

FORUM NEWS

CONSERVATION NEWS 5

NGO FORUM FOR THE UK DEPENDENT TERRITORIES

MAY 1991

CARIBBEAN CONSERVATION PROGRESS

On 15 February the UK Government announced the extension of the Ramsar Convention to Anguilla and the British Virgin Islands. Mr Baldry, Junior Environment Minister, commented that, 'This extension of coverage of the Convention reflects not only the commitment of the UK and its Dependent Territories to the Convention itself but also to nature conservation in general'.

Implementation of the Ramsar Convention in Anguilla should lead to site protection for the island's important salt ponds and coastal habitats and to a policy for the wise use of all wetlands. These aspects are discussed in detail by David Pritchard in his report, 'The Ramsar Convention in the Caribbean with special emphasis on Anguilla'. As the author points out the Convention is not only restricted to site protection but is highly relevant to Anguilla's water resource management as a whole as 'rainfall is very low; reefs and coasts are fundamental to the island's tourist economy; commercial use has in the past been made of the salt ponds; and many of the wildlife species are inherently deserving of protection'.

David Pritchard's report resulted from a month's visit to the island which provided the opportunity for field work and inventory of salt pond and some seabird sites, together with analysis of conservation policy and legislation relating to wetland conservation. The report

has acted as a stimulus to the joining of Ramsar by Anguilla and it is hoped will act as a catalyst for further conservation action. It provides a framework for Ramsar implementation through a series of recommendations some of which the Forum will help to take forward. It also provides a model for considering the implementation of Ramsar and other international conservation agreements which could usefully be followed in the other Dependencies.

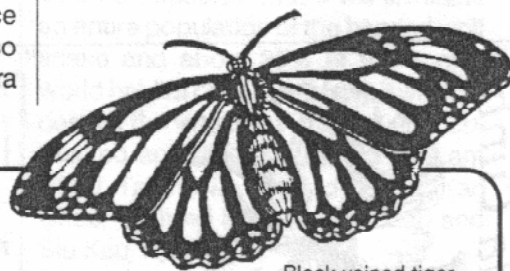
Like Anguilla the British Virgin Islands also have wetland sites of regional importance. Many of the wetlands are under threat from land reclamation, dredging for marine construction, dumping and the cutting of mangroves for timber, fuel and fodder. A wetland conservation policy would clearly be beneficial. Certain wetland sites are outstanding and are worthy of international conservation recognition, for example, as Ramsar sites. One such example is Flamingo Pond Bird Sanctuary on the island of Anegada. This is the largest wetland area in the British Virgin Islands and is one of the largest relatively undisturbed saline lagoons in the Lesser Antilles.

In the Turks and Caicos the first UK Dependent Territory Ramsar site was declared in 1990. This is a 10,000 ha wetland site of international importance for its birdlife. The Ramsar site also protects intertidal and shallow-water flora

and nursery areas for lobster, conch and fish.

There have been other positive conservation gains brought about by the Turks and Caicos Government over the past year. A leaflet prepared by the National Parks Committee for the Ministry of Natural Resources lists the National Parks, Sanctuaries and Nature Reserves, together with Historical Sites and Protected Buildings. It sets out the rules necessary to protect marine sites for boating, diving and swimming. The Turks and Caicos now have an impressive coverage of protected areas and Dr Brian Wood has been appointed as National Parks Adviser with funding from ODA. His main roles will be the implementation of a management plan for the National Parks and to work up legislation for a National Trust.

Revision of conservation legislation has recently been taking place in the Turks and Caicos. A new Wild Bird Ordinance came into force in 1990. This removes all but one migrant duck from the list of game species and has introduced provisions for large financial penalties. Steps are now being taken to include the Turks and Caicos in the UK's ratification of CITES. This is urgently needed to stimulate local protection of sea turtles.

