

FORUM NEWS 48

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3rd Council of UKOT/CD Environment Ministers

Ministers and senior officials from UK Overseas Territories (UKOTs) and Crown Dependencies (CDs) travelled to the Isle of Man in February 2018 to discuss the future of the environment in their jurisdictions. This was the third Council of Environment Ministers of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies and took place in Douglas, on 6th and 7th February. Previous meetings took place in Gibraltar in 2015 and continued in Alderney in 2017.

Top (l to r): Dr Richard Selman (Senior Biodiversity Officer, Isle of Man), Mrs Catherine Wensink (Executive Director, UKOTCF), Mr James Dent (Chairman, Policy & Finance Committee, States of Alderney), Mr James Glass (Councillor and Director of Fisheries, Tristan da Cunha), Mrs Michelle Fulford-Gardiner (Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Environment, Culture, Heritage & Gaming, Turks & Caicos Islands), Mr Jim Kerr (Deputy UK Representative, Tristan da Cunha), Ms Lian Camilleri (PA to Chief Executive Officer, Department of the Environment, Heritage & Climate-Change, Gibraltar), Dr Fiona Gell (Ecosystem Policy Manager, Isle of Man - and local organiser), Mr Paul Veron (Strategic Adviser, States of Alderney, also representing Deputy Barry Brehaut, President of the Committee for the Environment & Infrastructure, States of Guernsey); Dr Peter Duncan (Senior Marine Environment Officer, Isle of Man);

At split in stairs (l to r): Mr Richard Lole (Chief Executive, Department of Environment, Food & Agriculture, Isle of Man), Deputy Steven Luce (Minister for the Environment, States of Jersey), Mr Drew Pettit (Director of Environment and Natural Resources, Bermuda);

In front (l to r): Hon. David Osborne (Minister for Agriculture, Trade, Lands, Housing & Environment, Montserrat), Mr William Peggie (Director for Environment / Deputy Chief Officer, States of Jersey);
3rd row from front (l to r): Hon. Ralph Higgs (Minister of Tourism, Environment, Culture, Heritage & Gaming, Turks & Caicos Islands), Dr Richard Axton (Chairman of Council, La Société Sercquaise, on behalf of Sark Agriculture and Environment Committee of the Chief Pleas of Sark);

2nd row from front: Mrs Ann Pienkowski (Honorary Environmental Education Co-ordinator and Secretary of Wider Caribbean Working Group, UKOTCF), Hon. Walton Brown, JP, MP (Minister of Home Affairs, Bermuda);

Front row: Dr Mike Pienkowski (Chairman, UKOTCF), Prof. John Cortés (Minister for Education, Heritage, Environment, Energy & Climate Change, Gibraltar), Hon. Geoffrey Boot MHK (Minister for Environment, Food and Agriculture, Isle of Man);

Photo: Ms Liz Charter (UKOTCF Council and Isle of Man resident)





*Left: The meeting venue in Ramsey, Isle of Man.
Above: Meeting chair-persons, Hon. Prof. John Cortés MP and Hon. Geoffrey Boot MHK;
Photos in this article: Liz Charter, Ann Pienkowski & Dr Mike Pienkowski, UKOTCF*

The meeting was chaired jointly by Hon. Geoffrey Boot MHK, the Isle of Man’s Minister for Environment, Food and Agriculture, and Professor John Cortés, Gibraltar’s Minister for Education, Heritage, Environment, Energy and Climate Change, and coordinated by the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), a non-governmental organisation, in association with the Isle of Man Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture (DEFA).

At the meeting were representatives from Bermuda, Gibraltar, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands, Tristan da Cunha, Alderney, Guernsey, Jersey, Isle of Man, and Sark. Representatives from Falkland Islands, Pitcairn and St Helena participated remotely.

British Virgin Islands, who had hoped to attend, were unable to do so in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, and sent apologies, as did Ascension, Anguilla and the Cayman Islands.

On the second day, the meeting was joined by the UK Foreign & Commonwealth Office Director of the Overseas Territories, Mr Ben Merrick, and officials from the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the UK Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. DEFRA minister Dr Thérèse Coffey joined the meeting via video link.

Although very different in character, finances and their relationships with UK, the islands all boast beautiful environments that are important to economies and way of life. In terms of biodiversity, the UK Overseas Territories hold over 90% of the world biodiversity for which UK is responsible. Many of these species, such as the Montserrat oriole and St Helena wirebird, occur nowhere else in the world. UK Overseas Territories support

more penguins than does any other nation.

UK is responsible also for large areas of coral reef, being the 12th largest reef nation of the world. The Turks and Caicos Islands have the third largest barrier coral reef in the world.

UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies are responsible for many important unique plant species, as well as internationally important wetlands and rare tropical rain- and dry-forests, the latter one of the world’s most threatened ecosystems.

Sustainable fisheries and sustainable tourism, based on the natural environment, are very important for most of the jurisdictions. Delegates were impressed with a presentation on marine protected areas and fisheries conservation in the Isle of Man, and also the designation of the Isle of Man as first whole-country UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

At the request of the UKOT Joint-Chairman, Dr Mike Pienkowski, of UKOTCF gave a presentation on UK Overseas Territories, deemed as having no permanent human populations: the British Antarctic Territory, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, British Indian Ocean Territories, and the Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas.

Common opportunities and challenges across all territories were discussed on issues such as the role of the environment in growing the economy, energy efficiency, resilience to increasingly severe and frequent weather impacts, sympathetic development, enforcement and the impact of plastics.

Participants valued the opportunity to discuss with the UK’s Environment Minister, Dr Thérèse Coffey, how jurisdictions can



Meeting in session



From left: The meeting was joined on the second day, via

video link, by Dr Thérèse Coffey MP (Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Life Opportunities, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) and, in person, by Mr Ben Merrick (Director Overseas Territories, representing Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, Minister for the Overseas Territories, Foreign & Commonwealth Office), Dr Gemma Harper (Deputy Director for Marine, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs),

supported by Ms Thea Edwards (Deputy Head, Wildlife, Natural Environment Policy, Defra (behind)), and Mr Huw Davies (Deputy Head of UNFCCC Negotiations, representing Hon Claire Perry MP, Minister of State for Climate and Energy, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, supported by Ms Eliette Riera (Senior Policy Adviser, International Negotiations, BEIS).

work together, and more closely with the UK, to ensure a coherent approach on biodiversity matters and climate change. Minister Coffey invited the group to join the UK's discussions on these matters.

The meeting noted the importance of the Environment Charters, signed mostly in 2001, which set out a partnership approach to integrating environmental aspects into all sectors via a set of commitments by UK Overseas Territories and by UK government, and welcomed UKOTCF's collating progress on these.

Delegates discussed also the opportunities resulting from, and challenges posed by, the withdrawal of the UK from the European Union, and subsequent loss of EU funding, collaboration and potentially existing markets.

An agreed statement was issued (and is copied on pages 24-29 of this issue of *Forum News*), which highlighted the way the diverse territories can work together and more closely with the UK, to ensure a coherent approach on matters such as plastic waste, ocean acidification, reporting to international conventions, and increased frequency and severity of extreme weather events.

Delegates were given opportunities to experience Manx culture, and a superb selection of Manx local produce.

Following the formal business, Minister Boot escorted participants on an excursion through a range of island ecosystems, to the current and ancient sites of Tynwald, the oldest continuous parliament in the world. The party went on to visit Milntown House, close to Ramsey. This historic building links the Isle of Man and a UK Overseas Territory, Pitcairn. It was the residence of a powerful family on the island, the Christians. Fletcher Christian is famed as the leader of the mutineers on *HMS Bounty*. The visit continued to Peel, and the Department of Environment, Food and Agriculture's headquarters in St John's, giving all the opportunity to see parts of the Island.

A video summary of the meeting is available at https://www.youtube.com/attribution_link?a=gLZGnVdx1D_uqIB_&u=/watch%3Fv%3DMJdaLtCnCsU%26feature%3Dem-share_video_user



The final half-day site-visits included: (top left) Tynwald - the oldest continuous Parliament in the world, (top right) the view northward from the hills, over Ramsay and its Bay to the dune system at the Ayres; and Peel (middle right). The visit coincided with the coldest week of the winter, with snow on the hills. Some Caribbean Ministers rose to the challenge by engaging in a brief snow-ball contest.

Feedback welcomed by UK Government on the operation of the Darwin Plus programme

Whilst there is good agreement that the Darwin Initiative generally is a good way for UK to be a good citizen of the world in helping other nations with environmental issues, there were honest doubts expressed by well-informed persons, both before and since the merging of all UK Government grant monies for UKOT environment support into Darwin Plus, that this necessarily provided the best model for supporting conservation in the UKOTs. This relates in part to the fact that conservation in these is a responsibility shared between the territory government and UK Government (as set out in the Environment Charters), rather than UK helping in a nation where it does not share responsibility.

That said, peppered throughout *Forum News* (including previous issues) you will see evidence of how Darwin Plus, and before that OTEP, preceded by EFOT, have supporting the UKOTs and the many success stories they have helped to fund. As the calls are so competitive, there are always going to be disappointments after new projects are announced, as there is so much to do and there are so few funds for UKOTs to apply to. This is, of course, exasperated by the probable exclusion of UKOT work from future EU funds – which have, for the last few years, provided welcome funding, especially for smaller projects.

Such concerns are held also by several UKOT governments, as expressed in several places in the Statement of the 2nd Council of UKOT/CD Environment Ministers in Alderney in 2017. For example:

21. “We considered that we were not accessing available environmental funding, including climate funding, effectively. We felt that it was important that the territories should have the main voice in determining where and how cross-territory funds available should be spent, and that the territories should not have to compete for the allocation of such funds through an assessment process external to them...”

This relates in part to decision-making. The matter had arisen also several years earlier. By 2012, the then Chairman of the Darwin Initiative Panel had asked Defra to meet UKOTCF at a senior level to explore this matter and potential solutions. Unfortunately, staff illnesses amongst Defra officials, followed by vacant posts, staff changes and overload, meant that the planned meeting was diverted on to other subjects and the issue was not pursued.

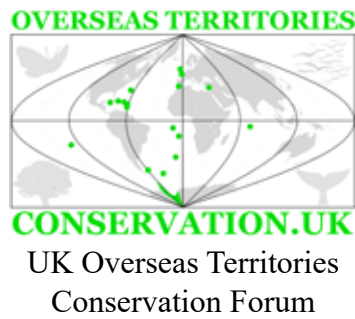
However, some of the concerns remained and several organisations commented between themselves that the feedback letters from the Darwin Plus system continued to be somewhat unsatisfactory in terms of both internal consistency and in relation to what they said about the applications. The wording of the standard feedback letters from Darwin Plus indicates that no further correspondence would be conducted. For this reason, applicants who have raised the issue with UKOTCF did not generally point out the discrepancies to the Darwin Secretariat or Defra, the lead ministry on Darwin Initiative funding and other matters. In addition, applicants tend to be somewhat reluctant to comment on the funding decisions of granting bodies – for fear of future bias, however unreal such risks may be.

In the most recent of UKOTCF’s regular meetings with Defra, the matter arose again. We were very pleased to learn from Defra officials that the wording of the Darwin letters was not intended to prevent constructive comment or querying of problem areas. Rather, Defra and its Darwin Plus programme wish to improve their performance wherever possible, and would welcome comments. So that this clarification can be as widely available as possible, UKOTCF agreed to publish a note in *Forum News*.

We welcome Defra’s willingness to listen to any concerns bodies working in UKOTs might have. This shows a genuine wish to be a responsive funder. The invitation is not restricted to decisions on the current round of applications, and can be extended back as far as necessary so that issues relevant to improving the situation can be raised, to future benefit.

Essentially, what is invited are notes on cases in which the feedback from the Darwin secretariat raises issues which appear to be internally inconsistent, or which appear to be errors, or which appear to make incorrect assumptions about applications.

Those who wish to help by raising such matters should send an email to both the Darwin Secretariat (darwin-applications@ltsi.co.uk) and Defra (darwin@defra.gsi.gov.uk or UKOTEnquiries@defra.gsi.gov.uk). If they wish also to copy to UKOTCF, please copy to info@ukotcf.org – but there is no requirement to do so.



Species new to science, alien invaders, views from space, local heroes, and wide local agreement on the future direction – an update from our Montserrat suite of initiatives

Since the last issue of *Forum News*, our suite of projects under the umbrella title of *Save Our Special Nature of Montserrat* has made much progress, with two further team visits, publication of two more issues of *SOS Nature of Montserrat*, and much work in Montserrat, UK, USA and elsewhere.

Montserrat stakeholders agree vision for the south of the island

The final workshop of the series of four within the present project, on the future of the south of Montserrat, was held on 10th November. As noted previously, this is one of the components of the project developed by the UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF), the Montserrat National Trust (MNT), and the Government of Montserrat, with other partners (see heading above). The project was successful in receiving part-funding from the UK Government's Darwin Plus programme (Project DPLUS049).

The project is based on the fact that, despite two-thirds of Montserrat being zones of restriction due to volcanic activity, the island remains hugely important for endemic species (*i.e.* those that occur nowhere else in the world). Earlier part-Darwin-funded work focussed on the Centre Hills. This current project takes a strategic view of the whole island – needed to identify and minimise pressures, and to ensure that the natural resources are safeguarded, thereby also underpinning economic recovery. The other components of the project are described in this and previous issues of *SOS Nature of Montserrat*.

The overall objective of the series of workshops was: ***To agree between stakeholders an environmentally sustainable vision for the future management of the south of Montserrat, which commands wide local support, and against which to seek financial support to implement it, after the current project.***

As determined by these stakeholders, the strategic vision will emphasise (but not be limited to) restoration of natural ecosystems. This is because of both their intrinsic importance and their potential value to Montserrat's future economy. This project will not implement the strategy but is aimed at providing a sound basis for seeking the resources to move it forward.

Within this framework, the objectives of this 4th workshop were: *Securing agreement on the vision resulting from the previous workshops and, as far as possible, the outline of funding proposals.*

The project partners and other participants were delighted that both Hon. David Osborne MLA, Minister of Agriculture, Trade, Housing, Land and Environment, and his predecessor, Hon. Claude Hogan MLA (who had long supported the project), both participated in the workshop.

In previous workshops, participants had identified important

elements for a vision for the south, which were presented. This is a consensus view, but different people would have different opinions on the relative importance to themselves of these elements. Knowing these different opinions would aid future planning. The analysis of these opinion scales, carried out after workshop, showed that a remarkably high proportion of participants thought that the consensus priorities are important to them too - with all items being considered important personally to at least 70% of participants, and some reaching 100%.

The meeting reviewed the outputs of the preceding workshop and a draft vision for the future based on these. Some of the key elements of this are:

1. On-island education campaigns to raise public awareness surrounding the different values of native species and invasive species, and the purpose and benefits of habitat restoration, carried out via *e.g.* schools, radio/ newspapers, social media. Development of more work experience and internship programmes.
2. Development of an operating base to facilitate and encourage researchers and students from overseas to carry out environmental & geophysical research projects currently out of the scope/ capabilities of on-island organisations.
3. To enhance food security, some re-establishment of (or use of existing) fruit trees, and more grazing, might be practicable, particularly if these were in areas in which day-time access were possible.
4. Some aspects of the conservation work may lend themselves to conservation-tourism, whereby visitors pay to experience Montserrat but included in their visits is a significant amount of time actually working on the conservation initiatives.
5. Exploring the possibilities for tourists and the local community to land in the south and the opportunity for eco-



Aerial view of Montserrat from the south. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski



Helicopter views of the south: (above) the rich forest area at Roche's; (right) area further south showing high erosion and desertification related to feral animal grazing. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski (above) & Nicolas Tirard (right)

tourism in the form of tours and trails in the forest that can also encompass built heritage. Obviously, this would need integration, not just with the safety requirements but also with the conservation plans. While there are a number of logistical constraints associated with this idea, such as health and safety permissions from MVO, DCMA and the Police, with the correct procedures in place and sufficient resourcing and management then this could be a viable and profitable option that promotes Montserrat's environment.

