FORUM NEWS

CONSERVATION NEWS 7 NGO FORUM FOR THE UK DEPENDENT TERRITORIES JUNE 1992

STUDY ON RAMSAR IMPLEMENTATION

The Forum is carrying out a study of the implementation of the Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat (the Ramsar Convention) within the Dependencies. We are undertaking this study jointly with the International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB), and in association with Falklands Conservation. The work has been commissioned by the Department of the Environment (DoE) as the first phase in a longer term study of opportunities for wetland conservation within the Dependencies.

The current study will provide an overview of existing information on wetland sites and measures for their conservation. It will identify sites which fulfil the criteria for listing on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance and also areas where further ecological survey is necessary.

The Forum is drawing on its existing information files and data held by members and associated organisations. IWRB brings to the study further background information, from its databases and inventories, together with comprehensive experience of using such information in the implementation of the Ramsar Convention. Falklands Conservation has the major task of summarising current knowledge of the extensive wetlands of the Falkland Islands. Most important of all, we wish to incorporate current site assessments and suggested conservation priorities from all interested parties working in the Dependencies.

The UK itself has 53 wetland sites designated on the Ramsar List. In June 1990, the Turks and Caicos Islands were the first of the UK Dependent Territories to make a designation. This is for the wetlands of North, Middle and East Caicos Islands, covering 54,400 ha. Other sites have already been identified in Bermuda, BVI, the Caymans, Falklands, Hong Kong, Montserrat. Processes have been initiated for their formal listing as mentioned in Forum News 2. The current project should help to clear the backlog and give the necessary international recognition to these important wetland sites.

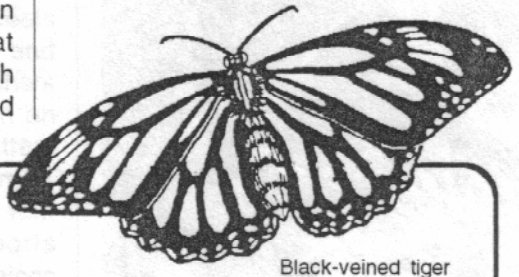
The Ramsar Convention places few stringent obligations on its member states and this is one of the very reasons for its success! There are specific obligations for listed sites, including the requirement to inform the Ramsar Bureau if the ecological character of a site, "has changed, is changing or is likely to change as the result of technological developments, pollution or other human interference". A more general obligation of the Convention is to "formulate and implement planning so as to promote as far as possible the wise use of wetlands" within a Contracting Party's territory. This is clearly an important consideration in areas with wetlands under threat whether in the Caribbean or the South Atlantic. Action programmes proposed by the study will suggest how the wise use concept can be implemented.

The report of the three-month study will be submitted to DoE by mid-August. If you can help in any way and we have not already been in touch please contact the Forum Coordinator.

Ramsar in Bermuda

David Pritchard, RSPB's roving Ramsar expert, has recently pursued his personal quest to speed-up Ramsar site designation in the Dependencies by visiting Bermuda. Eight sites were initially proposed by the Bermudan Government for Ramsar listing in 1986. Three years later the proposals were agreed by UK Government Ministers, following enquiries on the protection regime for the sites. Then no further progress ensued but David's visit has helped to clear the constraints and listing is expected in the very near future.

The report, "Designation and Protection of Ramsar Sites in Bermuda", by David Pritchard is an important contribution to the DoE Ramsar Study. The steps taken to prepare the ground for listing also provide a useful model for other Dependencies to consider. Copies of the report are available from the Forum Coordinator.



Black-veined tiger

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FLAMINGOES RETURN TO BVI

A major attempt is now underway to re-introduce Bermuda captive bred Caribbean flamingoes *Phoenicopterus ruber ruber* to the British Virgin Isles. This initiative stems from the success of the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo (BAMZ) in captive breeding this threatened species. Since 1967, the Zoo has had 24 consecutive seasons of breeding the Caribbean flamingo, and has sent surplus Bermuda-bred birds to zoos around the world.