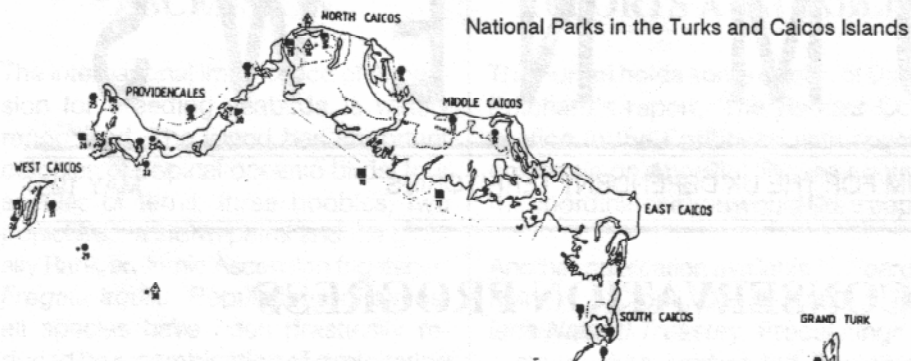


Black-veined tiger

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National Parks in the Turks and Caicos Islands

Conservation publicity and education remain of great importance in the Turks and Caicos - as in the other Dependencies. A new Heritage poster has been produced with funding from the Government and the US Nature Conservancy. A project to develop an educational package for the Turks and Caicos Islands dealing with coral reef conservation is being prepared by the Marine Conservation Society (MCS) and funding is currently being sought. The work will be carried out by MCS in close conjunction with the National Parks Adviser and other locally based environmentalists.

In Monserrat a very successful Conservation Education Program has recently been completed by the RARE Center. The Program, part funded by WWF-UK, has focused on the National Bird of Monserrat, the endemic Monserrat Oriole *Icterus oberi*. As Paul Butler, RARE's Caribbean Program director, points out, 'While the oriole is endangered, numbering less than 1000, its importance lies not only in its rarity, but also in its symbolic value. By generating pride for this black and yellow denizen of the forest, we hope that people will protect it, as well as the forest within which it lives, a resource critical not only as wildlife habitat but for water and soil conservation'.

The Conservation Education Program in Monserrat has been carried out by Rose Willock, using a manual developed by RARE Center. Her first task was to find out the level of awareness about the oriole and its habitat. A questionnaire survey revealed that less than 50% of respondents knew the oriole to be their national bird and less than 10% knew that it was endangered or protected. Attitudes are now changing through the work of local musicians, a puppet show, billboard and work in schools and churches. It is hoped that grass-roots support will lead to the updating of conservation legislation and the establishment of Monserrat's first national park.

The RARE Center has now turned its attention to the Cayman Islands. The target birds are the unique parrot subspecies of the Caymans. One of the goals of the Program in the Caymans is to have the parrot elected as a National Bird.

The Cayman parrot *Amazona leucocephala caymanensis*, confined to Grand Cayman, has been considered an agricultural pest by local farmers. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is now investigating whether it does in fact pose a threat to agricultural crops and what management steps may be necessary.

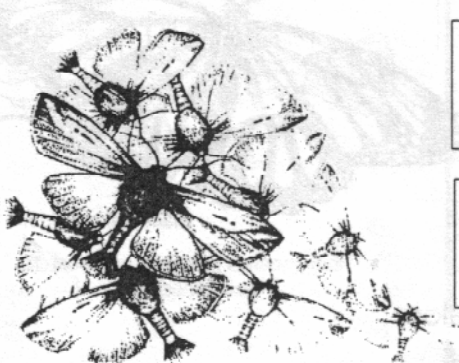
The US Nature Conservancy has acquired a 110 ha reserve on Cayman Brac which it is hoped might be suitable as a reserve for the endangered subspecies *A. leucocephala hesternae*. A project to investigate the breeding and ecology of this parrot, carried out by Dr Rosemary Gnam, will start shortly with financial support from ICBP British Section.

In May 1990 James Martin-Jones, International Conservation officer for WWF-UK, and recently appointed chairman of the Forum, visited all the UK Dependencies in the Caribbean to strengthen contact with local conservation agencies and to assess conservation priorities. WWF-UK, together with other members of the Forum, is keen to do all that it can to encourage and assist conservation initiatives in the Dependencies - in the Caribbean and elsewhere - and has a specific budget line to support conservation projects in the Dependencies. The Forum has produced a leaflet setting out how it and its members can act to promote conservation and we look forward to developing even closer links with local conservation groups.