6. A strategic environmental assessment to be carried out at the whole-island level, to provide a systematic framework for analysing and assessing the decision-making processes of policies, plans and programmes. This holistic approach is needed to allow consistent and informed decisions to be made relating to sustainable and appropriate land-use across the whole of the island.
7. Robust scientific data on the south (and the north) to be collected and a ground-truthed habitat map to be created for the south of the island (plus any further needed to complement the material that already exists for the north) to allow informed decisions to be made relating to biodiversity conservation.
8. Experts also to be contacted to carry out surveys for important taxa including invertebrates and rare plants.
9. A quantitative assessment to be carried out of the feral animals in the south to inform the development of a new

island-wide management/ control plan that also considers the situation in the north in terms of feral animals and current control measures. Investigation of whether, if carried out at the whole island level, the eradication of feral livestock would be possible.

10. The development of a potential land- and sea-use plan for areas in the south, taking into account land ownership rights and consultation with key individuals and organisations with land in the area, including development of proposed terrestrial and marine protected areas under local legislation and with international standing also.
11. The creation of restoration areas – expansion of the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* scheme into the south of the island, as well as in the north. This could be achieved on varying scales from a large-scale restoration project focusing on the restoration of native habitats with the provision for eco-tourism in Roche's, to small-scale projects around the periphery of the main exclusion zone for example sustainable farming initiatives.

As always, the workshop benefitted from the insights of James 'Scriber' Daley (DoE), based on his intimate knowledge of the



The workshop in session. Photo: Catherine Wensink



(From left:) Hon. Claude Hogan MLA, Dr Mike Pienkowski and Hon. Minister David Osborne MLA at the workshop, with the Vision summary statement being finalised in the background

area. He gave further comments on the condition of the south. He highlighted once more the importance of the south, noting important bird areas for Montserrat oriole, forest thrush, the coastal area for Audubon's shearwater, and nesting red-billed tropic birds. The ongoing destruction by invasive species (goats, sheep, donkeys) is threatening these. As mentioned earlier, the south could become an important tourism product, e.g. the bamboo forest.

A question was asked about the feasibility of using fencing as part of the management of feral animals. Mr Daley said that the best option would be to remove the goats, but in the meantime the dogs were effectively controlling the goats.

Dr Pienkowski noted that consideration of these issues as part of the project discussions was to determine what was needed for a proper review of the current situation, and what is feasible. Calling in international specialists would be important because of both the progress in techniques and changes in volcanic conditions since they were last here.

Mr Daley added that the goats feed on cactus (for water) but, so far, there was no sign of pigs in much of the area – if pigs got into the key areas, that would be a problem, as it was a large area. If goats were removed, it would save the cactus, and cactus is an important food source for birds.

Hon. Claude Hogan MLA noted to the Minister that this project, is related to other projects covered by UKOTCF. "This project has a long-term vision for providing work, opportunity, economy for Montserrat. I want to broaden it to say that, during the course of project development, Mike and his colleagues introduced me to Waitt so that we could include the marine side of the environment. So we get a holistic picture. I met Ted Waitt and Richard Branson, who introduced me to folks in FCO, which led to JNCC and the mapping work. A satellite image of the whole island in our GIS system will inform all our land-use planning. Our intergovernmental agreement with JNCC is establishing a data management system. Anything that the Montserrat National Trust wants from the database, they can have."

"I went to Paris and realised that we are way way behind. Before I met Mike, I thought I had to write everything myself. But, if so,

we would still be arguing in Montserrat among the stakeholders about everything. This project was the best approach: get the stakeholders together, discuss, as we have done since 2015, to come up with intelligent suggestions to move Montserrat into the 21st century. Because the impact of the volcano, we have little farmland. So we need to visit the south for all the reasons we have explained; it should have happened already, for future generations. What we have entered here is the beginning of a whole new chapter. Some of us may not be around at the end, but our names on the attendance sheet show that we were here at the start, to safeguard our environment and our own livelihood. This exercise now has the evidence that the people of Montserrat buy into this exercise. What we are doing here is beyond formidable; we are now worrying about the bigger picture, we have moved beyond our own backyard.

"Thanks UKOTCF, all Ministeries, everyone, the secretariat of volunteers has produced documents which are the heritage of Montserrat.

"We have to be bound by this vision statement. I want to suggest an amendment [to the overview] so that whole workshop takes ownership. This amendment is a cue that this reminds you of ownership. I want to connect all that. To publish this vision, this is the new tool we use to leverage further funding, and sponsorship and adoption by the Government of Montserrat."

Mr Hogan facilitated amendment of the overview to the Vision, resulting in the following agreed wording: "**Maximising the benefits from the potential usage of land in and near the restricted zones of the south in a way that will protect the special biodiversity in support of the people and economy of Montserrat into the future.**"

The Minister for Agriculture, Trade, Lands, Housing & Environment, Honourable David Osborne MLA, said: "I want to thank my colleague, Claude, and for helping to facilitate this project.

"We, as the Government, have to facilitate anything that is going to be beneficial to the country. I am now in a position to help Claude to continue because of his knowledge and experience. Don't feel that it is going to be put on the backburner; Mr Hogan is going to be working a lot!

"I am pledging help... Thanks for the wonderful work you have been doing. People need to understand the benefits of native plants, animal control, etc."

Dr Pienkowski noted that UKOTCF would produce a workshop report and circulate it, as usual. He said: "Regarding carrying work forward, things are already happening. As noted earlier, JNCC-commissioned work is taking forward in partnership some aspects identified by the present project as needed. On the basis of the earlier workshops and related discussions, a proposal, in partnership with Montserrat National Trust, the Government of Montserrat, Montana State University, Wildlife Management International and Montserrat Island Dive Centre, has been submitted to Darwin Plus. This addressed some of the key needs agreed: a feasibility study and a recommended plan to deal with the feral animals, extension of *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* to address the invasive plants and restoration of native vegetation, extending the data in the *Montserrat Virtual Museum of Natural History*, badly needed surveys of other key species, and systems to meet the needs of environmental planners to be able to deploy this information in physical planning." Participants welcomed this and expressed hopes that it would be funded.

Mike Pienkowski said that he hoped that this would not be the last workshop (although it is the last workshop of this project), and UKOTCF wants to continue its over 20 years of involvement



Tim Orton shows Ann Pienkowski along one of the paths through native vegetation created by removing invasive plants. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

in Montserrat, whether or not the current proposal is funded. He thanked all participants in this and previous workshops.

Adopt a Home for Wildlife partners make progress

We have earlier given the background to the setting up, as part of the current project, of *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*. Through this, the Montserrat National Trust (MNT) aims: to conserve and enhance the beauty of Montserrat; preserve the fauna and flora of Montserrat; make the public aware of the value and beauty of the island's heritage; pursue a policy of conservation; and act in an advisory capacity.

MNT continues to look for partners in the community to lend a hand in keeping the island beautiful, clean and full of unique wildlife and habitats. MNT is grateful for the support of UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum, the Darwin Plus fund and the other partners in the present project, in setting up this programme.

The *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* in Montserrat programme allows individuals, organisations, community groups and businesses to agree to maintain and protect a public or private space for a year at a time, with renewals annually. The programme runs all year round, and gives everyone the opportunity to make a difference in their local area. Here are a few examples progressing now.

Ventana, Garibaldi Hill

Tropical dry forest is one of the most threatened ecosystems in the world. Tim Orton, with advice from Project Officer Nicolas Tirard of MNT, has been busy at his *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* site at Garibaldi Hill, as the UKOTCF team saw when it visited again in November.

The garden and forest give him a lot of pleasure – indeed, that was a main reason to acquire this home and enrol in *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*. It is an area of about 3.5 acres with 1 acre of garden around the house. About 3/4 of an acre have been cleared of invasive plants, and work progresses.

Tim was delighted to discover that it costs about the same to remove *Acacia* and invasives by hand as it would have cost

to bulldoze. The advantage of not bulldozing is that the native vegetation remains, rather than having to re-plant it and wait for it to grow to the same size. Also, this route means employment for several Montserratian gardeners, and minimises inadvertent loss of species.

It took 5 weeks to remove invasives from an area which is a sort of natural pathway to the top of a rocky outcrop with a magnificent view that Tim did not even know was there. He hopes eventually to have some kind of circular walkway going from garden to path to tropical dry forest with some labelling of trees. This could even be an opportunity, by prior arrangement, to bring school children and other interested visitors into a tropical dry forest environment to see how different it is from other habitats across the island. In time, rainwater will be used for irrigation, which will add to the sustainable management of the area using natural resources.

At the moment, the area needs some care every few weeks or so to ensure that fast-growing species are kept back and do not get out of hand. However, when native trees from the MNT nursery establish themselves, this need will be reduced. Some of the larger trees were damaged during the hurricane but, with the *Native Plant Nursery* project, there will be some available for replanting, particularly gumtrees which are found a lot in this area.

Some highlights of the garden/forest are that tarantulas and fireflies are thriving. All three species of native hummingbirds are found in the garden. Six adult male birds visit the garden regularly on their feeding routes. Bats are doing very well at stripping the saporilla. Results of beetle and other invertebrate collection in July by Montana State University are still to be analysed. Since buying the property in 2010, Tim has seen a resurgence in wildlife after ash-fall caused significant reduction. The plants in the garden close to the house are a constant source of food for wildlife.

Unexpected bonus at Belham River mouth at Old Road Bay

Mr Dwayne Hixon, a local developer, has two *Adopt a Home for*



Some of the migrant shorebirds at Old Road Bay: snipe (left), greater yellowlegs (right), with pectoral sandpiper (in front and, closer; below). These species breed in North America. In the case of the pectoral sandpiper, the breeding range spreads from high arctic Canada, through Alaska and across Siberia. It has been discovered recently that individual males may range widely over this arctic range to breed with several females. In some cases, this is across both continents, with one male recorded as travelling 8000 miles within one breeding season.

Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski





Dwayne Hixon, Nicolas Tirard (MNT) and Mike Pienkowski (behind camera; UKOTCF) discuss the plan. The hollow which has been made to hold water for wetland birds and other animals during wet periods is on the right.

Wildlife sites. He had expressed the wish to “adopt” the site of Old Road Bay as part of this project, as soon as he was granted access to it by the authorities. His plan is to develop the site in a naturally sustainable way. The site is 19 acres of new land that has been gained from the sea through the activities of lahars (water-borne flows) of volcanic material over the last ten years. The substrate is very poor, consisting mainly of sand, rocks and gravel, and had been heavily colonised by pioneer and invasive species, such as acacias and *Casuarina* pine. He will be collaborating further with Montserrat National Trust, which will provide suitable shade-providing native species to plant.

Meanwhile, other aspects of his works have involved the excavation of the volcanic material adjacent to the old jetty. As a result, temporary pools formed in the bottom of these. During our visit in November, there was a steady turnover of migrant shorebirds in these pools, with 8 different species and variable numbers present at several visits during a 2-week period. These species breed in North America, in some cases in the high arctic, and spend the non-breeding season in wetlands in the Caribbean and South America.

These sort of birds previously used former wetlands including Fox’s Bay marshes and Piper’s Pond – both now lost due to volcanic outwash for the former and unfortunate human-undertaken infilling for the latter.

The observations in November show that a wide variety of migrant shorebirds are still looking for homes. Provision of such wetlands, perhaps incorporated more permanently in the designed development of some of these low areas, would again enrich the natural environment of Montserrat with exciting animals like these, attractive to both residents and visiting tourists. The project team can advise anyone who wants to create such areas – and advise also where such creation would be inappropriate, for example because of the importance of the existing environment.

The first part of the work done by Dwayne consisted of removing most of the ash and the invasive plants such as the *Casuarina* pine. This allowed him to have a better understanding of the topography of the new lot. He is keen also to incorporate other information and knowledge. Considering all this, he decided to divide the area in three zones, to reach the best possible combination of natural, aesthetic and financial value for the new land.

1. Beach bar / restaurant with landscaped ground (2 acres)

This area to the north of the lot should be protected from most of



View from the hill at Old Towne down the road to the site, with the pond hollow between the trees almost in line with the road, and the planned golf course to the left in front of the sea.

the lahars by being outside of the natural flow of water running through. The plan is to build a restaurant near but back from the beach, with a naturally landscaped playground. The restaurant will be located far enough from the water-front to avoid disturbing turtles nesting. In addition, lighting will be designed to minimise risk to the turtles.

A parking area will be built landward of it, to prevent cars from going on to the beach itself. A stone flower-planter will be built within the parking area and will act as a barrier to potential future lahars. It is intended that this long planter (about 6 feet by 100 feet) will be used to display native and/or endangered attractive plants, such as pepper cinnamon, overtop palm and broom palm.

2. Golf course, with some ornamental trees (around 17 acres)

Most of the surface of this new development is intended to become a golf course. (The old golf-course was slightly upstream in the Belham Valley and is now covered by several metres of volcanic material.) It is currently covered by grass that arrived naturally and managed to grow on the very poor sandy soil with no extra watering. This will be kept, as it minimises the cost and negative environmental impact of fertilising and watering plants not naturally adapted to local conditions. Some existing trees have been kept to help stabilise the soil and provide some shade, and it is the intention of Dwayne to replant more native ones, with good ornamental properties, such as the saman, white cedar and gum tree. The project’s native plant nursery at MNT’s Botanic Garden will provide seedlings.

On the east side of this development, along what used to be the coastline, but is now at the inland side, a line of strongly rooted trees will have to be planted, and discussions are underway with MNT to determine the best option.

3. Restoration of a wetland area (size will vary naturally, about 1 acre)

One of the good environmental surprises of this development will be the attempt to restore a pond area between the two zones described above. (See photos on previous page and also *SOS Nature of Montserrat 5*, page 12, where Mike Pienkowski – whose early career was as a shorebird biologist – described some of the water-birds visiting the site on migration in November 2017.)

When excavating, Dwayne realised that the natural flow of water, running through the Belham River when there is heavy rain, goes though the north part of the adopted area, along the (largely buried) former jetty at Old Road Bay. Instead of fighting nature,

he took the decision to work with it, and to restore a functioning wetland, that will act as a buffer in case of flooding. He is leaving part of the old jetty exposed, both for its historic interest and as a sort of weir to hold back some of the water when the water-table is high enough to form temporary pools on the surface.

This decision not only makes sense economically (it is the cheapest option to protect the investment in the restaurant), but it is also a way to recreate a habitat, coastal ponds, that has been almost entirely wiped out of Montserrat following eruption and human development in the north.

We all look forward to the success of this project working in harmony with the natural environment, and wish Dwayne success.

Restoring Cork Hill through community endeavour

After hearing the project team with Rose Willock Culture Show on ZJB Radio during the June/July visit (as reported in *SOS Nature of Montserrat* newsletter 4), the Cork Hill Reunion Committee contacted the Montserrat National Trust and expressed shared concern about the potential impact invasive species such as the blackberry is having in this area. They were interested in working together with MNT to manage the area, using native plant species and installing facilities to enable them to use sustainable practices such as harvesting rainwater and generating solar energy. Therefore, the Committee joined the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* initiative.

In March 2016, the Committee had become registered as a Friendly Society under the Friendly Societies Act. It was formed in order to provide a focus for the gathering, sharing of ideas and developing plans for former residents of Cork Hill area, whether still on Montserrat or the UK, US and elsewhere.

Following the volcanic eruptions, now over 20 years ago, residents of Cork Hill had to leave their homes and relocate to the north. In the 2017 budget, the Office of the Premier announced that the work of the Cork Hill Reunion Committee in organising a reunion, in March had been an inspiration. They wanted to support the effort, and therefore Cabinet approved granting exemption from Import Duty and Consumption Tax for three years on all building materials imported specifically to repair or build any structure located in those villages of Cork Hill and other sites in this part of the previous exclusion zone. This aimed to give direct support to those people wanting to rebuild their homes and regenerate these areas. The initiative is expected to “encourage significant construction activity in the private sector. As a business opportunity, it allows for the building of new homes and villas for sale as we increase housing and villa stock”.

