on the Falkland Islands, the solar farm on St Helena and the commitment made by the Turks and Caicos Islands and British Virgin Islands to the Carbon War Rooms initiative. We welcome the workshops offered by the UK Department for Energy and Climate Change in November to assist Territory governments' renewable energy programmes. We commit to link the Overseas Territories more closely to our shared ambitions for low carbon economies and to explore with international partners, such as the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), how the Territories can access technical and policy support to introduce renewable energy sources.

Within the section of the communiqué specifying the 2014-2015 Roadmap, "To meet the commitments in the Communiqué we agree to prioritise work in the following areas over the next year:", the environmental commitments were

7. Overseas Territories to produce environmental road maps by May 2015 where they have not already done so, setting out plans to implement environmental commitments agreed at the JMC

8. Joint work to ratify multilateral environmental agreements such as the Convention on Biological Diversity where these are of benefit to the Territories. Where multilateral environmental agreements are already in place we commit to work together to ensure that implementation standards are robust.

9. The UK government to explore with international partners such as the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) how the Territories can engage directly to commission technical and policy support to introduce renewable energy sources.

The full communiqué can be found at: https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/388001/JMC_Communique_FINAL.pdf

New TV series, short videos and book on the wildlife of UKOTs

UKOTCF has, for many years, tried to interest television broadcasters in the amazing and globally important wildlife of the UKOTs - with very limited success. The recent Parliament Environmental Audit Committee Inquiry into Overseas Territories also stressed this need, as did the workshop which UKOTCF organised at EAC's request in January 2014 to coincide with the report's launch.

UKOTCF was delighted to be contacted by biologist, film-maker and adventurer, Stewart McPherson who, having failed to get the networks to commission such a series, had decided to fund it himself, with the intention of recovering costs by sales to the networks of the final product.

After a very intensive three years, an outstanding series of four 1-hour films on the wildlife of UKOTs is nearing completion, and is expected to be broadcast in UK, Australia and North America later this year. UKOTCF is delighted to have been able to advise on some aspects of this work and commenting on drafts of the final product.

Because Stewart has much more high-quality film than is needed for the TV series, he will be using this to produce a short (5-10 min) video on each UKOT, as well as a few other shorts on cross-territory subjects. UKOTCF is delighted to have helped Stewart fund the editing work on these by helping arrange a crowd-funding exercise on the internet. The resulting shorts will eventually be available free to view on www.ukotcf.org and other sites - as well as at the July conference.

UKOTCF is also working with Stewart and others on writing text and providing photographs for an accompanying book called, in common with the videos, *Britain's Treasure Islands*.

Throughout the exercise, Stewart has kept personnel in the UKOTs and partner organisations elsewhere well involved. Here, UKOTCF helped organise a stakeholders' meeting to check and comment on the draft projects, courtesy of the Government of Gibraltar. Above right: the basic introduction and cover image.



Left: Mike Pienkowski (left) invites questions to Stewart (right), from the well attended stakeholders' meeting (below) at Gibraltar House, London, in January 2015. Photos: Ann Pienkowski, UKOTCF



Sir Richard Ground (1949-2014): distinguished judge and good friend of UKOTCF

Sir Richard Ground was born on December 17, 1949 in Stamford, England and educated at Oakham School in Rutland; Lincoln College, Oxford; and the Inns of Court School of Law. He won an open scholarship to Oxford in 1967 and the Violet Vaughan-Morgan University Prize for literature in 1968. He graduated with a BA Hons in English Language and Literature in 1970.



He was called to the Bar, in Gray's Inn, in 1975; was appointed Queens Counsel (Cayman Islands) in 1987; and was elected a Bencher of his Inn in 2011.

He began his legal career in private practice at 1 Brick Court, Middle Temple, where he specialized in media law, 1976-83. For a time, he served as one of a team of three night-duty lawyers, who happened to be called Tom, Richard and Harry, for *The Guardian* national newspaper. For long after personnel had changed, checking with the lawyers at that newspaper was referred to as sending to Tom, Dick & Harry.

He left London in 1983 for the Cayman Islands where he served as Crown Counsel. He was HM Attorney General in Cayman from 1987 to 1992.

Sir Richard was appointed Puisne Judge of the Supreme Court of Bermuda, serving from 1992 to 1998. His next career move took him to the Turks and Caicos Islands, where he was Chief Justice 1998-2004.