Once common throughout the Caribbean, the Caribbean flamingo has been absent from BVI since the early 1950s. In 1983, the US-based Conservation Agency (TCA) began working with interested parties on the possibility of re-establishing a breeding colony of flamingoes in BVI. The first, trial, phase involved the export of eight Bermuda-bred flamingoes to Guana Island Wildlife Sanctuary in November 1986. These birds were monitored until 1991, when the last birds flew off to join other Caribbean colonies.

By 1990, it had been determined that Bermuda-bred flamingoes could adapt to the wild, but that Guana Island itself could not support a large colony. The second phase involved TCA and the BVI National Parks Trust surveying, selecting and preparing a release site, that could support large numbers of flamingoes. The extensive salt ponds of Anegada Island, also historically the site of BVI's largest flamingo colony, were selected to provide the BVI colony.

In the autumn of 1991, BAMZ was able to commit twenty captive-bred birds to the re-introduction project and in conjunction with TCA, began working out the logistics of effecting a release in early 1992. A total of 20 birds from the BAMZ current population of 55 were flown to BVI on 7 March 1992. In order to increase the chance of early success, several known breeding pairs were included in the release. The site chosen for the re-introduction is the two connecting salt ponds, known as Flamingo Pond and Bones Bight Pond, which provide an extensive and undisturbed wetland habitat.

John A. Barnes,
Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Parks, Bermuda.