Members of the Committee, Roland “Jabo” Irish and Hewlett A

Williams, met with the project team on site on 7th November. They explained that the Committee comprises of volunteers and activities are focused currently on three main areas: the park, the clinic and the Pentecostal church.

“We have about 30 members now. Most of the work is done on the weekend. We have events here and are planning one in December. We are fundraising for activities and are bringing people over to show them we are getting back; we are getting there,” explained Mr Irish.

Mr Williams added that: “The Government of Montserrat was instrumental in restoring the park for the Cork Hill Community. We didn’t want that work to have been carried out in vain.” He explained that the Committee wanted to have a maintenance plan and to do their best to look after the area and control the regrowth of vegetation where it had become invasive and unmanageable.

They added that: “there is a lot of blackberry around at the moment. We make wine and juice out of them, but they must be removed from much of the area and kept under control elsewhere.”

“The long-term plan is that this becomes a tourist area again. We don’t have public facilities, in terms of toilets and so on. So we would hopefully like to set up a visitor centre at the old health clinic, with toilets inside, fixed-up roof, harvesting water and using solar panels to power the pumps, and so on. That is the long-term plan. Tourists come into the area and they really want to use somewhere, so we will have something. Basically, that is what we are trying to do.”

Mike Pienkowski noted that this is very compatible with the project aims, and recalled the book that UKOTCF and MNT had produced about bird-watching and other visitor interest in Montserrat to try and encourage people. Mr Irish welcomed this and the reinforcing opportunities with the Committee’s work.

We saw the first main success: the clearing of the large sports ground where a variety of sporting events will take place (e.g. cricket and golf) – and a golf tournament has already been held. Some grass seed has been planted to stabilize the soil. The Committee sought advice from the Trust for guidance on what vegetation would be suitable for shading around the edges of the ground, beautifying the area, but which are native and rare on Montserrat.

Nicolas Tirard, Darwin Project Officer offered to provide the Committee with advice and access to some of the native plants which were being grown at the Trust as part of the nursery project, and which would soon be made freely available for any community groups involved in the *Adopt a Home for Wildlife* initiative to plant out. This will maximise the range of those species found only on Montserrat or only in the region.



The sports field at Cork Hill, cleared of invasive blackberry by the Cork Hill Reunion Committee (aerial view left), discussed (right) by the Cork Hill and Adopt a Home for Wildlife project teams on the ground. Photos: (left) Catherine Wensink; (right) Dr Mike Pienkowski

Mr Williams then took us to his family home, which he had to leave following the volcanic eruption. He showed us his recently planted pineapples in the cleared garden around the house. Nicolas pointed out that the non-native Philippines orchid *Spathoglottis plicata* could be seen on his roof and the neighbouring house. This has become a real problem in Puerto Rico. It is a fast growing species, particularly in the tropics, and studies suggest that its presence leads to an increase in numbers of the orchid weevil, which then increases in number to become a pest species threatening native orchids.

It was evident that the blackberry had really taken a hold on the area in the last 20 years. In this area, there are large stands growing to over 3 metres. The area where this had spread is still relatively small and Mr Irish felt that it was important to control it where possible. He was very keen to explore how this could be done. Nicolas thought that a nearby area overgrown with blackberry might be a good trial removal site, for clearing the area of blackberry trees, and then planting some native trees, such as white cedar *Tabebuia heterophylla* or *lignum vitae*. They would be fast-growing in an area cleared of blackberry. During the trial, monthly checks could be carried out to remove any blackberry shoots until the native tree species were established.

The Committee members expressed interest in working with the project also to explore clearing of invasives and restocking native species where owners would like this, and potentially extending local joint efforts to include visiting volunteers co-ordinated through *Adopt a Home for Wildlife*.

Species new to science described from Montserrat specimens - the first of several resulting from this project?

During project fieldwork in June 2017, Dr Justin Runyon, Associate Researcher at the Montana State University, USA, found a previously undescribed fly (meaning that it had not been formerly identified, described and given a scientific species name). It is in a group of invertebrates, Dolichopodidae (long-legged flies), in which he is particularly interested. Flies in this group are tiny (1-9 mm long) and so are rarely collected. They are usually metallic green with long, slender legs. This family of flies is the 3rd largest with over 8,000 species worldwide.

The 2005 Centre Hills survey had focused on beetles, but many long-legged flies were caught in nets and were taken back to the laboratory at Montana State University. No dolichopodid species

were known from Montserrat prior to the survey, simply because no-one had studied them. In the years that followed the 2005 survey, 62 species (26 genera) of Dolichopodidae were found. 15 new species were new to science. This was more species than predicted based on the size of Montserrat and comparing with neighbouring islands (as also for beetles). Justin gave a very interesting evening lecture, following Dr Ivie's talk on beetles, during his June visit, which was really well attended at the Montserrat National Trust offices.

Dolichopodidae are very common in and around streams and other water bodies and on vegetation. Males often have ornaments to attract females. Adult flies are predators, feeding on smaller invertebrates including larvae of mosquitoes, a common and disease-carrying pest and a particular problem in some areas around Montserrat, such as Carr's Bay.

Dr Justin Runyon said at the time, "For me, I guess the highlight of the trip was catching that little fly on Woodlands Beach. It has only been collected once before – ever – from Dominica and that specimen was damaged. I got quite a few and this will allow me, or someone else [back at the laboratory], to actually describe it and give it a name so that is one of the most exciting finds."

When back at the lab in Bozeman, Justin sent the specimens off to the Diptera Unit at the Canadian National Collection of Insects in order for them to be described formally. In February 2018, the two specialists, Scott Brooks and Jeffrey Cumming, published a paper in the scientific journal *Zootaxa* describing this tiny species.

In 2002, the genus *Chimerothalassius* had been established for a single species *Chimerothalassius ismayi* by Shamshev & Grootaert, when it was found on beaches in New Zealand. Almost a decade later, Brooks and Cumming described the first new world species from Dominica but, as explained earlier, this was from one specimen, a female, and fragmentary, with not enough material to describe and name the species. As Justin found several male and female specimens, it has been possible to name a new species of *Chimerothalassius*, from Dominica and Montserrat, while at the same time they record the presence of the genus in Central American, based on the newly discovered Costa Rican female specimens.

In total, there are now 5 species in this genus, with *Chimerothalassius runyoni* the newest to be named. *Chimerothalassius runyoni* is being considered as conspecific to Dominica and Montserrat, meaning that they are the same species, although further specimens are needed to establish whether they are, in fact, separate species.

Authors are not allowed to name species after themselves, for several reasons. One of these is that, in the full formal name of the species, the describing authors are listed after the generic and species names. However, a happy consequence of this is that the naming specialists can credit Justin's hard work by making the specific name *runyoni* (Runyon's in Latin; specific names always start with a lower-case letter, and generic names with a capital).

This story highlights how taxonomy is a continual process and that, sometimes, only one piece of the jigsaw puzzle is available to us in order to make choices about where a species fits and how to compare with others. It also shows us how unique the ecosystem on Montserrat is, and that in its "nooks and crannies" biological riches are waiting to be found. The island can also contribute to science on a global scale as, with the information gained here, mysteries from around the world can be unpicked.

Chimerothalassius runyoni has been providing a service to the island, unpaid, by eating the larvae of pest species such as mosquitos, for some time. This tiny public servant now has a name and should be cherished for the contribution it makes to human well-being.



Female specimen of *Chimerothalassius runyoni*. Reproduced under Creative Commons Attribution License <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0> from Brooks, S.E. & Cumming, J.M. (2018) New species of *Chimerothalassius* Shamshev & Grootaert (Diptera: Dolichopodidae: Parathalassiinae) from the West Indies and Costa Rica. *Zootaxa* 4387 (3): 511-523, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.4387.3.6>. © 2018 Magnolia Press

The full paper is cited as: Brooks, S.E. & Cumming, J.M. (2018) New species of *Chimerothalassius* Shamshev & Grootaert (Diptera: Dolichopodidae: Parathalassinae) from the West Indies and Costa Rica. *Zootaxa* 4387 (3): 511-523, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11646/zootaxa.4387.3.6>.

Justin is confident that there are several other new species in his collections, but painstaking work by him and colleagues in various institutions will be needed to work through these.

Update on Montserrat Virtual Museum of Natural History

There have been a few set-backs over the last few months in getting the database launched as there have been some computing system problems and health problems in the team. Also, Ohio State University, which hosts the database computer has had three personnel changes in last year after having the same person for 10 years. A new permanent position has been filled, and started at the end of January 2018. Furthermore, MSU has had some computer system changes. We are grateful to Dr Mike Ivie and his team for ensuring that all data are safe (as they do routinely) and working out how to overcome the problems. As a result, although there will be delays of a few weeks in getting everything up and running for the public, these delays will be minimised and the team will ensure all works. We wish them all well, and hope to announce access details in our next issue of *Forum News*.

Almost all the beetle data have been captured from the various institutions, have been checked and are in the database. The process had been on schedule and almost complete. However, MSU received a huge return loan of bark beetles, and the number of species for Montserrat went from 13 species known to 64, so that information needed to be entered, in order for it to be as complete as possible.

This just goes to show how much of a changing situation we have in terms of data for Montserrat. Even in the lifetime of the project, we are uncovering the complexity of how data management of biological data is an ever-changing situation. All of that material needs to be entered. Sarah Rubun is working on that now. Each specimen has a label on it for identification. All locations are in the database but we don't have all of the specimens in yet. Each has a unique identification/barcode label on it.

Most of the additional collecting of new material that was done in summer 2017, when the MSU team was on island, will not be included when the current project funding ends. It will, however, be done. It will be easy to do this in future, but it takes time and we cannot add the additional individual data-records in the timeframe that we have left within the funded project period. It should not be underestimated how good a record this will be for Montserrat. According to Dr Mike Ivie, leader of the MSU team: "This is more than anyone has for anything anywhere else in the Caribbean UKOTs and the region. Nobody has that many records backed up by a voucher (e.g. individual museum specimen)."

The Montserrat Virtual Museum of Natural History (MVMNH) portal is in various development phases. James Beck is leading on this. Information will be added continuously and will continue beyond the end of the currently funded project period. Input from those on-island is being used to design and finalise the portal.

Once all the data in the database have been verified, these can be migrated into the system with all records at once. There will be several uses for the the database on island.

The portal will be open access, meaning that it can be freely used by anyone with an internet connection. MSU will continue to manage the database records behind the scenes, adding to it where possible and in collaboration with Montserrat National Trust (MNT), the Government of Montserrat (GoM) and UKOTCF. In future, it

would be great to provide an opportunity for a Montserratian to receive training from MSU to take this forward, but this would need to be a committed individual with a lifetime of work ahead! The portal can be used as a tool for schools to teach about the natural environment with information that is locally appropriate to them.

NGOs, particularly MNT, and civil society will be able to follow the island's own natural history and may be able to use it as a tool for more engagement with the community and in the region as a centre of excellence.

Governments need data that allow them to meet obligations under international agreements and laws for biodiversity protection, and plan where resources go. Although Montserrat is not signed up to the Convention on Biological Diversity, it has come a long way towards this with its Conservation and Environment Management Act, and it is already included in some other international conservation agreements. Data management is an important aspect of this, and the MVMNH portal puts Montserrat ahead of many others in the region in this regard.

Alien invaders!

Addressing the challenges posed by alien invasive species forms key parts of several elements of our current project. Unlike the science-fiction movies, the alien plant and animal species threatening rare native species and ecosystems are not doing so under their own master-plans. They are the result of unwise or unintended actions of humans. So, we have some responsibility to address these issues.

Here, we report first a new invader and another potential one, and then a possible approach to addressing one already here but now posing a serious threat.



Above: endemic coffin borer blind-snake *Antillotyphlops monastus* (this individual about 28 cm long); below: head of alien, potentially invasive blind-snake, probably *Indotyphlops braminus* (with millimetre scale). Photos: Nicolas Tirard, Montserrat National Trust.



Flowerpot snake a new invasive for Montserrat?

New species keep arriving on Montserrat. In April 2017, an unidentified specimen of blind-snake was found by the project close to the Belham River. It differs from Montserrat's endemic species, the coffin borer *Antillotyphlops monastus*, in size and colour (see images). Staff of the Montserrat National Trust have identified it as "probably *Indotyphlops braminus*", a species from India which is spreading all over the world linked to the plant trade.

After reporting this to the Department of Environment, the specimen was given to a team from Bard College (Simon's Rock, Massachusetts) visiting the island, for it to be identified formally. A paper is currently being written by Robert Schmidt, from Simon's Rock to report the presence of this new potentially invasive species on Montserrat. It is unclear if this new species will have any detrimental impact on the native fauna. It is, however, a possibility, as the invader feeds on the same prey as our endemic species and can therefore possibly out-compete it. Only time will tell.

This snake is very interesting indeed, as it is one of the few parthenogenetic vertebrates. The population consists only of female individuals, able to lay eggs without fertilisation. This characteristic makes it very efficient as an invasive species, as the introduction of a single individual can very quickly lead to the establishment of a new population. Add to that the fact that it is a subterranean species, often hidden in flower pots, and one will understand why it is now one of the most widespread reptile species in the world. It also shows how important biosecurity is for a country.

In Montserrat, importation of soil is now forbidden (plants need to be brought bare-rooted). It is important for people to realise that this is the best and cheapest way to avoid biological invasion. This time, a minute and shy blindsnake has been introduced, but next time it might be a venomous species. Fire ants were absent from Montserrat before the volcanic eruption. This aggressive and painful species probably arrived in Montserrat the same way the blindsnake did about a decade ago, via Antigua. They not only have an impact on human well-being, but also on wildlife; fire ants attach to eggs and hatchlings of ground-nesting species on Montserrat. This would include the sea turtles that visit the island to nest.

The team talked more about the threat of invasive species and the way in which the local community can get involved in the Trust's activities on the Culture Show with Rose Willock on Saturday 24th March: <https://montserratradioecho.wordpress.com/2018/03/24/saturday-march-24-2018-the-cultural-show-pre-show-youth-interviews-with-rose-willock/>.



Cocos nucifera: (left) healthy; (right) leaf yellowing symptoms due to lethal yellowing. Photo: N. A. Harrison

Antigua lethal yellowing of palms

Another example of damage caused by an invasive species is visible on neighbouring island. Antigua has been contaminated by a disease called "lethal yellowing" affecting the palm trees. This disease, which is caused by a phytoplasma, a bacteria-like organism, but spread from one palm to the next by an insect, has been introduced on several Caribbean islands through the palm trade and is currently threatening to kill most of the coconut trees and some other ornamental species as it spreads throughout Antigua.

It is important for people in Montserrat to be vigilant and not to allow a single palm tree to be imported from Antigua, as it might carry the disease and cause irreversible damage to Montserrat's native palm species, many of which are vulnerable to extinction because of their small populations

A practical solution to other invasives: "uprooter" to rid the island of rubber vine

An inhabitant of Old Towne, Lawrence Hurley, who has worked in different plant nurseries in Texas and Maryland in the US, has offered some advice on how to remove some of the invasive species present on Montserrat. He has been active in a couple of volunteer groups in the US, who give their time in order to remove invasive alien species from sensitive ecosystems. He understands the impact they can have, and would like to help in Montserrat too.

His main concerns lie with the rubber vine (purple allamanda, *Cryptostegia madagascariensis*), which has become very visible especially in the Silver Hills and north of the island, and the neem tree *Azadirachta indica*. Two different approaches have been suggested:

- 1) use of a herbicide to treat the stump after cutting it;
- 2) use of a mechanical tool called an "uprooter", allowing the removal of small to medium plants entirely.

Option 2 might be suitable for the rubber vine, but this will take considerable effort and time to create a dent in the population.