In 2004, he was appointed Chief Justice of Bermuda. He served in this position for eight years, retiring in 2012. During his final arraignment session of the Supreme Court, numerous members of Bermuda's legal profession turned out to bid him farewell. They described him as patient and professional at all times, and praised him for his judicial acumen and intellect. Notably, he was applauded for being "firm but fair" at all times.

In other legal appointments, he had begun serving as Justice of the Court of Appeal for Turks and Caicos Islands in 2005, and was appointed to the Court of Appeal in the Cayman Islands in 2012. Effective 1 January 2013, he was appointed to sit on the Bermuda Court of Appeal but his illness overtook him before he could attend his first session.

He was awarded the OBE in the New Year's Honours List 1991 for his services as Attorney General in Cayman, and was made a Knight Bachelor in the Birthday Honours list 2012 for his services to justice in Bermuda. He was a Bencher at Gray's Inn.

Outside his legal and judicial work, Sir Richard was a keen and talented wildlife photographer and became passionate about the natural world. He published his first book of photographs in Cayman in 1989, *Creator's Glory*, and in 2001 a book of the wildlife of the Turks and Caicos Islands. His photographs have been published in numerous magazines such as *WildBird*, *Bermuda Magazine*, the *Times of the Islands* and *The Bermudian*. He was also a keen collector of Tudor coins and Bronze Age

weaponry – and continued to be fascinated by their stories.

In 1986 Sir Richard married Dace McCoy, a Harvard-trained lawyer he met in the Cayman Islands where she was the Marine Parks Coordinator responsible for establishing a system of protected marine areas for those islands. She later became the founding Executive Director for the National Trust for the Cayman Islands. In Bermuda, Lady Ground worked tirelessly as a volunteer for the Bermuda National Trust and the Bermuda Garden Club's horticultural scholarships programme.

Whilst individual member organisations and members of the UKOTCF network (especially those in Cayman and Bermuda) had earlier worked closely with Richard and Dace, UKOTCF as an organisation became closely involved with them when they arrived in TCI, where UKOTCF was heavily engaged with local partners in conservation and environmental education work. Mike and Ann Pienkowski rapidly built up a close volunteer working relationship with Dace, and Richard was always extremely helpful and supportive in appropriate ways, such as when Dace and Mike facilitated the first exercise for a UKOT to develop a strategy to implement the Environment Charters.

Richard's superb bird photographs and Dace's outstanding layout and design skills were soon heavily deployed in the pioneering nature-trail guide-cards, environmental centre displays and other interpretative material. UKOTCF personnel were pleased to be able to reciprocate in a small way in helping in the production of Richard's superb book (designed by Dace) on *The Birds of the Turks & Caicos Islands*. Richard (and, of course, Dace) remained very supportive in many ways after moving back to Bermuda and then in UK.

Sir Richard retired in 2012 to Derbyshire, an area he had come to know and love during many vacations spent trout fishing in the Derbyshire Wye. Tragically, he contracted brain cancer in May 2013. Following surgery and medical treatment, he hoped to return to his judicial work, but the cancer was in fact more aggressive than first thought. He was 64 years old when he died.

UKOTCF is grateful, with much sympathy, to Dace, Lady Ground, for some of the information in this note and for her photograph (above) of Richard.



Richard Ground stalks birds for photography, Middle Caicos, Turks & Caicos Islands. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF

New UKOTCF Council members

In November 2013, four new UKOTCF Council members were elected. The Council is greatly enhanced by the addition of these members with their huge range of skills and knowledge complementing those of other Council members. UKOTCF greatly appreciates their voluntary efforts. The new members are profiled briefly below.

Tom Appleby

Born in Bristol but growing up on the coast of South Devon, Tom is a former commercial lawyer and now legal academic specialising in marine and conservations issues. He is a lecturer in law at the University of the West of England and has published extensively on the mechanics of fisheries management and marine conservation. He is a member of the international water security network. Tom's work has been used by a number of NGOs, governments and other organisations to promote conservation measures which enhance the local environment while promoting sustainable livelihoods. A short film relating to one of Tom's most recent publications can be found at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qsoi4TMq5bA.