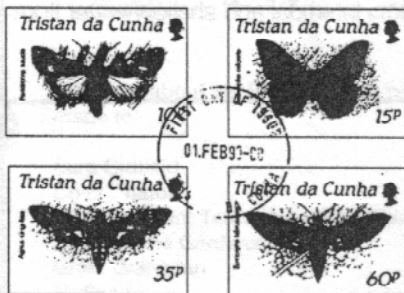
CONSERVATION BREAKTHROUGH IN GIBRALTAR

Gibraltar has an impressive diversity of biological interest and natural beauty for its tiny size - less than 6 sq km. I was fortunate enough to see this for myself as a guest speaker at the joint Gibraltar Ornithological and Natural History Society (GONHS) and Gibraltar Heritage Trust Conference held in October 1990. Within minutes of stepping off the plane I was able to watch Barbary partridge *Alectoris barbara*, peregrine *Falco peregrinus* and Barbary macaque *Macaca sylvana*. The theme of the two day conference was the importance of Gibraltar's natural and cultural heritage. The

Tristan da Cunha



Moths



Official First Day Cover



incorporating the requirements of the European Community's Bird's Directive and setting up the procedures required to declare reserves and marine nature reserves. Although not as big a problem as in other Mediterranean areas, there is a certain amount of bird catching in Gibraltar, mainly of migrating finches. The next stage that GONHS will be involved in will be the designation of the reserves to ensure that all habitats are protected and the limited extent of natural habitat is not subdivided further.

Other projects currently being undertaken include the digging of a freshwater pond on Windmill Hill Flats, a site important for migrants and for Barbary partridge, and the construction of an artificial offshore reef. The latest addition to the reef, courtesy of the Gibraltar Government and of the Ministry of Defence, was a 30 foot cable-laying vessel that was sunk several hundred metres offshore. The GONHS Marine Section is also acting as consultant to the Gibraltar Government on land reclamation projects, whereby it hopes to ensure that natural rocky shore habitats are recreated. Other work includes the refurbishment of an old Police headquarters building on the Upper Rock to be used as a field centre for the Society's activities.

Much work remains to be done, however. There is considerable development pressure in Gibraltar. Some green areas are disappearing and GONHS therefore sees the legal protection of all major habitats within protected areas as essential. GONHS will continue to campaign for all these to be designated.

papers presented highlighted yet again the significance of Gibraltar for bird migration and the conservation of endemic species. The Proceedings of the conference will be published shortly.

Gibraltar's Minister with responsibility for Heritage, the Honourable Joe Pilcher chose his closing speech to the Conference to announce an unexpected conservation breakthrough. He announced the Government's decision to formally declare the Upper Rock a Nature Reserve. GONHS and other conservation organisations have been calling for such a commitment for years and the decision marks a very welcome step forward.

I am very grateful to GONHS and in particular to John Cortés and Clive Finlayson for arranging my participation in the conference and for the hospitality I received whilst in Gibraltar.

Sara Oldfield

It is gratifying to see that the work that has gone into promoting nature conservation in Gibraltar over the years is starting to bear fruit. John Cortés, Secretary of GONHS, describes the recent developments:

'The passing by the Gibraltar House of Assembly of the Endangered Species Ordinance (1990) was important as it adopted the requirements of CITES which had not been updated in Gibraltar law since 1976. Gibraltar threatened species has also been included in this legislation. GONHS has also been closely involved in the drafting of the Nature Protection ordinance (1991), which has already passed its first and second readings in the House of Assembly. Although there is resistance from some quarters, namely those interested in keeping finches in captivity, the law will extensively protect plants and animals in Gibraltar and its surrounding waters,

HONG KONG - NATURAL RESOURCES UNDERVALUED

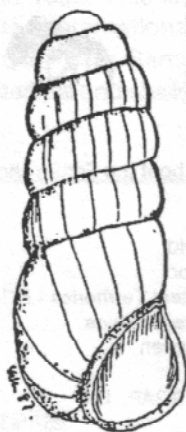
In response to the special issue of Forum News focusing on Hong Kong, James Lazell, associate of Harvard's Museum of Comparative Zoology and President of the Conservation Agency, wrote to say he was pleased to see the Forum giving publicity to the unique wildlife and conservation needs of Hong Kong. He feels, however, that Hong Kong is vastly more important than we communicated as it, 'harbours the greatest wildlife populations and species diversity left anywhere in all China: for its area, vastly more species and numbers than anywhere else on the coast of mainland Asia north and east of Viet Nam'.