Larry spends only part of his time in Montserrat, but was on-island in late March and early April. Nicolas Tirard worked with him in this period and reports that the uprooter works well for shrubs up to about 1-2 inches in diameter, so that it should be able to deal with most invasive purple allamanda plants. Larry has kindly loaned the device to MNT for further testing.



Above: "Uprooter" tool in use by Larry Hurley in Montserrat. Photo: Nicolas Tirard

Current project helps stimulate work by others, and UKOTCF/MNT provide advice, drawing in extra resources for Montserrat

One of the aspects which UKOTCF and MNT have been initiating in the present study is a start to vegetation-type mapping for the whole island, and some early results and their application have been the subject of the contents of issues of *SOS Nature of Montserrat*. We are grateful for a grant from the DigitalGlobe Foundation, enabling the project to acquire several otherwise expensive high-resolution satellite images of the island. These images will aid our understanding of the island's vegetation types and habitat changes. This, in turn, helps us form an understanding of key associations and important ecosystem functions, e.g. between invertebrates and associated habitat types.

UK Government agency JNCC has now decided to commission some further work on this aspect as part of their *T2T* project between Montserrat and the Falklands Islands. We are delighted that Katie Medcalf's company, Environmental Systems, has been contracted to the short study on this. UKOTCF had introduced Katie to this issue in Montserrat in 2016, and she kindly donated some technical advice. In turn, Katie sought UKOTCF's advice on ground-truthing, and UKOTCF put her in touch with Nicolas Tirard (Montserrat National Trust), our part-time Project Officer.

Whilst the JNCC-commissioned study will not fulfil all needs in this area, it should make a valuable contribution, to build on our initial work, and to combine with our planned future studies involving both remote-sensing and ground-survey.

The JNCC-commissioned team's visit to Montserrat partly overlapped with that of the November visit of the present project. A year earlier, the JNCC-commissioned project had held a workshop in Montserrat concerned mainly with fisheries. That project would gather and integrate fisheries data, to improve food security and sustain the cultural value of the fishery. An MSc thesis had already contributed to this. Training has taken place in fisheries data-collection. The training conducted in Montserrat included representatives from other Caribbean UKOTs. Clear process and protocols for fishery data-collection were being developed, and the training will lead to fishers understanding why they were collecting the data and what this means to Montserrat.

The teams from the two project consortia took advantage of the overlap to work in the field together to develop common understanding of the vegetation definitions for ground-truthing high-resolution satellite images. These are being used for further habitat mapping, to understand the composition of the natural environment, and monitor changes over time. The JNCC-commissioned work was based on previous work in the very different sub-Antarctic UKOT of South Georgia. Therefore, working alongside personnel from the UKOTCF/MNT/GoM/Darwin project was particularly valuable, benefitting from the project's Montserrat expertise.

In *SOS Nature of Montserrat 5*, page 10, we recalled some of the work initiated by the UKOTCF/MNT project on satellite mapping, and the help being provided to JNCC and UK-based consultancy Environment Systems in undertaking further work in this area. The project's Nicolas Tirard has continued to help with this JNCC work and reports this here.

A first version of the habitat map of Montserrat has been produced using satellite data from the Pléiades system. This map allows the evaluation of the size of the different habitats of Montserrat, and their evolution over time. This first map can be updated each time new data are available. This could be new satellites imagery or when additional surveys are conducted.

On this habitat map, the island is divided into "polygons" based on

the colour characteristics of the imagery. Each polygon represents a habitat type, based on similarity with places that were ground-truthed (*i.e.* actually going to a site to identify what is there).

Some information displayed on the map was quite surprising in a way that was not easily explained. The canopy cover was dramatically low or high on some of the polygons. As the information is geographically positioned, it is then easy to go to the location and assess the situation.

We have been to some of these areas and each one can be explained easily:

- Some are former agricultural plots, where tree cover has been removed several years ago and has not yet fully recovered;
- Some are areas heavily affected by the volcano, where vegetation would change very quickly from one year to the other;
- Some areas are recent development (agriculture in Cork Hill, geothermal drilling in St Georges Hill, housing development in Woodlands...);

This project reached an end on 22 March 2018, and the results have been handed by JNCC to the Government of Montserrat. The beautiful maps that have been produced will be displayed at the Montserrat National Trust after being printed locally.

Readers of our project newsletters (all available at <http://www.ukotcf.org/WGnewsletterlist/WGNewsletterslinks.pdf>) will remember about the series of workshops held by this project at the Montserrat National Trust to reach an agreement between the island stakeholders about how to manage the south of the island (see also pages 5-8). During those workshops, James 'Scriber' Daley, from the Department of Environment's Forestry Section, shared his concerns that some of the ecosystems there were being damaged by feral animals (mainly goats, sheep and pigs). One of the problems he faced was that access to these areas was difficult, making it hard to follow up with the situation. Many stakeholders wanted to get some numbers related to the size of the habitats, and their evolution over time.

Now that a habitat map has been produced, facilitated through this project, further developing our initial satellite analyses reported earlier, we can continue to answer some of the questions stakeholders had, for example:

1. The map clearly indicates areas of main concern, the surface they cover, and reveals some potentially very interesting habitats that we did not know about. For example, according to the analysis, some parts of South Soufriere Hill look very much like the elfin woodlands of the Centre Hills. It is not known if this is really an elfin woodland or something entirely different, as more exploration is needed.
2. The map can be updated when new satellite images are available, allowing for a remote-sensing assessment of the different habitat areas over time. It will therefore be possible, in the coming years, to follow trends and to assess if a specific habitat is at risk of extinction or not.
3. The analysis shows that the vegetation cover of some areas directly affected by the volcano is changing very quickly. There is an opportunity to study this "recolonisation process".

We are just starting to use this information, and it is already clear that it will be very powerful!

Other work

These are just a few examples of parts of this project. There is more information on these and other parts of the project in project newsletters *SOS Nature of Montserrat 5* & *6* (available at <http://www.ukotcf.org/WGnewsletterlist/WGNewsletterslinks.pdf>).

UK Government's plan for the environment up to the 2040s

With global temperatures expected to rise 2°C by 2030, leading to sea-level rise due to the accelerating melting of Antarctic glaciers, will come significant changes to the natural environment and particularly coastal areas, where more than 60% of the world's population lives, including many of the UKOT communities.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; 2015-2030) set out a sustainable development agenda with targets to address both the need for climate change action and actions to protect marine and terrestrial natural resources.

As part of its obligations under several international treaties, such as the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and taking into account the SDGs, the United Kingdom has a responsibility to help protect the special but fragile environments in the UKOTs and, as such, it includes several references in its 25-year plan for the environment, launched in January 2018 (although, as noted by the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council, none to Crown Dependencies).

A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment sets out what the Government aims to do to improve the environment, within a generation.

Here we provide a summary of the report's attempts to outline its ambition of how, through several initiatives, it aims to achieve this, and where we think further ambition and focus is needed.

There was an acknowledgement that the UKOTs *boast some of the world's most delicate and complex ecosystems and habitats* and that the UK is a party to the CBD and numerous conventions that protect marine, migratory and endangered species – many of which comprise the globally significant biodiversity in the UK's OTs – and it has a commitment to meet obligations to protect them.

There is an acknowledgement that local people in the UKOTs rely heavily on societal benefits from the environment in the form of tourism, disaster mitigation and the provision of food and clean water.

The document notes that, working in partnership with the UKOTs, HMG is undertaking natural capital assessments to improve understanding of the full value of the unique environments in the UKOTs through the *Natural Capital in the Caribbean and South Atlantic Overseas Territories* project, initiated in late 2016 and led by the South Atlantic Environment Research Institute (SAERI) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC). This work aims to build capacity to monitor environmental change and to integrate environmental evidence into economic policy making and infrastructure planning. This work is funded by the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). Reports are available here: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=7443>

Through the *Blue Belt* programme, 4 million km² of ocean around the UKOTs will be given long-term protection by 2020 – an opportunity to lead the world in marine protection. The programme is being led by UK Government agencies, Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture (CEFAS) and Marine Management Organisation (MMO). HMG is providing £20 million of funding over 4 years (2016-2020) and aims to: conserve habitats and the species that they support by ensuring that management is sustainable and long-term; increase resilience to long-term pressures, e.g. climate change and damaging human activities in surrounding areas; support sustainable economic development for the long term, ensuring food security while upholding social and cultural wellbeing.

The UK government bodies aim to achieve this by: developing new techniques to develop and implement evidence-based, tailored marine management strategies to manage protected areas

in the UKOTs, e.g. by: introducing the use of remote sensing, earth-observation satellites and use of autonomous vehicles, for surveillance and enforcement; increased engagement with the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) and UKOTs to encourage the adoption of best sustainable management practice of coral reefs, as well as their associated ecosystems; and continued work towards the development of a network of protected areas around the Southern Ocean. A UK-led initiative ensures that marine areas newly exposed from ice shelf collapse or retreat, such as occurred at the Larsen C ice shelf in 2017, are protected from commercial fishing activities for scientific study. The UK remains fully committed to the Protocol on Environmental Protection and its ban on commercial mining in Antarctica; introducing a sustainable fisheries policy as we leave the Common Fisheries Policy.

The *Blue Belt* Programme is focused initially on seven islands and archipelagos: British Indian Ocean Territory, South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands, British Antarctic Territory, Pitcairn, St Helena, Ascension Island and Tristan da Cunha.

Active social media campaigns has gained a large following. Official Twitter account: @ukgovbluebelt and #BackTheBlueBelt movement.

The *25-Year Plan* sets out an intention to continue to deliver the Darwin Plus funding. The next round of the Darwin Plus is expected to open for applications in spring 2018.

JNCC is leading a UKOT Biodiversity Data Access project (initiated in 2016) which aims to consider the options and opportunities for improved access to UKOT 'core' biodiversity data. This includes a new clause in the Schedule of Terms and Conditions for Darwin Plus Awards that 'the grantee will publish all data outputs from the project', with a copy of the data being archived by JNCC. Details: <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=5817>

The full *25-Year Plan* can be accessed here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan

The *25-Year Plan* details the ambition for the UK and, to some extent, the UKOTs. We look now at wider views than that of UK Government summarised above. As part of the UKOTCF-coordinated exercise to review progress in the UKOTs under the Environment Charter, Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Goals, there were several areas where progress remains slow and where HMG has a role to play.

Many UKOTs still need to review and update quite urgently their environmental legislation, institutional capacity and mechanisms to ensure that Environmental Impact Assessment process is effective, given the pressures encountered by physical development. Some work by UKOTCF and others, has tried to address this but, in most cases, capacity and legal drafting priorities are preventing progress from being made by UKOTs, despite opportunities to work with developers to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and the international standards set by institutions such as the World Bank and the International Finance Corporation.

Climate-change and the use of renewable energy are mentioned in the context of mainland Great Britain, but there is no explicit references to the UKOTs (or CDs). The UK, as signatory of the UNFCCC, has ratified the Convention on behalf of several UKOTs, but some UKOTs have not yet joined. Some of these would welcome more help from UK Government in achieving this status. HMG has given an indication to UKOT Environment Ministers that it is looking at representation at international fora, given that they are likely to be at the forefront of the impacts of climate change, which threatens their economies. This is a positive step after much encouragement from UKOTCF and others.

There is no explicit mention of terrestrial conservation initiatives, e.g. invasive species management and biosecurity being two of the most pressing issues. Biodiversity, for which the CBD was founded to protect, is particularly relevant to terrestrial conservation, given the physical isolation of islands and the numbers of endemic species found there. A useful document relating to invasive species, supported by HMG, is *Tackling Invasive Non-Native Species in the UK Overseas Territories: Gap Analysis of Biosecurity Capacity* by Dr Jill Key (April 2017) - www.nonnativespecies.org/downloadDocument.cfm?id=1566.

Some UKOTs and most NGOs would also like to see HMG's focus on the seas of isolated oceanic islands with no or few human inhabitants, extend to the more challenging situation of territories with larger human populations, existing fisheries and other marine uses, and bordering territorial seas of other nations, for example Caribbean UKOTs where the need is urgent.

Funding for all conservation activities (and other aspects) will continue to be a major challenge to UKOTs, given their status and relationship with the UK up to 2030 and beyond. There is no explicit mention of 'Brexit' relating to the UKOTs and how HMG plans to replace those funds which were previously open to UKOTs such as BEST (see, e.g., *Forum News* 47: 32), as well

as those generated by economic activity depending on trading or other links with the EU. We understand that HMG are looking at this, and we look forward to any developments.

Following the publication of UK Government's *25-Year Plan*, the UK Parliament's Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) launched an inquiry. Around the same time, the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council issued a Statement from their meeting in February (see articles on pages 1-3 & 24-29), UKOTCF promptly used this as a basis for a submission, as the EAC was gathering written evidence. This evidence has now been published online here: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/environmental-audit-committee/25-year-environment-plan/written/79595.pdf>. EAC is now collecting oral evidence and questioned the Secretary of State, Rt Hon. Michael Gove MP, on 18 April 2018.

Whilst there is much that the UK Government is doing in support of the UKOTs, we will continue to voice concerns raised, particularly from non-government organisations – which play such an important role in conservation efforts and engaging with local communities – as well as from territory officers with whom we work closely.

Changes at UKOTCF

Eric Boyd (Conservation Assistant)



We welcome Eric as a volunteer Conservation Assistant. Eric holds a BSc(Hons.) in Environmental Science from the University of Dundee, and an MSc in Anthropology, Environment and Development from University College London (UCL). Eric's research interests are currently focused on the role of the extractives industry on the social production of resources, and the role that the mutual effect of human/nonhuman interaction has on the shaping of resources as viable or non-viable methods of energy production. Eric has undertaken research in field sites as diverse as the Andes in the Central Highlands of Ecuador and the depths of Europe's largest closed mining pit in Kiruna, Swedish Lapland. He once stepped on a bear trap, and was chased out of a forest by a herd of cows, and is insistent that these two events do not give an overall accurate account of who he is as a person.

And to our web-site

For more than 20 years, www.ukotcf.org has been a first port-of-call for those looking for information about the environment (and often other matters) in the UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. This is in addition to its original and continuing

purpose of providing an information exchange and resource for conservation practitioners in territories. In its early days, this site was technically pioneering in allowing dispersed input to the site at a time when this was far from standard.

Nowadays, there are potentially valuable additional functions that are not practicable to undertake on the existing web-site. In addition, our site platform is not designed for use by mobile smart phones and tablets – because these did not exist when the site was designed!

For the past year, UKOTCF personnel have been fitting around their other commitments, the design and populating of a new web-site. This has been helped by a grant funding some of the work at the new platform which will be using, and by much advice from our existing long-standing web-designer, John Wheeler, who has been encouraging this move.

Throughout, we have been insistent that, whilst we would be adding new functionality, no existing functions should be lost – because of their importance to current users. This, in itself, has given us a challenge, because the grant-aided assistance and platform was designed more for new sites and those without large information-bases to access, than for existing sites and ones with such resources. However, we are overcoming these challenges. The work has been spread across the team, including Wylie Horn, Catherine Wensink, Mike Pienkowski, Nicola Weber, Eric Boyd, Ann Pienkowski, and Avishka Sendanayake, as well as other persons consulted at various stages.

We expect that the new site will be operational well before publication of the next issue of *Forum News*. Once this is the case, there will be messages and easy redirection options from the existing web-site. The existing web-site will remain available, to fulfil certain functions (with links to these from the new web-site), as well as to provide an archive, but topical items will, after that, appear only on the new site. The old site will retain the current address www.ukotcf.org, whereas the new site will be www.ukotcf.org.uk (which currently redirects to the old site). Email addresses of UKOTCF remain unchanged.

We hope that you like the new site when you see it. Of course, your comments will be welcome, and there is an easy facility on there to email them.