He helped to set up the Lamash Bay marine reserve in waters adjacent to the Isle of Arran in Scotland and is an active trustee of the Community of Arran Seabed Trust. Tom is also a trustee of the Blue Marine Foundation and is working on a number of projects in the UK Overseas Territories and elsewhere in UK waters.

In his spare time Tom is a keen sailor and has sailed across the Atlantic.

Sarita Francis OBE

Sarita holds a BA in Geography and Linguistics and a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education from the University of the West Indies.

Sarita Francis took up the position of Director of the Montserrat National Trust in 2013 after retiring as Deputy Governor in the Montserrat Public Service. Her career in the Public Service spans some forty years during which she worked in Education as a Geography Teacher and Deputy Principal until 1993. She served as Director of Housing from 1999 to 2001, and was appointed Permanent Secretary to the Chief Minister in 2001. She was promoted to Chief Establishment Officer/Deputy Governor in 2007 and was instrumental in delivering the Public Service Reform Programme across Government. Mrs Francis played a pivotal role in the implementation of the changes brought about by the New Montserrat Constitution in 2008.



Sarita Francis became involved with the Montserrat National Trust in 1985, and headed the Environmental Education Committee. She was transferred to the Trust to work as Environmental Education

Officer in 1994. She was President of the Trust during the height of the volcanic crisis and had to assume management of the organization and was instrumental in relocating the Trust Office and Museum from Plymouth to its new headquarters in Olveston.

Apart from her years of voluntary service to the Trust, Sarita has served on many Boards including the Montserrat Tourist Board, the Bank of Montserrat and Credit Union Boards, and UWI Guild of Graduates. She is a member of the Cultural Centre Committee and the Montserrat's Arts Council. Sarita has one son, Dion, who is a Civil Engineer and Director of his Company, Engineering Design and Construction (EDC) Ltd, in Montserrat.

Nigel Haywood CVO

Nigel retired from the Diplomatic Service in 2014. His last posting (2010-2014) was in Stanley, as Governor of the Falkland Islands and Commissioner for South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands. His previous postings include Ambassador to Estonia (2003-2007) and Consul-General in Basra (2008-2009).



During Nigel's time in Stanley he worked to bring together environmental work in the South Atlantic, as a founding director of the South Atlantic Environmental Research Institute (SAERI). This has proved valuable in developing areas of shared interest, most notably on Geographic Information Systems and fisheries conservation. His major environmental concern was South Georgia, establishing one of the world's largest MPAs, and pushing forward, in conjunction with the South Georgia Heritage Trust, one of the most ambitious habitat restorations ever undertaken anywhere.

Nigel has an MSc in Biodiversity Conservation from Bournemouth University. This focused on habitat requirements for specialist butterfly species which had become victims of environmental degradation. He wrote the species action plan for the Falklands fritillary, the Falklands' only resident butterfly. He is working with Bournemouth University, Butterfly Conservation, SAERI and Falklands Conservation to see how that can best be implemented.

Nigel lives in Corfe Castle in Dorset, in the centre of the most biologically diverse 10 kilometre square in Britain. He is currently undertaking research into reasons for the decline of the Lulworth skipper butterfly.

Boyd McCleary CMG CVO

Boyd joined the Northern Ireland Civil Service in 1982 and served in the Department of Agriculture. In 1985, he was seconded to the Diplomatic Service as Agricultural Attaché at the British Embassy in Bonn, then capital of the Federal Republic of Germany. On leaving Bonn, Boyd transferred to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and spent the next thirty years on the move, serving in Seoul, Ankara, Ottawa,



Düsseldorf and Kuala Lumpur before taking up the appointment as Governor of the British Virgin Islands (2010-14). His London postings included Director of Estates and Director of Roll-out for a major new accounting and procurement system for the FCO.

Boyd has had a life-long interest in flora and fauna. As High Commissioner in Malaysia (2006-10), he worked closely with a number of organisations involved in researching and protecting the country's environment, including the Royal Society's South East Asia Rainforest Research Programme, which had a wonderful research centre in Danum Valley, Sabah.

As Governor of the British Virgin Islands, Boyd was again heavily engaged in conservation issues, such as the head-start programme for the Anegada rock iguana and the eradication of alien invasive species to protect the magnificent frigate-bird colony on Great Tobago. He collaborated closely with the National Parks Trust of the Virgin Islands and local NGOs, with UKOTCF and with the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Kew Gardens.