Chinese gecko

Dr Lazell is concerned about the pace of destruction in Hong Kong and in particular about the Port and Airport Development Scheme (PADS). This will involve the total destruction of the island of Chep Lap Kok with its freshwater marshes, excellent mangrove swamps and habitats for 32 terrestrial vertebrate species. The vertebrates include world rarities such as the banded wolf snake *Lycodon subcinctus*, Romer's frog *Philautus romeri* and a recently discovered lizard which may be a new species. PADS will eliminate an entire population of the banded wolf snake and about 30% of the known world habitat of Romer's frog. It will also destroy the virtually unstudied, undocumented and unknown islands of Lam Chau, Tai Mo To, Siu Mo To, Tsz Kan Chau, Cheung Sok, Kau Yi Chau and Siu Kau Yi Chau.

At present almost none of Hong Kong's smaller islands are protected at all despite the fact that they harbour many relic and endemic wildlife forms, and most of the best nesting sites. Biological inventory and habitat protection remain urgent priorities.



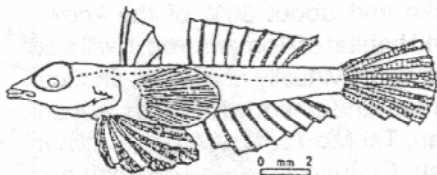
Acicula norrisi
an endemic threatened mollusco of Gibraltar

ASCENSION

The international importance of Ascension for breeding seabirds is widely recognised. The island has important colonies of tropical oceanic birds, four species of terns, three boobies, two tropicbirds, a storm-petrel and the globally Rare, endemic Ascension frigatebird *Fregata aquila*. Populations of almost all species have been drastically reduced by a combination of exploitation by humans and predation by introduced animals, especially rats and feral cats. The situation of the red-footed booby *Sula sula* is particularly serious, with probably less than 30 individuals remaining from an originally large population.

At the Twentieth World Conference of the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP), held in November 1990, a recommendation was made that, 'the Government of the United Kingdom designate Ascension Island a 'Protected Natural Area', prepare a management plan which must include the eradication of introduced animals, and implement it as soon as possible'.

The Forum is now helping to carry this recommendation forward through discussion with the UK Government on the practicalities of its implementation. At a meeting between the Forum and representatives of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in March, the FCO agreed in principle to the idea of a feasibility study based in Ascension to consider the eradication of cats and rats and also agreed to look at possible sources of funding.



St. Helena Dragonet, *Callionymus sanctaehelenae*

REPORTS AVAILABLE

The Forum holds some copies of David Pritchard's report, 'The Ramsar Convention in the Caribbean with special emphasis on Anguilla'. Please contact the coordinator if you would like a copy.

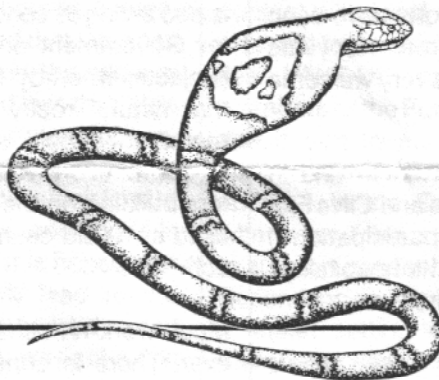
Another publication available is: Pearce-Kelly, P. & Cronk, Q.C.B. (1990) *St Helena Natural Treasury*. Proceedings of a symposium held at the Zoological Society of London, 9 September 1988. Zoological Society of London.

The papers in this report highlight the international importance of St Helena's natural history. The Forum is coordinating response to the report and in particular is calling for international protection status for the island. Again, copies of the report are available from the coordinator.

WWF EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

WWF has produced nearly 100 teaching materials for use in the classroom and at home and a further 40 will be published in the next twelve months. The range of publications covers all subjects - from science to language, maths to music, art to RE - and all age groups. The WWF Education Catalogue 1991 lists the wide range of books, posters, videos, teaching packs and other educational materials and provides a stimulating sources of ideas and information. Copies of the catalogue and further information on WWF's education programme are available from Hamish Alitchison, Senior Education Officer (International), WWF UK, Panda House, Weyside Park, Godalming, Surrey, GU7 1XR. Tel: 0483 426444. Fax: 0483 426409.

Chinese cobra



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