Prof Cortés' inaugural lecture as Beacon Professor

In April 2018, Professor John Cortés, gave his inaugural lecture as Beacon Professor, University of Gibraltar. Beacon professors are unique to the University of Gibraltar, which was established in 2015; the title is “symbolic of their role to spread the light of knowledge, to inspire students and illuminate their life paths”.

His lecture entitled *Fragments of Paradise, Nature and Man in Far-flung Islands*, takes a look at the issues that small islands face when balancing economic development with environmental protection, no doubt inspired by the people and places he has visited over many years' involvement in UKOTCF conferences (as well as several years on UKOTCF Council) and the links made with conservation practitioners across the UKOTs and CDs (including the most recent, hosted by the Government of Gibraltar in 2015, which saw also the initiation of UKOT/CD Environment Ministers meetings; see *Forum News* 44).

Using examples from Gibraltar, the other UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies, and the Galapagos Islands, the lecture explored how the challenges are being met and what lessons can be learnt that are relevant at a global scale.

John gained a D.Phil at the Animal Ecology Research Group, Oxford, in 1983. Between 1983 and 1991, he was a civil servant, attaining the post of General Manager of the Gibraltar Health Authority where he gained experience in public administration, management and handling large budgets. From 1991 to 2011, he was Director of the Gibraltar Botanic Garden. Also until 2011, he was General Secretary of the Gibraltar Ornithological & Natural History Society (GONHS), a post he had held since the creation of GONHS in 1976. He was last elected to the post in 2009. He was also an environmental consultant with Wildlife (Gibraltar) Ltd.

He is a Justice of the Peace, and was elected President of the Gibraltar Magistrates' Association in 2009. John was awarded an MBE for services to ecology and conservation, and is an accomplished director and actor in amateur theatre.

John Cortés was elected to Gibraltar's Parliament in December 2011 and served initially as Minister for Health and the Environment. He is currently Gibraltar's Minister for Education, Heritage, Environment, Energy & Climate Change.

John has long been involved with UKOTCF. He has extensive experience in ornithology, ecology, natural history and conservation, having authored, edited and lectured on these subjects. He is, or has been, a member of numerous organisations, including the Gibraltar Development and Planning Commission, the Gibraltar Heritage Trust, the Institute for Campo-Gibraltarian Studies and the Park Authority of the Parque Natural de Los Alcornocales in Spain. Between 2003 and 2008, he directed a European Union Interreg Project in Gibraltar/Morocco. He has wide experience in lobbying and campaigning, having been instrumental in achieving Gibraltar's Nature Protection Act and the creation of an Environment Ministry in Gibraltar. He is experienced also in working within or with both NGOs and Government bodies.



In another territory: Minister John Cortés (centre) discusses with colleagues during the field visit of the Environment Ministers meeting in the Isle of Man.

Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

The real Skywalker brings the force to Gibraltar

The Skywalk on Gibraltar's Upper Rock Reserve has been built on a former military lookout point, which overlooks the Bay of Gibraltar. The glass platform and walkway have been designed so that they provide a panoramic viewpoint from the top of the Reserve. Although,



plans have been under development for some time, the opportunity presented by a press tour for the latest *Star Wars* movie, with Mark Hamill, the original Luke Skywalker from George Lucas' 1977 classic, were too good to be true.

Chief Minister, Fabian Picardo welcomed Mr Hamill to the Skywalk for its official opening on 21 March. Before long, the event reached international audiences via online news and social media reports.

Mr Hamill said: “It is unlike anything I have ever seen. Beautiful visit; 360 degrees of gorgeous sites and the macaques! They are the greatest. They look like they just tolerate us. They don't look like they are overly fond of us. It has been a great experience to be here.”

The new Skywalk links other sites including the Windsor Suspension Bridge and Apes' Den with the Upper Reserve via a series of walking trails. It is expected to attract many visitors particularly thrill seekers and lovers of *Star Wars*!



Mark Hamill, with Chief Minister Fabian Picardo and an unusual honour guard, open the Skywalk. Photos: Skywalk.gi and visitgibraltar.gi



World Heritage Site restoration on Gough Island

The Tristan Island Government is working with international partners, including the RSPB, on a programme to restore its World Heritage and Ramsar Site of Gough Island.

Gough Island lies 350 km to the south-southeast of Tristan da Cunha itself, in the mid South Atlantic Ocean, and about 2,500 km from South Africa (Cape Town), as well as about 4,000 km from South America (Mar del Plata).

Gough is the largest relatively unmodified, cool temperate, island ecosystem in the South Atlantic. It has been described as ‘a strong contender for the title *most important seabird colony in the world*’. As many as 54 bird taxa are recorded, of which 20 are non-breeding seabirds and two are endemic land birds.

Introduced house mice pose a significant threat to the ground-nesting birds found on Gough. In 2016, the Institute for European Environment Policy (IEEP) outlined the case for action for Gough in a report: *Gough and Inaccessible Islands World Heritage Site: an assessment of its status and case for inclusion on the List of World Heritage in Danger*, taking into account the years of research collected by the Conservation Department assisted by the RSPB and others. <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/gough-island-status-assessment.pdf>

Gruesome images of mice feeding on chicks have led to a campaign to raise funds for their removal. Over £4 million has been raised so far.

Bait will be used, administered by helicopter, using similar methods to those used on South Georgia, given the similarly difficult terrain to work in.

In 2018, the eradication programme is expected to begin. The programme team will arrive on Gough Island to lead the mouse eradication. This will include a specialist aviculture team to capture and house Gough buntings and moorhens. Helicopters, specialist pilots, bait and other supplies will arrive on Gough Island, and commence the mouse eradication, followed by a monitoring and welfare programme beginning in 2019.

For more information see: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/globalassets/downloads/documents/conservation-projects/gough-island-restoration-programme.pdf>



Team rat hopes to find nothing

Monitoring the success of a programme to restore islands’ natural ecosystems by removal of human-introduced rodents is tricky, especially when the area is as extensive as South Georgia. That said, the ambitious programme looks to have been a success, due to the endeavours of South Georgia Heritage Trust. However, they are not resting on their laurels. At Christmas, they received a welcome present in the form of three sniffer dogs. They will be used in the second half of Phase 4 of the removal (see *Forum News* 45: 13 for earlier phases). An innovative tool, the dogs are used in order to identify signs of rats. Their handlers are highly trained working in remote conditions and can cover huge areas.

They join a team of 15 people and three vessels, all-working towards answering the question: “Is South Georgia free of rats?”

The South Georgia Heritage Trust, a UK-based charity leading the work, hopes that this is the case and that South Georgia has been rodent-free since 2015 when the third baiting phase was completed. Initial signs are good but, following international protocol, some extensive survey is needed, after 2 years, before they can claim the island to be rodent-free.

The team, affectionately known as “Team Rat”, has been on island since early 2018, to conduct the survey, with the Government of South Georgia & the South Sandwich Islands providing support from their logistics and patrol vessel *Pharos SG* and further human resources. The survey uses a number of detection methods including inert devices, (chewsticks, chewboards, peanut-butter flavoured wax-tags, and tunnel and camera traps), together with the dogs and their handlers. The survey work should be completed by April 2018.

Project Director Dickie Hall said: “The scale of the task is daunting as it is many times greater than any rodent survey previously undertaken anywhere in the world, at a land mass of 895 km².

“It would be impossible to inspect every square metre of land, so the strategy is to subsample the terrain in such a way as to maximise the chances of detecting any surviving rodents. We have assembled a team of specialists, many with experience of previous expeditions as part of the Habitat Restoration Project, to conduct a thorough survey of the island so we can achieve our aim of declaring it rodent-free.”

Professor Mike Richardson, a Trustee of The South Georgia Heritage Trust and Chair of the Habitat Restoration Project steering committee said: “This has been an incredibly important project for the wildlife of South Georgia, delivered by a team tackling the often challenging and highly inhospitable climate as well as the remoteness of the location.

“If no rodents are detected during the survey (which is very much our hope), this final crucial stage should allow us to declare the island rodent-free and, in what is no more than a brief moment in the long history of South Georgia, to reverse two centuries of profound human-induced damage to the island’s wildlife. Millions of birds will then be able to reclaim their ancestral home and the future of the unique, delicate South Georgia pipit will be secure.”

South Georgia Heritage Trust <http://www.sght.org>

Team Rat dogs at South Georgia.
Photo: South Georgia Heritage Trust

Wetlands of International Importance

Celebrations took place on World Wetlands Day on 2 February (the day in which the Convention on Wetlands was originally signed in the city of Ramsar, Iran, in 1971) to raise awareness about the value of wetlands for humans and the planet.

In Anguilla, the Anguilla National Trust led the fifth annual region-wide survey of Caribbean waterbirds, inviting the public to participate. In Turks and Caicos, a series of clean-up initiatives were carried out.

Ahead of the 13th Meeting of the Conference of the Contracting Parties to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (COP13), which will take place in October 2018 in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom, like all Parties, is obliged to submit a National Report.

UK Government delegates the drafting to its agency, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, which sought information from statutory bodies in metropolitan UK, Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies. As UKOTCF has considerable experience in working with the Ramsar Secretariat, wetland projects and in the review of actual and potential Ramsar Sites in the UKOTs and CDs, it was asked to comment and contribute to the draft.

Overall, there was a good amount of input from the UKOTs, more so than in the previous report in 2015, but there were a few gaps that UKOTCF was able to fill, particularly where NGO involvement has been crucial to the management of wetlands. This applied, for example, in Anguilla and Alderney where the Anguilla National Trust and the Alderney Wildlife Trust are taking a lead, in agreement with the Anguilla Government and States of Alderney. Their and similar efforts should be highlighted as part of the report and so this was made clear throughout UKOTCF's submission.

The final report will be transferred to the online Ramsar National Reporting system (part of www.ramsar.org) in advance of the COP.

UKOTCF continues to support several UKOTs in their ambitions to designate Ramsar sites and protect/restore wetland habitat. *Buy Back Bermuda*, an initiative between the Bermuda National Trust and Bermuda Audubon Society, continues to raise funds to purchase land, some of which is wetland then restored in order to provide habitat for wetland birds, fish and other species, and also as recreational space for the general public to enjoy the outdoors. New sites continue to be added here.

The importance of having a suite of protected sites was underlined in a most painful way in late March, when a fire destroyed all the vegetation in the east basin at one of Bermuda's proposed Wetlands of International Importance, Devonshire Marsh.



Pembroke Marsh Ramsar Site is home to a pea clam and freshwater limpet only found in Bermuda. Photo: Bermuda Department of Environment

Land Reserve Fund drive in the Cayman Islands

Perhaps encouraged by the successful *Buy Back Bermuda* campaign which was presented by the Bermuda National Trust at the UKOTCF-organised Cayman conference in 2009, the National Trust for the Cayman Islands, in its 30th year, has launched a drive, which will run throughout 2018, to raise funds as part of its Land Reserve Fund in order to purchase land to protect some of the islands' most fragile and unique habitats.

The National Trust for the Cayman Islands Law allows it to acquire property for protection. Following the government decision to drop its funding to the National Conservation Council to buy land for protected areas, the Trust has stepped in to ensure that, as the island continues to develop, there are spaces for nature to flourish. The Trust, together with the Department of Environment, works tirelessly to understand the complex processes and ecosystems, of the islands. They are able to identify suitable areas which should be protected, but need funds to enable them to purchase these areas of high biodiversity value.

Christina Pineda, Executive Director of the Trust, explained that, "The team at the National Trust works tirelessly to understand, identify and preserve the areas of land that are crucial to ensuring the unique and diverse range of plants, trees and creatures that we have here in Cayman.

"Education plays a huge part in the work we are doing, and we need the next generations of Caymanians to be as passionate, if not more passionate, about maintaining the crucial balance between preservation and development."

"Without action, survival of Cayman's native wild plants and animals cannot be guaranteed, but we need the help of the community." National Trust Environmental Programme Manager Stuart Mailer added.

The campaign is aiming to "establish Cayman as a conservation leader in the Caribbean through [the] *10 x 20 Challenge*." By doing this, NTCI hopes to achieve greater protection of terrestrial areas which are under threat from development. The team hopes to protect 10% of the total land mass by 2020. Under the UN Convention on Biological Diversity's Aichi Targets, the goal is for each country to set aside 15% of the land mass for conservation.

The Trust's page has further information on this:

<http://www.nationaltrust.org.ky/get-involved-ca92>

Briefing for Cayman Governor

As is normal with all new Governors-Designate, UKOTCF tries to meet with them, usually in London, before they take up their posting. This is in order to provide information relating to environmental matters. UKOTCF's Chairman and Executive Director met with Mr Anwar Choudhury, recently British Ambassador to Peru, before his taking up post in the Cayman Islands in March. Mr Choudhury was enthusiastic about the environment. Especially having spent considerable time in the vast country of Peru, he was intrigued to see what working in a smaller setting might be like. He was interested to hear about the unique biodiversity of the Cayman Islands and some of the challenges, e.g. invasive species, as well as some of the successes.

Coral reefs in peril

Over 17 million viewers have now seen the BBC Natural History Unit's *Blue Planet 2* series in the UK. In addition, some media sources report that over 80 million viewers streamed the series in China, temporarily slowing down the country's servers.

During a trip to Montserrat recently, the UKOTCF team was able to watch one episode at the Aquabar in Little Bay, home of Fish 'N' Fins, an NGO set up to teach local children to swim and about the ocean. Those gathered watched in wonder at the underwater life, which they are just beginning to learn about through the endeavours of Veta Wade, Director of Fish 'N' Fin, an educator and ocean advocate.

Blue Planet 2 attracted a lot of attention from the sublime beauty of the oceans to the sometimes apparently ridiculous, but fascinating, behaviour of ocean creatures; to the plight of the world's oceans and the catastrophe of plastics which float around in ocean currents causing untold damage, all of which has happened in the last 50 years, since they became a part of our everyday lives.

Dr John Turner, Professor & Dean of Postgraduate Research at Bangor University, has led projects funded by Darwin Initiative and the Bertarelli Foundation. He is a Trustee of the Chagos Conservation Trust. He has been working in several UKOTs over the past decade or so and attended the UKOTCF conference in Cayman in 2009. Over this time, he has seen first-hand the damage caused by global warming and the efforts of local organisations trying to preserve reefs. Reporting in *TheConversation*, an online blog, he has outlined some concerns.

In 1998, coral reefs in the Chagos Archipelago experienced 90% mortality in shallow waters in the severe warming event. Over 12 years, they recovered, with "rapid growth of branching and tabular corals". Sadly, warming events in 2015, 2016 and 2017 in shallow reef areas have been severe, and researchers believe it is less likely that the coral will be able to recover as rapidly as it did before.

According to Professor Turner, "coral recruits can be observed, probably from slightly deeper depths, but they are settling on dead collapsing colonies, and storms are likely to wash them off before they get the chance to colonise." Furthermore, successful recolonisation "may depend on the availability of stable substrates and being able to compete with the algae that is replacing the live coral."

UKOTs are unlikely to be able to make any dent in the reducing in CO₂ emissions needed to stop global sea-temperature rise. Dr Turner acknowledges that all is not lost and there are things that can be done at a local level, which can build resilience: for example, reducing the impact of, and/or management of, other human activities.



Chagos coral bleaching, April 2016. © Dan Bayley



Coral garden. © Jon Slayer

Management of marine resources in order to maintain normal functions of a reef ecosystem is vital for their survival. One such management option is marine reserves whereby fishing of reef-grazing fish, such as parrotfish, is prohibited. Allowing them to perform their important function of controlling algal growth on the reef can reduce the rate of reef-decline.

Professor Turner has worked with the Department of Environment in the Cayman Islands and notes that, off the Cayman Islands, groups of spawning Nassau grouper, once heavily exploited by local fishers, are now legally protected. Acoustic techniques have been used to show that they are now once more gathering in their thousands to spawn.

There seems to be a swell of support for the oceans created by the *Blue Planet 2* series. Nature showing us its' wonders is definitely the easy part, harnessing this support into action is the hardest part, despite the efforts by dedicated conservationists and volunteers across the world.