On retiring from the Diplomatic Service in 2014, Boyd moved to a small village in Hampshire, where he aims to explore the local environment, while retaining an interest in wider conservation matters.

And two volunteers helping core roles

An initiative from UKOTCF Co-ordinator, Catherine Wensink, has resulted in two highly qualified volunteers trained to MSc level, helping out with the core roles of UKOTCF in responding to the requests for support from partners in the Territories.

In addition to their initial tasks outlined below, Emma and Sarah have also been helping with preparations for the conference for conservation practitioners, which will be held in July. They will be conducting a desk-study to review progress in meeting the Environment Charters since the last review which was conducted in the run up to the conference in 2009 in Cayman.

Emma Cary

(Volunteer Conservation Assistant; Secretary Europe Territories Working Group)

Emma has been working on the virtual tour for Cyprus, which she has completed. Keeping with the theme of Europe Territories, she has taken the role of Secretary of the Europe Territories Working Group and has been working with Keith Bensusan the Chair of ETWG to reinvigorate the Working Group, organise meetings, keep a record of discussions and work on a newsletter for the group.



She has also been exploring ways in which UKOTCF can get its good news stories about conservation in the UKOTs out to journalists using online platforms. Emma is based in Exeter but was able to join us for the presentation of Stewart McPherson's project in January where she was able to meet with many conservation groups and government representatives.

Emma holds an MA(Hons) in Social Anthropology with Development from the University of Edinburgh and an MSc in Conservation Biology from the Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology. Her interests lie in sustainable development and capacity building for conservation action. In 2010, she spent time working for a conservation research charity in Malaysian Borneo, but has more recently worked closer to home in the UK; as part of the National Trust's team in South Devon, and as an assistant with the RSPB's Cornish chough and corn bunting projects. In her spare time she is a keen cyclist and swimmer, and has recently started learning to play the cello.

Sarah Barnsley

(Volunteer Conservation Assistant; Support to the Secretary Wider Caribbean Working Group)



As Sarah is based near London, she has been able to attend and take notes of several meetings, including those of the All Party Parliamentary Group for biodiversity at the House of Commons, as well as a joint meeting between the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and several non-government organisations working in the UKOTs. She is supporting Ann Pienkowski, as Secretary of the Wider Caribbean Working Group.

Sarah has also been liaising with Ascension Tourism and Conservation Departments, to collate information, format text and upload this to the virtual tour for Ascension, which will soon be live on UKOTCF's website.

Sarah has always loved being outdoors and, having grown up in the Alps, she was able to explore the mountains and the wildlife that they offer. This developed her passion for nature, therefore leading her to choose a BSc degree in Animal Science from the University of Reading and then an MSc in Conservation Science from Imperial College London, which she completed in September 2014.

Having spent time working with animals in various different agricultural environments including a pastoral farm in the Swiss Alps and an urban farm in London, Sarah is particularly interested in the interaction between conservation and agriculture, including areas such as sustainable farming, and the impact that livestock can have upon natural habitats and food and water security. Believing that it is incredibly important to engage people with nature and the environment in order to promote an understanding of the importance of, and a respect for, the natural resources of the world, Sarah is also greatly interested in conservation and environmental education.

Sarah joined UKOTCF as a part-time Conservation Assistant in October 2014 and is greatly enjoying learning more about the conservation work that is being carried out in the UKOTs. Some of her first tasks have included developing the Virtual Tour for Ascension Island and helping to update Conservation Projects on the database.

Other interests include skiing, travelling, yoga and dancing and, of course, hiking up in the mountains.

UKOTCF conservation volunteer embarks on epic journey to St Helena

The following article is written based on Felix Driver's updates, and his photographs. He sailed from Cape Town on RMS St Helena in October 2014 to volunteer with the St Helena National Trust for six months. He has self-funded his travel. Felix has just graduated from Writtle College (University of Essex) with a 2:1 BSc in Environmental Conservation. This is the third overseas territory he has visited following a sailing adventure in Pitcairn in 2011 and survey work in Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas in summer 2012 (see [Forum News 41](#) page 18).



Jamestown is one of the best examples of Georgian architecture preserved to this day.

October 2015:

The journey on the *RMS* was wonderful. It was a long journey but a good way to get to know people, both expats and saints.