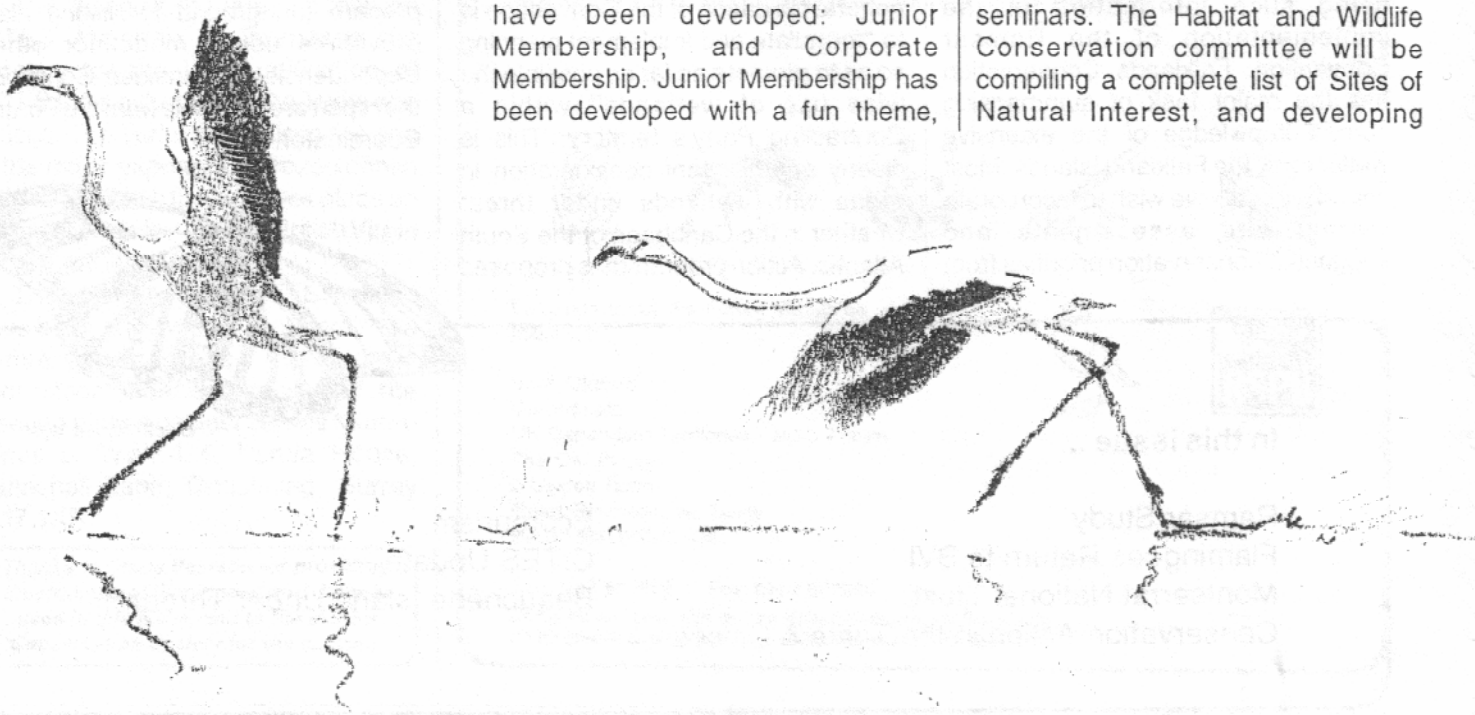
MONTSERRAT NATIONAL TRUST

As the deadline for the end of core funding from WWF - UK draws near, the Montserrat National Trust is looking seriously at a number of ways to strengthen its position as the leading environmental NGO in Montserrat. **Sara Cross** describes some of the new initiatives which have been taken this year to boost membership, public awareness of the Trust and income.

Two new membership categories have been developed: Junior Membership, and Corporate Membership. Junior Membership has been developed with a fun theme, based upon "Monty" the Montserrat Oriole, the Island's national bird. Young people up to sixteen years of age are invited to become "Monty's Messengers", to spread the word about good environmental practices, by giving advice and by example, such as joining beach cleanups. So far, the Trust has gained 43 paid up Junior Members, with a further 15 paying by pocket money instalments.

Corporate Membership was launched in April, with a view to attracting a sustainable local form of revenue for the Trust, and to gain interest and involvement from the business community. Substantial membership fees are starting to come in, and it is hoped that a Corporate Steering Committee can soon be formed, to help guide Trust projects and promote sound environmental practices in the workplace. In addition to these two new categories, membership of the Trust has increased to its highest level for five years, and there has been a 30% increase in the number of active Montserratian members.

In a bid to involve more local people in the work of the Trust, a Committee system has been set up, easing the burden of the 11 Council Members onto 50 or 60 active volunteers. To mention just a few: the Environmental Education Committee, committed to raising public awareness is in the midst of organising this year's Best Villages Competition, as well as Earth Day and Environment Day clean ups, environmental competitions, fairs and seminars. The Habitat and Wildlife Conservation committee will be compiling a complete list of Sites of Natural Interest, and developing



management plans for each. The Fundraising Committee is charged with tapping new sources of sustainable funding for the Trust, and organising a series of fundraising events for specific Trust projects throughout the year.

An informative editorial column in the press, entitled MNT Notes reaches over 1000 people each week and thus the National Trust can no longer be regarded as 'the best kept secret on Montserrat' - to quote a member who joined last year. Obviously, increased support from Government would ease the burden on finances, nevertheless without this, the Trust is becoming a publicly acknowledged and supported organisation in Montserrat.

CONSERVATION ACTION IN THE TURKS AND CAICOS

Leaflets, posters and postcards promoting marine conservation in Turks and Caicos will shortly be ready for distribution in the islands. These materials have been produced by the Marine Conservation Society in association with the Department of Heritage, Environment and Parks in TCI and with funding from WWF-UK. Aimed at visitors, islanders and decision makers, they will boost the efforts being made to push environmental matters higher up the agenda in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

This initiative comes at a time when the TCI Government is attempting the delicate balancing act between rapid development and environmental protection. Tourism is seen as one of the keys to the future and an unspoilt environment is an essential element - as illustrated in the islands' promotional slogan "Beautiful by Nature". Hopefully the protected areas programme will move forward by leaps and bounds now that Dr Brian Wood is in place as National Parks Adviser (funded by ODA). However, he faces a massive task with only a small budget and very few staff.