Dr Turner's full article is available here: <https://theconversation.com/blue-planet-ii-can-we-really-halt-the-coral-reef-catastrophe-87286>

2018 the Year of the Reef

At the 31st General Meeting (November 2016 in Paris, France), the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) declared 2018 as the third International Year of the Reef.

IYOR is a global effort to increase awareness and understanding on the values and threats to coral reefs, and to support related conservation, research and management efforts.

As part of the initiative, a photo gallery has been launched which can be used widely to highlight and promote management of healthy reef ecosystems across the globe. Some of the photos included in the gallery include UKOTs. Some examples are shown on the following page.

According to the *Millennium Mapping Project*, the total area covered by coral reefs in the UKOTs is about 4,712km². Most of the UKOTs have coastal communities, which rely heavily on coral reefs for the ecosystem services they provide.

Recognising this importance the UK Government's *25-Year Plan* (see article on pages 15-16 of this issue) outlines its' commitment to exploring opportunities to link with UKOTs on the issue of protecting reefs: "*the UK's ambition is to champion and support their conservation and biodiversity in UK and Overseas Territories' (OTs') waters and around the world. We welcome the fact that 2018 has been made the International Year of the Reef by the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI), recognised by the UK [Government] as the key international body for the conservation*

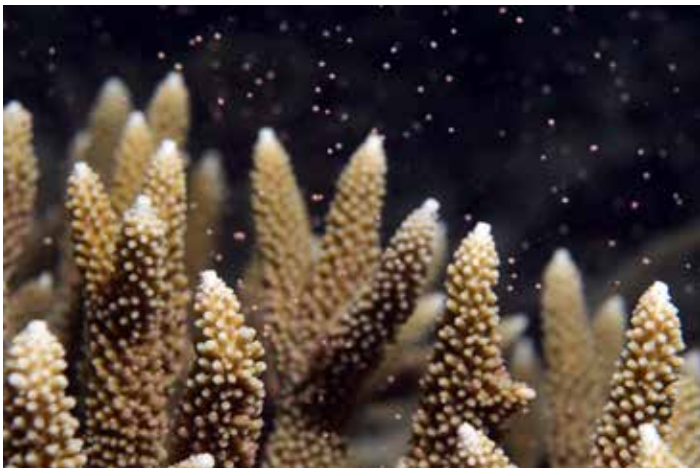


*CoralReefs, Nelson Island, Chagos.
Photo: The Ocean Agency XL Catlin Seaview Survey*

of coral and related habitats. We will increase engagement with ICRI and work with OTs to encourage the adoption of best sustainable management practice of coral reefs, as well as their associated ecosystems. We want to provide sustainability for fisheries and ensure food security while upholding social and cultural wellbeing.”

Many initiatives are taking place across the UKOTs, but funding these as continuous programmes beyond short-term projects, remains a challenge. The ICRI Secretariat has recently published a report which aims to address insufficient funding for coral reef protection which can be downloaded here: https://www.dropbox.com/sh/nzpgwx7dj9yk1h1/AABbJWtDEJ_hwlrQIAJRz4G1a?dl=0

Partnerships between governments and their agencies, non-government organisations with largely volunteer efforts, and even tourist companies are vital components in successful coral-reef



*Above: Staghorn coral spawning. Photo: JayneJenkins
Below: Photo: OceanSafari, TheOceanAgency*



protection programmes. One recent example of collaboration between Caribbean organisations includes the EU-funded project in the Turks and Caicos Islands (see *Forum News* 46: 29). Of course, there are many other examples, and UKOTCF has attempted to bring together UKOTs to share experiences and resources particularly in the Caribbean region (see *Forum News* 43: 7).

Throughout the year, we will be working with and supporting our partners on issues relating to coral reef protection.

Blue Belt publication for schools

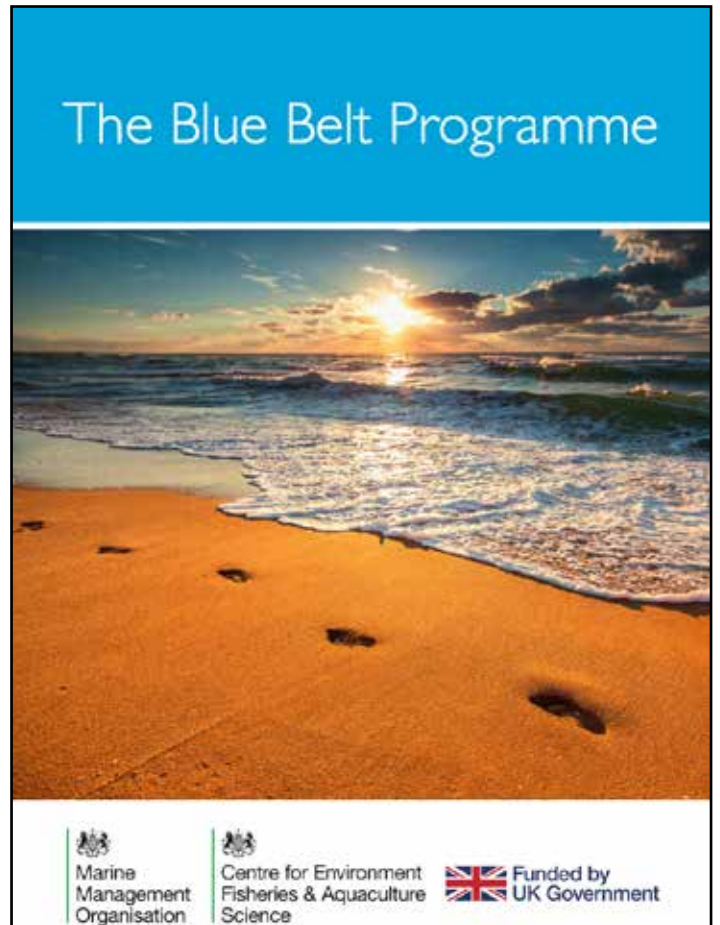
The UK Government has published a brochure, intended for secondary school children, to introduce the work of the *Blue Belt* programme.

It was launched at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in April, on board the *Cefas Endeavour* vessel, with the help of local school children from south London.

The publication is available here: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/700528/bluebelt.pdf.

We have been interested to follow recent progress in the Government’s *Blue Belt* initiative, as outlined on page 15. The last 6 months have seen expeditions to Ascension Island, St Helena and the Tristan da Cunha group. These expeditions have seen overseas experts working with the on-island environmental teams to carry out research, often in previously unsurveyed areas such as the seamounts, that will inform marine protection strategies for the islands. They have also facilitated the sharing of best practice on fisheries enforcement and the trialling of novel methods, such as the use of drones on Ascension Island as a means of evidence collection in the event of encountering an illegal fishing vessel.

The *Blue Belt* programme facilitated an event in March 2018,



organised by the BIOT Administration, for key stakeholders to begin the process of developing an up-to-date conservation management plan for the territory. The BIOT management plan will be informed by the Bertarelli programme for marine science in BIOT, launched in 2017 and coordinated by ZSL, which has already deployed a number of expedition teams to carry out innovative and informative research in the archipelago with updates regularly published on Twitter by @BIOTScience.

Great British Oceans members have worked to maximise

the impact of the #BacktheBlueBelt social media campaign (especially following the success of the television series *Blue Planet 2* in engaging the public on marine conservation). To date, 280 individual Members of Parliament from eight different parties have pledged their support to the *Blue Belt* programme. We hope to see this initiative extended in coming years to include the Caribbean Overseas Territories, as well as the oceanic territories currently included, and of course to not forget support required for the equally important terrestrial areas in the UKOTs.

Some updates on the aftermath of *Hurricanes Irma and Maria*

In *Forum News* 47 (pages 16-19), we outlined some of the severe impacts of Hurricanes Irma and Maria in September 2017, on Anguilla, the British Virgin Islands, the Turks & Caicos Islands and, to a much lesser extent, Montserrat. Here, we include some follow-up reports. This is not a comprehensive review, but we thank those people who have contributed.

British Virgin Islands

Much work remains to be done throughout BVI to restore and rebuild.

Mangroves are, of course important in the region, both as wildlife habitat (including for natural fish nurseries) and for storm protection. Already as long ago as 2005-6 when UKOTCF was working with local partners to identify potential Wetlands of International Importance, there was local concern at the much reduced areas of mangroves due to inappropriate development.

On 18 April, *BVI News* reported that an assessment has shown that the remaining reduced British Virgin Islands' mangrove population was nearly wiped out by last September's hurricanes.

A week-long assessment was done by Dr Gregg Moore, who is a coastal restoration ecologist. His assessment was to find out the current status of local mangroves and present a report to government and the public. The findings will assist also in identifying restoration and conservation priorities.

This recently-concluded assessment done on the mangroves in Jost Van Dyke, Tortola, Frenchman's Cay, Beef Island, Great Camanoe, Virgin Gorda and the Prickly Pear Islands, was sponsored by regional wildlife organisation, BirdsCaribbean.

"The assessment confirms what BVI residents and visitors to the territory could probably already guess: At least 90 percent of all the mature red mangrove trees that form the coastal fringing system have been defoliated and are dead, with very few exceptions," said a press-release from the Jost Van Dykes Preservation Society.

The loss is a serious one to the territory's ecological system. "The significance of this finding is that not only does it represent a serious ecological blow to the system, but the storm also took with it the flowers and fruits that we'd expect would be the next generation."

Based on the results, Dr Moore recommended that mangroves, albeit being dead, should not be cut because they are still a valuable habitat for wildlife such as birds and invertebrates. "As dead mangrove trees decompose, they release energy and return essential nutrients and carbon to the system. Mangrove's physical structure is mainly intact and still buffers wave and storm energy, and helps hold peat and sand in place along fragile coastlines."

The news release added that mangroves also protect animals and helps trap and protect mangrove seedlings that will regenerate the forest naturally.

It said foot traffic and humans dragging timber in those areas threaten, trample, and damage fragile seedlings.

"And since it may be years before new plants mature and bear seeds to populate these areas, those established seedlings are more valuable than ever now."

However, the assessment also revealed some positive findings: "Some interior sites in the BVI maintained mature trees, many of which are now flowering and will produce seed." That is seen in some sections of North Sound, Virgin Gorda.

"These will be important sites for sustainable recruitment of plant stock for restoration and conservation efforts; and, despite severe damage to the mature canopy, virtually every site visited had a significant understorey of live, rooted seedling plants. Albeit quite young and short today, these young plants are the future of BVI's mangroves and should be carefully protected."

Dr Moore, who is based at Jackson Estuarine Laboratory at the University of New Hampshire, hopes to return to the BVI in the autumn of 2018 to continue his assessment as part of broader UK Darwin Plus-funded project.

The project will be focusing on the resilience of coastal and marine habitats being launched by Jost Van Dykes Preservation Society, in partnership with the University of Roehampton (UK) and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

Anguilla

Anguilla was severely hit by Hurricane Irma, with substantial infrastructure damage and loss of vital services and communications. Fortunately, there was no loss of life. The Anguilla National Trust offices were not damaged, and, within a few days of the passing of the Hurricane, despite all the difficulties, National Trust staff undertook environmental assessments and surveys. Since then, ANT has continued monthly bird counts, and has visited Dog Island, Prickly Pear Cays and Sombrero. Its surveys show that the land birds, initially badly hit, are returning, and the frigatebird colony on Dog Island is healthy.

Turks & Caicos Islands

UKOTCF visited TCI in March 2018 and was able to call on several islands of the archipelago.

The eastern islands suffered severely from both Hurricanes Irma and Maria, with the western ones suffering mainly from the former. Much work was evident on Grand Turk on buildings, shore defences etc, but the roads were in relatively good condition. Much of the airport terminal was out of action for repairs, but this did not seem to impede the flight schedule. Power and communications systems were still somewhat erratic.

One improvement since our last visit was a restoration of use by shorebirds of the Town Salina, which appeared to have been poisoned by illegal inputs a few years ago. However, illegal tipping seems to have continued into both protected and unprotected areas, negatively impacting both habitat for internationally important



Above: building in central Grand Turk still needing a new roof. Below: migrant shorebirds back in Town Salina but, behind them, continued illegal infilling of this protected area still threatens.
Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski



wildlife and the ability of the old salt-pans to buffer the effects of rainfall during tropical storms. Sadly, some of the other salt-pans previously internationally important for shore- and waterbirds had not recovered from damage sustained as a result of the construction of the cruise-liner port.

As usual, Salt Cay – despite its proximity to both hurricanes – had



Severe damage to roofs, doors, windows and walls is under repair at the famous White House (above: the centre of the historic salt business) and other buildings in Salt Cay. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski



Laughing gull, short-billed dowitchers and ruddy turnstones on the old salt-pans at Grand Turk. Photos: Dr Mike Pienkowski

been largely left to its own devices to overcome the challenges, apart from a welcome visit from the Royal Navy personnel some time after the hurricane. They had re-roofed the airport building and the school. Since then, the islanders themselves had re-roofed most of the dwellings.

However, a major problem remained 6 months after the hurricanes. These had destroyed a small, but key, section of the breakwater. Having been left unrepaired until the winter storm season further north, severe wave action led to the undermining in March 2018 of much of a key restaurant and dive centre, upon which a large part of the economy is based. The same problem has led to the silting up of the small harbour, so that the barge used to carry heavy equipment (including building materials) can no longer be used – and even the shallower drafted passenger ferry is likely to be stopped soon if this continues. Help is needed urgently.

UKOTCF was not able to visit the hugely important uninhabited seabird cay to the south, Big Sand Cay, where it has worked previously at the request of TCI Government. However, colleagues report that all vegetation has been stripped off. It is hoped that natural processes will restore this before too long.

In the limited time available, UKOTCF was not able to visit South Caicos, the easternmost of the Caicos Islands, which had suffered damage comparable to Salt Cay. We are pleased, however, that our colleagues in the Turks & Caicos Reef Fund have managed to secure modest funding to help facilitate some of the residents there to build up small businesses based on low-intensity sustainable tourism on the nature paradise of nearby East Caicos. (This had been part of a project proposed by TCRF and UKOTCF some



The cafe and dive centre at Salt Cay. The left part of the building (previously supported by the free-standing blue pillars) was washed away by wave action in March 2018. This was because the short segment of the breakwater, which had linked the long section parallel to the shore to the shore and which had been destroyed by the September hurricanes, had not been repaired even by 6 months later. The line of the missing segment can be seen by the small section showing above water on the left of the image. Part of the harbour, which is rapidly becoming unuseable as another result of the loss of the break-water segment, is in front of that wall fragment. Photo: Dr Mike Pienkowski

years ago, but for which we were unable to secure funding.)

Middle and North Caicos appeared to be recovering fairly well from the impacts. The loss of the Caicos Pine nursery – and the heroic saving of the seedlings by staff working above and beyond the call of duty – was described in *Forum News* 47. An appeal for funding, previously delayed by administrative procedural problems, is now underway.

Towards the western end of the chain, the most developed island of Providenciales is fully back in action, and achieved a high occupancy during the holiday season.

Montserrat

As noted previously, damage to Montserrat was much less than the three territories above. (However, those not from hurricane regions should be aware that this is relative. The cost of clearing the garden of one house from fallen trees was \$10,000!)

By the time of the UKOTCF project visit in March, most of the damaged roofs had been repaired and reconstruction of damaged buildings was nearing completion. Most of the forest nature trails (which were blocked in our November visit) had been cleared of fallen trees and were again usable.

The hurricanes had led to scouring of the beaches, with the loss of almost all the turtle eggs this season – something that probably occurred also in the other territories impacted.