My arrival on the island was equally wonderful. We reached the southern corner of the island on Wednesday early morning, and then cruised anti-clockwise around the island to the northwestern side where Jamestown is located. Jamestown is very attractive, resembling small Cornish towns such as Trebarwith Strand or Port Issac, with mostly Georgian terraced and detached town-houses situated either side of the road, then rising up the valley.

I have eaten well so far; food is plentiful but fresh produce is hard to get. I have, however, done the rounds and found how to get fruit and vegetables and have a good stock of apples, oranges, pears, pumpkin, cabbage, and potatoes. Islanders grow them too, so I think there are ways round things.

Due to the isolation of the island, the Royal Mail Ship resembles an extension of it, its movements operating almost in a bizarre lunar calendar, with the islanders and inhabitants (including me) operating on a time-scale that corresponds with where the ship is and what that means for us and the provisioning of fresh food and conveniences. Just like the sun's rays, we dependently hope for the growing of food and the keeping of a positive temperament. With the ship as the only lifeline to the outside world, its presence and disappearance beyond the horizon causes us to longingly await its return and to count time not just in months but in numbers of ship visits.

November 2015:

I am working as the Community Forest long-term volunteer with the St Helena National Trust.

St Helena could be described as one of the most devastated islands in the world from an ecological standpoint. Since 1502, when it

was discovered, it became of strategic importance for water-supply on the trading routes between Europe and Asia for the importation of spice and other commodities. It played a key role in the Royal Navy's role in ending the slave trade. St Helena served in the same capacity that many remote islands do, as a source of replenishment to visiting ships. It was the introduction of non-native species for the purpose of provisioning ships (as well as accidentally) that has caused some of the major ecological problems St Helena today. However, with few records (except sub-fossil) of how the island was prior to exploitation in its natural state, there is a lot of educated guesswork.

Introduced animals are a big problem – for example grazers such as rabbits and goats. Rabbits are prolific breeders and continual grazers, eating the shoots of seedlings and ringing the bark of established plants. Goats not only graze but also trample on vegetation in their constant search of food. Other introduced animals threaten plant growth in much the same way, and domestic cats have affected the Island's endemic flightless (and flighted) bird population, which had no natural ground predators.

Culling is therefore one of several solutions to try and reduce the spread of grazers and help return the island as close as possible to its original undisturbed state. Attempts to do this are being kept within the perimeters of Millennium Forest on the northwest side of the island. This is the single largest conservation effort on the island to restore the island's deadwood forests (thought to have consisted primarily of gumwoods, the dominant plant species of St Helena) to the dominant coverage they once had over much of the northeast side of the Island.

Around 40 endemic plants remain on the island, consisting of ferns, broad-leaved plants and several grasses. Many of these species are restricted to a few sites within the Island's cloud forest – and, in some cases, to only a small number of individual plants.

Much of the conservation effort of the St Helena National Trust has been concentrated on species-specific projects. However, there has been a recent shift to thinking at a landscape- and ecosystem-level. The aim is to rehabilitate degraded landscapes by removing non-native species, which have become invasive, and the replanting of endemic and native species. Once plant communities are established, the aim is to allow them to develop themselves, and for succession to occur with minimal intervention. It is hoped too that the community forests being established in various areas around the Island can link together as a network to increase coverage and resilience.

Propagation and seed-collection from remaining wild specimens



Millennium forest and airport project in distance (proposed to be ready in early 2016, with test flights in June 2015)



Dead wood of the last naturally planted she-cabbage in existence that might contain endangered host specific invertebrates

has been crucial to allow these endemic plants to be grown. One example is the endemic St Helenian redwood. Considered to be extinct in the wild, propagated plants of the parent specimen came from just one single tree. Unfortunately, this one tree was diseased and the planted redwoods are struggling. This is true also for the St Helenian dwarf ebony. The only wild specimens are just two plants on a remote cliff.

In addition, I am also assisting UK-based non-government organisation, Buglife, with their [Bugs on the Brink](#) Darwin-Initiative-funded project. I am receiving training for IUCN Red-Listing from the leading entomologist David Pryce. He is leaving the island in two months' time and I have the opportunity to learn how to submit listings for endangered species under the IUCN process.

I am now also working with the Environmental Management Division (EMD) of the Government by assisting with ornithological surveys on Egg Island (a rock-stack off the coast).