One of his most pressing jobs is to produce signs and other publicity material for the Princess Alexandra Marine Park on Providenciales. At present few people are aware of the Park, know where its boundaries are, or why it exists! Even more confusing, particularly to someone who picks up one of the official leaflets describing the location of 26 other protected areas, is to discover that in reality they do not yet exist! The hold-up in designation is hard to understand given that the National Parks legislation was prepared several years ago and needs little more than a stamp of approval from Government.

A piece of good news is that plans are moving ahead smoothly for the establishment of a National Trust for TCI. This will provide the islands with their only local non-governmental organisation involved in environmental matters (the Turks and Caicos Development Trust no longer has this role) and will enable important land and buildings to be acquired and managed.

Environmental education is still not adequately taught in schools, despite the availability of a number of useful teachers guides and other materials. To counter this, Ethlyn Gibbs of PRIDE (Foundation for the Protection of Reefs and Islands from Degradation and Exploitation) will be organising teachers workshops and other activities in an effort to get environmental matters firmly entrenched in the curriculum.

Another organisation helping with conservation is the Watersports Association of the Turks and Caicos Islands (WATCI). As the name implies, its primary aim is to promote watersports, but this is being done with the environment very much in mind. WATCI members have been involved in the installation of mooring buoys at reef dive sites, in order to prevent reef damage. To date, around 40 buoys have been put in by dive masters and Brian Wood has secured funds for maintenance and new installations.

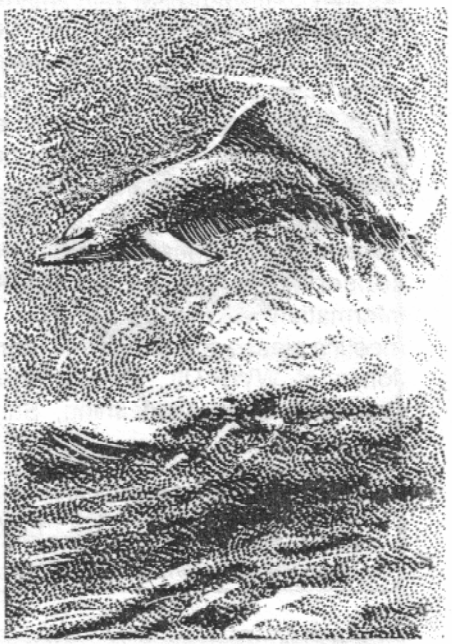
Fisheries management is another challenging area of work, and a research programme funded to a large extent by ODA is currently underway. Efforts are being made to conserve stocks of commercially important species, but demand is high and people have noticed a decline in fish, conch and lobster numbers over the past decades. It will be interesting to see how populations fare in the next few years.

Dr Elizabeth Wood,
Marine Conservation Society

ECOTOURISM IN THE DEPENDENCIES

The development of ecotourism holds exciting potential for areas with interesting wildlife and unspoilt habitats. Cruise ships already visit the most isolated locations like Pitcairn, South Georgia and Tristan, and growing numbers of green tourists are attracted to the Caymans, Gibraltar and Montserrat. The Forum is interested to learn details of successful ecotourism schemes within the Dependencies which can be used as models elsewhere.

For ideas and background reading an excellent report, published in 1990, is available from World Wildlife Fund. "Ecotourism: the Potentials and Pitfalls" by Elizabeth Boo, can be ordered from WWF, P.O. Box 4866, Hampden Post Office, Baltimore, Maryland 21211. Tel: (301) 338-6951.



CITES UPDATE

The Eighth Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to CITES, held in Kyoto in March, was dominated by discussions of the ivory and rhino horn trade. Delegates also grappled with a whole range of other species trade issues and at the meeting nearly 80 proposals to amend the Appendices were accepted. Amongst the new listings of particular relevance to the Dependencies are the additions to Appendix II of the American black bear *Ursus americanus*, mahogany *Swietenia mahagoni*, lignum vitae *Guaiacum officinale* and the queen conch *Stombus gigas*.