With its Irish and related heritage, St Patrick's Week (not just the Day that the Irish seem to limit themselves to!) is the traditional season for many of those living away from Montserrat to return home to visit their families. It was therefore unfortunate that wave action forced a number of ferry cancellations around that period. It is not that the weather was necessarily unusually severe; it is just that 21 years after the volcano Montserrat still lacks a replacement break-water, so that even mild seas can stop the ferry. Although Montserrat was previously self-supporting, since the severe Hurricane Hugo, soon followed by the volcanic eruption, UK Government has been responsible for Montserrat funding. The writers of this item are UK tax-payers, and are amazed at the delays which have prevented this modest expenditure for all this time. This cannot be helpful to re-establishing the full economy. It is said that the UK Government has finally approved the building of a break-water; we hope so – and that restitution of essential services and protection from further damage to the hurricane-impacted territories (see above) is faster by orders of magnitude!

Third UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies Environment Ministerial Council Meeting, Isle of Man, February 2018: Statement

1. The Environment Ministers (or their equivalents or representatives) of 13 of the UK's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies (UKOTs/CDs), met in Douglas, Isle of Man, on Tuesday 6th and Wednesday 7th February 2018. This was the third in a series of Environment Ministerial meetings, the first having been held in Gibraltar in 2015, the second held in Alderney in 2017. The territory environment leaders invited UK Government Ministers for the second day of the meeting in order to discuss with them directly a range of topics relating to our precious environments and for them to share in our ambition to protect them for future generations. They were pleased to welcome the presence of senior officers from the Foreign & Commonwealth Office, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, representing their ministers, and for a discussion by remote technology in one session with Dr Thérèse Coffey MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for the Environment and Rural Life Opportunities, Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs. We thank Mr Geoffrey Boot MHK, Environment Minister of the Isle of Man, for convening and hosting the meeting, Dr John Cortés, Environment Minister of Gibraltar, for continuing to provide support for the meetings as co-chair, UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF) for helping to organise the meeting, and the Government of the Isle of Man for their hospitality, including excellent meals and a familiarisation tour of relevant areas.

2. Welcoming the presentation on Ramsey Bay, Isle of Man, where collaborative working produced an area which benefits both fisheries and environmental protection, territory environment leaders recognised that environmental protection generally benefits from economic activity based on this interest, and funding need not always come from grants but may be generated locally.

3. The territory environment leaders welcomed new Ministers and Councillors to their 3rd meeting, to build on the success of the first two meetings of the UKOT/CD Environment Ministers Council, so as to develop further the benefits and economies of joint and collaborative working, and develop common priorities and approaches in discussions with UK Government. They recognised

the great range of differences in the economies of individual UKOTs and CDs, but that they have in common extraordinary biodiversity that is a shared responsibility under international conventions – something of which UK and the territories should be proud.

4. Collectively we hold a truly staggering amount of biodiversity, which provides us with many goods and services, e.g. fishing, tourism, storm protection, renewable energy supply. In terms of endemic species (those which occur nowhere else in the world), proportions of other species supported, sensitive ecosystems and threatened species, we hold even greater importance than that of metropolitan Britain. This biodiversity has served to underpin sustainable livelihoods in our inhabited UKOTs/CDs for many generations. Biodiversity provides also the potential to underpin continued and raised living standards and employment in such areas, especially through, for example, sustainable tourism. These natural assets need both safeguarding and management, in order to support the features that provide the attractions on which sustainable tourism can be based, and which also maintain the quality of life and culture of local communities.

5. About 90 endemic species occur in mainland Britain, compared with 3300 known so far in the UKOTs. About 75% of those formally reviewed are globally threatened, and most of those not yet reviewed are likely to be similarly threatened. By including the territories, the United Kingdom's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) is the fifth largest in the world, at 6,805,586 km². The total reef area inside the UKOTs mapped by the Millennium Mapping Project is 4,712 km², making the UK the twelfth largest reef nation of the World¹. UKOTs support more penguins than any other nation on earth, holding an estimated 36% of the world's population of southern rockhopper penguins and 34% of gentoo penguins², as well as several other species. Terrestrial ecosystems include some of the rarest habitat types on the planet. Many are particularly biodiverse, including Montserrat's Centre and Soufriere Hills, and Diana's Peak on St Helena, which holds at least 119 endemic invertebrate species.

1 Sheppard, C (Ed.) (2013) Coral Reefs of The United Kingdom Overseas Territories

2 http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/ukots-stocktake_tcm9-369597.pdf

6. The Governments of the UKOTs, indicating their commitments to conserve threatened globally important biodiversity and support those communities who wish to continue sustainable livelihoods based on traditional uses of biodiversity, have chosen to be included in various international environmental agreements. Environmental programmes, geared towards supporting effective biodiversity conservation and sustainable development, are vital. As such, UK and UKOT governments agreed a partnership approach to integrating environmental aspects into all sectors via their Environment Charters, signed with the United Kingdom in 2001 or, in one case, approved separately. The Environment Charters arise from the 1999 White Paper *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity*³ in which the UK Government outlined its expectations for good governance in the Overseas Territories by encouraging these measures, which are needed for the preservation of the environment, the promotion of high standards of financial accountability, respect for human rights and compliance with the rule of law. The 2012 White Paper *The Overseas Territories: Security, Success and Sustainability*⁴ stressed that it built on the 1999 White Paper. We return to this topic later in this statement.

7. The CDs and those few UKOTs without an Environment Charter make essentially the same commitments which arise from international agreements in which they are included. They are committed to protect and enhance biodiversity, with most the CDs having Biodiversity Strategies in place, with accompanying action plans.

8. For these reasons, the territory environment leaders have come together to discuss challenges and to support positive environmental action through this series of Environment Ministerial Council meetings. Since our last meeting, there have been some discussions between some of the leaders of the UKOTs and CDs and the UK Government over 'Brexit'. We have seen unprecedented hurricanes severely impacting on infrastructure, utilities and local economies in several of the UKOTs. External funding for new initiatives to tackle priority natural environment matters that the territory environment leaders have identified previously (see e.g. Statement from Alderney meeting 2017 and recommendations from 2015 Gibraltar conference), e.g. unsustainable development, invasive species and the impacts of climate change, is still a challenge. The EU was a source of considerable funds for some, both in terms of resources, technical advice and funds for infrastructure.

9. The relationship with the UK is materially different between the UKOTs and the CDs, with the CDs and certain UKOTs not currently expecting UK funding for these matters; therefore, it is important to be clear that the commentary with regard to funding expectations and obligations refers to some UKOT and UK relationships. There is a broad range of financial situations as between the UKOTs.

10. The territory environment leaders welcomed the response received from Lord Ahmad, FCO Minister with responsibility for the UKOTs, following the Alderney meeting in April 2017. The Overseas Territory environment leaders were pleased that he is overseeing an increase in funding for terrestrial and marine projects in the UKOTs through the Darwin Plus programme, other support through the Conflict Stability and Security Fund (CCF) and for continued support for UKOTs in international fora. The Darwin Plus Initiative continues to be one of the only sources of funding available to the UKOTs. The territory environment leaders received a review of progress on the other points raised in their 2017 Statement and the Recommendations of the UKOT/CD Conference in Gibraltar 2015, which the territory environment

3 <http://www.ukotcf.org/pdf/WhitePaper99full.pdf>

4 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/14929/ot-wp-0612.pdf

leaders support. They look forward to UK Government responses

11. The importance of these meetings of Environment Ministers was reiterated in the Joint Ministerial Council meeting in November 2017, which stated: “[...] *We emphasised the importance of work in the Territories on climate change adaptation and mitigation and collaboration between the Territories to share best practice on environmental management and climate change issues, including through the annual meetings of Territory environment ministers*”⁵.

UK's Departure from the European Union

12. The UK's exit from the European Union will have a significant impact on many of the UKOTs and CDs. The Overseas Territory leaders have been party to discussions with the UK Government, as part of the Territories Joint Ministerial Council on EU Negotiations (JMC-OT-EN). The CDs have held discussions with the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which have included representatives from the Ministry of Justice, Department of International Trade, Treasury and the Department for Exiting the European Union.

13. Gibraltar, like Great Britain & Northern Ireland, is within the EU and, as this ends, Gibraltar will be affected in the same way as Britain itself, but will also face other challenges. These are related particularly to the way in which the environmentally and other damaging acts by a neighbouring country have hitherto been moderated most effectively through common membership of the EU. Ending this will necessitate increased diplomatic support from UK, with associated costs. The territory environment leaders urge UK Government to support, as a matter of urgency, the facilitation of Gibraltar's inclusion in other international agreements which will help to offset this loss.

14. The other UKOTs are not within the EU but will suffer various problems, losing their status as Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) of the EU. As OCTs, the UKOTs are eligible to apply for various forms of funding from the EU, including major technical assistance, infrastructure funds and environmental funding. Furthermore, the access to EU trade and information is of major economic benefit to UKOTs. A substantial amount of direct funding also goes to UKOTs, this having major indirect effects on the environment. Gibraltar also receives funding as a part of the EU.

15. The relationship between the Crown Dependencies and the EU is enshrined in Protocol 3 of the UK's 1972 Accession Treaty: the Islands are essentially within the Single Market for the purposes of trade in goods, but are “third countries” (i.e. outside the EU) in all other respects. The Channel Islands are outside the EU VAT area and the WTO, whilst the Isle of Man is within both. The Channel Islands and the Isle of Man have a close relationship with the EU in many different fields – not simply those covered by the formal relationship under Protocol 3, including certain maritime matters. They choose also to implement selected EU legislation with an international dimension or to apply the standards on which it is based, for example sanctions, asset-freezing, anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism. The Crown Dependencies are not in the EU and are not OCTs. However, there have been cases in which their natural environments have benefited both financially and through facilitated cooperation. This is because EU policies recognise that conservation measures need to take account of neighbouring countries, for example for effective ecosystem-conservation or to address the needs of migratory animals. With UK's departure from the EU, the potential for such collaboration and financial support will be much reduced, and the opportunity to strengthen partnerships

5 https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/663983/Joint_Ministerial_Council_2017_-_Communique.pdf

between the UK, UKOTs and CDs will become more important. In addition, continued access to the nearest ports, supplies, sales of fishing products *etc.*, are important to all CDs, especially for some of the smaller Channel Isles located adjacent to France. Access to seasonal workers, plus UK, EU and third party country markets currently accessed through EU trade arrangements are similarly of importance for the CDs.

16. The territory environment leaders discussed, separately amongst the UKOTs and CDs, the challenges they face as a consequence of UK's departure from the European Union, notably for the UKOTs to access technical support on a variety of environment matters, particularly in the renewable energy sector and on much needed sustainable development (particularly those in receipt of Official Development Assistance (ODA), as defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *e.g.* Montserrat, Pitcairn and St Helena).

17. In addition to recognising the fact that UK Government resources to UKOTs need to be increased in the present situation, the territory environment leaders agreed that UK's departure from the EU would remove major funding opportunities for some, relating to the main EU budget (Gibraltar), the EDF (several UKOTs) and, potentially for all inhabited UKOTs, relating to renewable energy, sustainable development and biodiversity – only recently achieved after many years of lobbying (including the Voluntary Scheme for Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of the European Overseas “BEST”). As recognised by the House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee⁶, the UKOTs will need additional funds from UK Government for environmental conservation to replace these lost resources, as well as the opportunity to agree with UK Government more cost-effective and appropriate procedures for determining the allocation of UK public funds to projects. Given the UK Government is the signatory on behalf of territories, at the request of the territories concerned, of the Convention on Biological Diversity and other international agreements, some UKOT environment leaders would welcome dialogue with UK Government on how to address current levels of resources, which are inadequate and low when compared with other EU Overseas Territories.

18. The relationship between the UK and the EU differs for each territory, as does their relationship with neighbouring countries, *e.g.* through trade agreements with French and Dutch Overseas Territories or members of, for example, CARICOM. The territory environment leaders urge the UK to maintain these important links with the EU and its member states with overseas entities.

19. Some Overseas Territories environment leaders, again, ask that the UK help seek out and investigate arranging eligibility to other funds, such as those for which it is a major contributor, *e.g.* the International Climate Change Fund and the Global Environment Facility, which could help UKOTs to meet UK Commitments under UNFCCC and CBD. The territory environment leaders ask also that HMG make provisions for those UKOTs not currently signed up to the UNFCCC or CBD, but which have been progressing towards them.

20. The territory environment leaders remind that, whilst the departure from the EU may have an impact on potential sources of technical expertise and financial resources, it could present an opportunity for the UK to be a greater champion of its UKOTs and CDs, particularly on the international stage through the support it gives them to mitigate and adapt to climate change and the

⁶ House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee. The Future of the Natural Environment after the EU Referendum. Sixth Report of Session 2016–17. HC 599, 4 January 2017.

House of Commons Environmental Audit Committee. Marine Protected Areas Revisited. Tenth Report of Session 2016–17. HC 597, 25 April 2017

innovations they are making. For example, if energy-relevant EU policy is to be grandfathered into UK law, updated and enforced, then the UKOTs (especially Gibraltar) and Crown Dependencies should be consulted fully. The UK should continue also to fund UKOTs regarding climate science and the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services, including through the National Environmental Research Council (NERC). It is pleasing that NERC's Environmental Evidence for the Future (EEF) has included UKOTs in their recent consultation discussions on future redeployment of resources. EEF aims to: *“pave the way to addressing crucial challenges and exciting opportunities that present from the UK leaving the European Union, including optimising sustainable environmental management and ensuring the resilience of our ecosystems and the quality of our water and air.”*⁷

21. The territory environment leaders further remind that the smaller UKOTs and CDs noted that they require clear lines of access to UK Government institutions and additional attention, as they have few institutional resources of their own to ensure the representations best needed to ensure that their interests are protected.

22. The territory environment leaders supported those UKOTs and CDs which currently export environmentally sustainable products to the EU in looking to UK Government to ensure that this economically important trade can continue effectively.

23. In July 2017, the House of Lords European Union Select Committee held an evidence session on the implications of ‘Brexit’ for the UKOTs. Chief Ministers, Premiers and representatives of eight UKOTs appeared before the Committee giving evidence on: the impact of ‘Brexit’ on the Overseas Territories; possible benefits for the Overseas Territories arising from ‘Brexit’; engagement with the UK Government through the Overseas Territories JMC; and the potential impact ‘Brexit’ could have on the Overseas Territories’ future political, economic, constitutional and cultural relationship with the UK.