December 2015:

This week, I have been helping out the Biosecurity Team in plant quarantine. In my spare time, I spend weekends either working part-time at the Consulate Hotel as a barman, or taking long hikes with friends to remote and historic locations or hanging-out with Saints (i.e. local inhabitants) at the wharf, swimming or fishing and enjoying the bars of Jamestown. I find, though, that I am happier being mostly busy, as it helps with the moments when I feel slightly claustrophobic and isolated here, as I do get like that.

I am now involved with EMD on an ornithological study, researching the population dynamics and behavioral ecology of seabirds inhabiting the offshore stack of Egg Island, for it is conceivable that the native Madeira storm-petrel that is known to reside on the island may actually be a separate endemic species of storm-petrel found only on St Helena!

The project is in its third year now, and each year involves a research team visit to the island for 10 consecutive nights, to trap birds that live there. This involves use of mist-nets, which are set up between 17:30 hrs and 23:30 hrs at four locations. Being involved with this task taught me the important balance of being both gentle but firm with the birds that are caught. While the bird flaps it can get into a tangle. This is limited by being quick to them when they become trapped in the net. Once they are in the net, you can remove them by holding them in the correct manner and making sure that their wings are comfortably held. So you can overpower them without hurting them or them flying off!

The bird-measurer and ringers consisted of a team from both

EMD and the Ascension Island Conservation Department, who came from Ascension especially for the study. Their task included identification of species and age, weighing, measuring upper leg length, lower leg length, head-and-beak length, beak depth, wing length, tail length etc. and recording state of moult. Some examples of the birds we caught were: Madeiran storm-petrels, brown noddies, sooty terns and white-faced terns. I worked as the scribe on several occasions, which – although tedious and uncomfortable when sitting on a rock precipice for hours writing down measurements – gave me a good understanding of the range of sizes of the birds, and I started to see patterns in the data.

Getting on and off the island in the dark was tricky, but we had the help of fishermen who dropped us off at the rock each afternoon. This involved climbing from a ledge on the edge of the rock and, as the swell lifted the small skiff, we would leap into the boat and be taken to the bigger boat that took us to Jamestown Harbour. I made four trips to Egg Island but, had I been able, I would have done more; just working days and nights was very hard work!

Today, I have just returned from High Peak, a site on the Island, along with just a few other spots such as Dianna's Peak, with plant communities and associated habitat features, that come closest to how the Island looked in 1501. At High Peak, there are black cabbages, ebonies, jellico, St Helenian lobelia, tree-ferns, large bell-flowers and a diverse array of invertebrates that depend upon these plants. The Critically Endangered spiky yellow woodlouse remains only on this patch of cloud forest, living off plants that cover an area smaller than a tennis-court. Conservation efforts aim to protect this last remnant of the Island's natural state by expanding the site outward.

One method of conserving this habitat is the collection of seeds. I was involved with seed-collection for part of today, with the careful collection of the black cabbage seeds. Black cabbages are of the botanical family Asteraceae, the daisy family, which has had the greatest success of all botanical families on the Island with 9 of the Island's 30 (approx) endemic dicotyledonous plants being of this family.

Last week, I worked also at a site that has the remains of the last naturally seeded she-cabbage *Lachanodes arborea*, which consists of a stump and some dead wood. The site is in a clearing between two pasture fields and is being used to try and encourage its growth under a re-planting programme. Conservationist Rebecca Cairns-Wicks and the National Trust's entomologist David Pryce are working hard to move remains of this dead wood to the other re-established she-cabbage communities around the island to preserve possible dead-wood-dependent invertebrates that may benefit the growth of she-cabbages. Sadly, an endemic weevil that lived off she-cabbages and assisted with pollination is thought to be extinct, having not been seen since the mid-1990s – but through efforts like this it is possible it may be rediscovered.

Felix continues his adventure on St Helena and is due back in the UK in March 2015.

Summer volunteering in Cyprus continues

Callum Waldie was the second student volunteer (following Felix) to spend his summer in Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas, in 2014. He was assisting personnel at the Akrotiri Environmental Education and Information Centre by: conducting surveys and helping staff prepare for the opening of the new facilities (see article on page 12). In collaboration with Writtle College, UKOTCF continues to facilitate student participation in activities in the SBAs.

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