Hong Kong is one of the importers of bear gall bladders, which are predominantly sold to South Korea and also to Taiwan, Japan and Singapore. The addition of the American black bear to CITES Appendix II is intended to help close a loophole in CITES controls. Previously gall bladders of rarer bear species have been mislabelled as the American species to facilitate illegal trade.

Appendix II listing for *Swietenia mahagoni* and *Guaiacum officinale* may already be too late as the species are effectively commercially extinct in the wild. Nevertheless the listing could reinforce protection in the areas where these two timber trees occur within the Caribbean region. The *Guaiacum officinale* proposal was put forward by the US Government to bring protection in line with provisions of the SPAW Protocol.

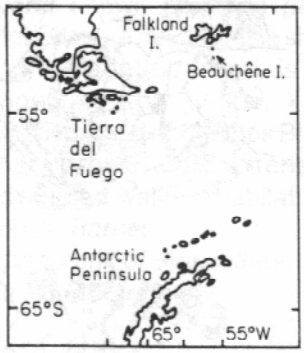
The listing of the queen conch on CITES Appendix II, increases the urgency for the UK's ratification of CITES to be extended to the Turks and Caicos. The Turks and Caicos are one of the major exporters of frozen conch to the US. Conch fishing takes place on a smaller scale in Anguilla, British Virgin Islands and the Caymans.

The full results of the CITES meeting have been quite widely reported in the conservation press. For further information on the outcome of the meeting please contact James Martin-Jones at WWF-UK, Panda House, Catteshall Lane, Godalming, Surrey GU7 1XR.

Thanks to Bruce Pearson for providing illustrations of flamingoes and dolphin used in this issue, and to the Marine Conservation Society for the cartoon.

BEAUCHÊNE ISLAND UNDER THREAT

Beauchêne Island is the most isolated of the Falkland Islands archipelago and provides an extremely important refuge for wildlife. The island is protected as a seal reserve and as a wild animal and bird sanctuary under Falklands legislation. It has globally significant seabird colonies with almost half a million pairs of black-browed albatrosses and rockhopper penguins.



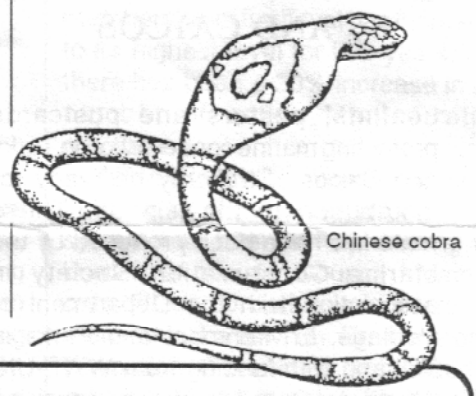
On 14 March, the trawler Lord Shackleton II sank in 70 m of water just off Beauchêne Island. Fortunately no lives were lost, but the incident poses major threats to the Island's wildlife.

An oil slick resulting from the sinking does not yet appear to have caused significant damage to the wildlife. But a continuing hazard is posed by the remaining fuel aboard the ship, estimated at just under 600 tonnes, which will inevitably escape at some point in the future.

A second potentially catastrophic consequence of the sinking lies in the possibility that rats could have been introduced to Beauchêne on wreckage which was washed ashore. If there were any rats on the ship, the implications for the Island's breeding petrels and passerines, as well as its unique invertebrate fauna and even the Tussac itself, could be disastrous.

Falklands Conservation has submitted detailed recommendations to the Falkland Islands Government on monitoring Beauchêne for rats and on dealing with the remaining oil pollution threat. Now, action on the recommendations is awaited.

Source: The Warrah. Newsletter of Falklands Conservation, No. 2, May 1992.


Chinese cobra

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