24. This led the House of Lords Committee Chair to write to ‘Brexit’ Secretary of State, David Davis, in September 2017, outlining some of the evidence. It noted the economic and technical expertise awarded as part of the UKOTs’ unique relationship with the European Union⁸. Premier of BVI, Orlando Smith, was reported as pointing out that: *“in common with some other Overseas Territories, BVI benefited from EU horizontal programmes to protect and develop its ‘very significant and very rich’ biodiversity. He noted that EU support was helpful in terms of environmental infrastructure development and alternative energy. For instance, an EU-supported project was proving valuable in repairing a damaged beach and reef in the most tourist-oriented part of the island. He stressed the importance of EU funding in boosting the quality of the BVI tourism product on each of its many islands.”*

25. The Committee report indicates Premier Donaldson Romero of Montserrat as noting that: *“Every cash injection, especially that from the EU [via the Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services in Territories of Europe Overseas (BEST) initiative as received also by other UKOTs], formed a ‘significant percentage of our capital budget’ and made a ‘huge difference’, by allowing the Government of Montserrat some autonomy and flexibility in deciding what priorities should be addressed, and to plan over a period of time.”*

26. Councillor Leslie Jacques (Pitcairn) noted the regional cooperation that was starting to develop on a wide variety of

⁷ <http://www.nerc.ac.uk/research/partnerships/crosscouncil/eeef/>

⁸ <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/eu-select/Correspondence-2017-19/11-09-17-Overseas-Territories-letter-to-David-Davis-MP.pdf>

issues in the South Pacific and *“it is rather disappointing that we are just starting to develop this relationship and now suddenly it is probably going to end ... to lose all that for us would be quite catastrophic.”*

27. In relation to the EU’s European Development Fund (EDF), St Helena had been able to gain access to *“the thematic component of the 11th EDF, which will fund projects to reduce the risk from climate change and disasters, and to promote sustainable energy.”*

28. The House of Lords European Union Committee supported our Alderney Statement in 2017, and by implication, our discussions again here in the Isle of Man, by saying *“We also note the significance of BEST funding in supporting biodiversity. In the event that the Overseas Territories are no longer eligible, after Brexit, for receipt of such funding, will you commit to extending the Darwin Plus initiative to address this shortfall?”*⁹

29. In October 2017, the UK Government response to the House of Lords Inquiry on the impact of ‘Brexit’ on the CDs¹⁰ recalled that *“The UK Government and each of the Crown Dependencies signed an International Identity Framework Agreement in 2007–2008. In these agreements, the UK committed that it will not act internationally on behalf of a Crown Dependency without prior consultation and that, where the interests of a Crown Dependency differ from those of the UK, the UK will seek to represent those interests when acting in an international capacity. The framework agreements also affirm that the Crown Dependencies and the UK will work together to resolve or clarify any differences which may arise between their respective interests. The UK Government will continue to honour these agreements and we are committed to getting the best possible deal for all British jurisdictions when we leave the EU.”*

Funding requirements

30. In the context of meeting UK/UKOT joint commitments to conventions, including the Aichi Targets, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Environment Charters, successes in protecting biodiversity/ecosystems are joint successes of UK and UKOTs, and ones of which both parties can be proud. To help with these where needed, the UKOTs share limited resources via the UK Government’s Darwin Initiative, which has a dedicated funding stream, Darwin Plus, for the UKOTs. These funds are not available to the CDs, except for CD institutions for undertaking work in the UKOTs. The scheme is administered by LTS International and funds come from three UK Government departments: Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), Department of International Development (DFID) and Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). This fund is so important because the status as UKOTs means that the territories are ineligible for many international funds due to the close links with the UK. Darwin Plus is the only way in which many territories are able to fund projects with an environment focus. Darwin Plus is the successor to both the previous part of Darwin Initiative spending on UKOTs and the FCO/DFID Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP), itself the successor to FCO’s Environment Fund for Overseas Territories (EFOT), all arising from the 1999 White Paper.

31. The Overseas Territories environment leaders considered barriers to accessing effectively available environmental funding, including climate funding, which to some UKOTs will be vital if they are to reduce dependency on imported fossil fuels. Most

territory environment leaders considered that it was important that the territories should have the main voice in determining where and how cross-territory funds available should be spent so that this could be related to agreed priorities, and that the territories should not have to compete for the allocation of such funds through an assessment process external to them and largely removed from local knowledge. Further discussion with UK Government is needed on how this might be done.

32. The environment leaders expressed concern that, whilst there is no legal impediment to some funding from the UK National Lottery being used in support of the environment in UKOTs, policies and procedures of the Lottery funding bodies effectively prevent this. The UKOT environment leaders welcomed the earlier attempts by NGOs and FCO to change this situation and wish to engage directly with the Department of Culture, Media & Sport and the Lottery bodies, ideally with the support of other bodies to change this situation.

33. Recognising the major challenges to Caribbean and North Atlantic UKOTs from hurricanes, as well as the continuing challenges to Montserrat more than 20 years after the start of the volcanic eruptions, the territory environment leaders, noting the financial and logistic impacts on those NGO and governmental bodies responsible for safeguarding the natural environment on which much economic activities depend, recognised the urgent need for a disaster management fund.

34. Many of the territories are well used to working with a variety of international partners including many non-government organisations, UK Government agencies etc. For many territories with small populations, this is the only viable way to make progress in biological research and conservation. The key NGO bodies experienced in helping filling this vital role need funding so that they can deploy their skilled volunteer and paid personnel in helping the territories and raising and empowering local capacity. These partnerships need to maintain their approach in ensuring that knowledge is transferred to territories at every opportunity so that territories can retain their intellectual property and build expertise locally. This is the only way to ensure long-term continuity.

35. Territory environment leaders welcomed the update from Pitcairn in relation to item 13 in the Statement from their Alderney meeting in 2017. They welcomed the continued support that Pitcairn had received from the EU in respect of the Renewable Energy Feasibility Study and its report recommending the introduction of a solar power system which would provide 90% of the Island’s energy needs, as well as the EU agreeing to provide two-thirds of the required funding of NZ\$ 1.2m, under the EDF 11 Pacific Regional Envelope, to replace the current expensive diesel generators. Pitcairn is, this month, seeking the balance of funding for this project from DFID, and the territory environment leaders hope that this will be successful, thereby allowing the introduction of renewable energy to Pitcairn, with obvious benefits to both its economy and environment.

36. Whilst we all need to make use of current resources in the most efficient way possible, the territory environment leaders recalled the presentation by Gibraltar at their previous meeting about accessing large climate funds and the major challenges in this (see also 41, below); they agreed that there are other funding sources that warrant considering and urge the UK Government to help to explore these where appropriate. In particular, the UKOT environment leaders urged UK Government to remove constraints which impede inward investment in some territories.

37. Some UKOTs have had success with visitor taxes ear-marked for environmental work and funds set up for land purchase in habitats which are rare but threatened. It was useful for those territory environment leaders considering these to talk with those

9 <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/lords-committees/eu-select/Correspondence-2017-19/11-09-17-Overseas-Territories-letter-to-David-Davis-MP.pdf>

10 <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmjust/423/423.pdf>

who have implemented such initiatives in this forum to learn from their experience, including the drafting of legislation and operational matters. The UKOT environment leaders noted that previous encouragement to this approach from UK Government has, in recent years, moved towards a more negative approach to such hypothecated funds, and called for a return to the earlier positive view.

38. The Overseas Territories environment leaders agreed to continue investigating the potential for UKOTs jointly to seek support from international funding sources / commercially-based bodies. The territory environment leaders agreed also to investigate the possibility of obtaining support from some of the aid funds currently supporting Caribbean projects, e.g. CARICOM, to contribute to a UKOT environmental small grants programme.

Building resilience to climate change impacts

39. 2017 has, for many of the UKOTs, mostly notably Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Turks and Caicos Islands and, fortunately to a lesser extent, Montserrat, been a reminder of the damage that can be sustained to small economies as a result of extreme natural disasters, as experienced also in many UKOTs previously e.g. Cayman Islands, Montserrat, Turks and Caicos Islands and others. Resilience to further anticipated extreme weather events (storms which would once have been once in a lifetime are becoming more frequent) was acknowledged as an integral part of the rebuilding exercise. Healthy ecosystems can play a major role in this and we have explored this during our discussions.

40. The territory environment leaders discussed the need for resilience to be built into the assistance supplied to the UKOTs, and recognised the role that healthy ecosystems can play in minimising risk and damage.

41. The territory environment leaders were pleased that UKOT personnel will be included in the delegation to UNFCCC CoP, but the Paris Agreement's ambitious goals can be reached only if appropriate financial flows, a new technology framework and an enhanced capacity building framework are put in place. Climate finance refers to local, national or transnational financing, which may be drawn from public, private and alternative sources of financing. Climate finance is critical to addressing climate change because large-scale investments are required to reduce emissions significantly – but, equally as important to the UKOTs, it is important for adaptation, for which significant financial resources will be required to allow them to adapt to the adverse effects and reduce the impacts of climate change. The territory environment leaders again ask HMG to help gain a clearer understanding of green financing alternatives and to help territories by taking a role in providing as well as facilitating access to green funds, for both climate-change and biodiversity-conservation purposes.

42. The territory environment leaders welcomed the announcement, following the meeting of the Joint Ministerial Council in London in November 2017, by the Minister of State for Climate Change and Industry, the Hon Claire Perry, that the UK would in future include a representative from the Overseas Territories at COPs of the Paris Agreement. They decided that they would plan to rotate the representation, possibly moderated if, for any particular meeting, the agenda proves particularly relevant to one territory or region.

Involvement in international fora and extension of Multilateral Environment Agreements

43. UK Government makes, and is ultimately accountable for, international commitments made on behalf of the UKOTs, including Multilateral Environmental Agreements such as the

Convention on Biological Diversity. Territory environment leaders confirmed that the decisions as whether or not a territory is included in UK's ratification should be a matter for the territory concerned, and that, if asked by a territory government to include it, or not include it, in a convention, that request should be fulfilled. Territory environment leaders noted also that the level of administration and reporting for a territory to meet convention requirements should be scaled to that territory's size and not necessarily to the scale of Britain itself.

44. The territory environment leaders are heartened by the response from Lord Ahmad, which stated that the UK takes very seriously responsibility for Territories' representation at international meetings. The Overseas Territories environment leaders look forward to continuing invitations from the UK to participate in these meetings, which they see as important to them as members of a global community.

45. A system needs to be put in place to ensure that UKOTs and CDs are consulted before participation in Conferences or Meetings of the Parties of Agreements in which they are included, and encouraged by UK to participate in discussions at the COP/MOPs. Whilst this has improved in recent years and is very efficiently co-ordinated by DEFRA and JNCC for some agreements (e.g. CITES), there is less communication on others, and a more systematic approach would be useful.

46. In 2021, the UK Government and UKOTs will celebrate 20 years of the existence of a series of Environment Charters created for most of the UKOTs, and signed by both the governments of these territories and UK Government. They aimed to reflect the responsibilities of each party towards the environment. However, this responsibility applies equally to the relationships between UK and those territories which do not have Environment Charters. One of the core elements of the Charters is a set of Commitments by each territory government. These Commitments were not created under the Charters, but the latter brought together existing commitments under other international measures. The other core was a set of corresponding Commitments by UK Government to provide support. After 20 years, the Charters still hold true in terms of their ambition for the environments of the UKOTs. It would seem important to celebrate the achievements and progress in meeting the commitments as set out in the Charters in the context of other global standards. To some extent, the basis of this has been done by the work of the UKOTCF, in their "*Review of performance by 2016 of UK Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies in implementing the 2001 Environment Charters or their equivalents and moving towards the Aichi Targets and Sustainable Development Targets*", which the territory environment leaders endorsed at the preceding meeting in Alderney.

47. The territory environment leaders recognised the problems posed by plastic waste, particularly to the marine environment. As largely island jurisdictions, this is a problem particularly relevant to the UKOTs and CDs, and the leaders support moves to reduce the negative impact of plastics.

48. The territory environment leaders identified a need for UK Government to develop a coordinated approach to engage with them on major environmental issues and with good continuity, save for those areas where territories retain constitutional authority. At present, this is spread across several UK Government departments and many individuals who tend to change post frequently, with consequent risk of lack of adequate corporate memory.

49. The territory environment leaders welcomed the best practice amongst the territories in relation to integrating environmental aspects into physical development. This includes early involvement of environmentalists with developers, facilitated by government, and timely and open environmental impact assessments.

50. The potential value of an online system for sharing experiences of physical planning and environmental interactions, reinforcing discussions at their previous meeting, and encouraged the Government of Gibraltar and UKOTCF to explore.

51. The territory environment leaders noted the difficulties that the smaller UKOTs and CDs had with developing and enforcing appropriate environmental policies. They typically have few civil service resources of their own. They also have little access to external resources. It would be useful if a common pool of resources were available.

UK Commitments and UKOT priorities for safeguarding our precious natural resources

52. The Overseas Territories environment leaders welcomed the current additional “Blue Belt” funding for extensive marine protection around oceanic territories and recognised the current campaigns surrounding this, particularly in the uninhabited territories, for which the UK is responsible. Whilst large marine protected areas with no-take zones are an important tool for sustainably managing marine resources, we heard many examples, including from the Isle of Man, where different approaches, such as fishery management zones within Marine Protected Areas, are often also having a good outcome for marine biodiversity, as well as maintaining local livelihoods. The territory environment leaders welcomed Tristan da Cunha’s ambition for sustainably diversified fisheries. The UKOTs would welcome more accessibility to this funding to help effective marine conservation also in the less remote UKOTs.

53. The territory environment leaders note that the UKOTs without permanent human populations may lack local voices to interact with the administrations appointed by UK Government. The territory environment leaders discussed these UKOTs, decided on maintaining a watching brief and looked forward to discussing further. They expressed a common feeling with them, and commend the efforts of NGOs to achieve conservation measures. A particularly prominent example over the last few years has been the major operation of removal of introduced rodents from South Georgia by the South Georgia Heritage Trust. The territory environment leaders recognise too the efforts of the Government of South Georgia and the South Sandwich Islands in undertaking, with the help of the Government of Norway, the parallel removal of introduced reindeer. The territory environment leaders welcomed the forthcoming project to rid Gough (in the Tristan da Cunha group) of introduced mice which threaten the uniquely important seabird colonies there.

54. The Overseas Territories environment leaders welcomed also the restoration of environmental education back into eligibility for UK funds, including Darwin Plus, by the UK Government, as recommended by conservation practitioners in the UKOTs at the Gibraltar *Sustaining Partnerships* conference in 2015. This will help ensure that territory communities are engaged with the efforts of hard working conservation practitioners, furthering local knowledge of these unique but fragile environments, and fostering a sense of responsibility for their preservation.

55. The Overseas Territories environment leaders agreed that changes need to be consulted upon and considered in respect of the size of project funds. EFOT and early OTEP were primarily small-project funds. They made possible, usually by combining with voluntary work, a great deal of highly cost-effective progress on small issues or piloting work which could beneficially be applied on a larger scale to address major conservation issues. There is a need too, for funding for medium-sized and/or longer duration projects, for species-recovery programmes, ecosystem restoration, organisational capacity development, etc. The territory

environment leaders welcomed therefore the recognition of this need in HMG’s 2009 *UKOTs Biodiversity Strategy*. However, whilst such larger (but not longer) projects are now possible, they are resourced from the same total funding previously limited to small projects. Inevitably, this will mean fewer small projects, despite their excellent track record.

56. There are few opportunities for UKOTs conservation practitioners to meet face-to-face in order to discuss some of the challenges we face in our territories, and for the small teams involved to come together as a critical mass. In the past, the UK Government has supported the working conferences for conservation practitioners (organised by UKOTCF), as an opportunity to share experience and skills; this has led to maximising cost-effectiveness of project funds. These conferences are highly valued by the UKOTs/CDs. The territory environment leaders, as UKOT/CD Environment Ministers or equivalents, were involved in the most recent of these, held in Gibraltar in 2015. The territory environment leaders saw first-hand the value of such conferences and welcome others in the future. While the first four such conferences were largely funded by UK Government, this funding was then ended, against the wishes of UKOTs. The resulting long gap was ended by HM Government of Gibraltar, which funded most of the 2015 conference (supplemented by a much smaller grant from Defra). The Overseas Territories environment leaders therefore encourage UK Government to provide funding for future UKOTCF-organised conferences, as is the wish of the territory environment leaders and the UKOTs as a whole. It will become increasingly important to share resources and expertise, as some of this may become unavailable as a result of leaving the EU, which is addressed more generally above. (We should not overlook the potential benefits to UK-based people in attending such meetings. Ideas and experience can flow both ways, and may be especially applicable to smaller communities in the UK.)

Appendix: List of Ministers and other lead representatives participating

Hon. Geoffrey Boot MHK, Isle of Man

Hon. Prof John Cortés, Gibraltar

Mr James Dent, States of Alderney

Mr Paul Veron, Guernsey

Deputy Steven Luce, Jersey

Dr Richard Axton, Sark

Hon. Walton Brown, JP, MP, Bermuda

MLA Teslyn Barkman, Falkland Islands

Hon. David Osborne, Montserrat

Councillor Michelle Christian, Pitcairn

Councillor Russell Yon, St Helena

Hon. Ralph Higgs, Turks & Caicos Islands

Councillor James Glass, Tristan da Cunha

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Please pay: UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum at NatWest Bank, 9 Bank Court, Hemel Hempstead HP1 1FB Sort-code: 60-10-33
Account number 48226858 the sum of £..... now and a similar sum thereafter on this date annually.

My account number: Name

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Signature: Date:

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