

FORUM NEWS

CONSERVATION NEWS 9

UK DEPENDENT TERRITORIES CONSERVATION FORUM

MARCH 1994

THIS FIRST 1994 ISSUE OF FORUM NEWS MARKS ONE OF THE BUSIEST PERIODS OF ACTIVITY FOR THE FORUM, as it embarks on an ambitious series of projects and undergoes a complete review of its objectives, activities and services. Ultimately, we hope that a refreshed, revitalized and more efficient and effective Forum will emerge, better equipped to serve the interests of conservation groups and biodiversity projects in the UK Dependencies.

THE DARWIN INITIATIVE

A major development for the Forum at the end of 1993 was its successful bid for funding from the Darwin Initiative. The funding, to be used over a two and a half year period up to April 1996 will allow the Forum to strengthen its UK base and to develop a more integrated and efficient support network for NGOs in the Dependencies. In general terms, the Initiative's objective is to support the aims of the Biodiversity Convention by deploying Britain's scientific, educational and commercial strengths to assist the conservation and sustainable use of the world's resources of biodiversity and natural habitats. Details of the Forum's programme under this Initiative are as follows:

Our main objectives under this Programme:

1. To increase the level of support for existing conservation organisations in the British Dependent Territories, by conducting grass roots research in order to prepare an action plan through which the Forum can act to better serve the needs of Dependent Territory conservation groups and thus, in turn more effectively further biodiversity conservation objectives within the Dependencies.
2. To support the development of new conservation NGOs in those Dependencies which do not have an environmental NGO at present.
3. To strengthen the support provided by experts and scientific institutions in the UK for biodiversity conservation in the Dependencies by expanding and consolidating the Forum's contact network and database.

Timetable for Carrying out the Project:

December 1993 to March 1994

- Pilot project to research and determine biodiversity conservation needs in each Dependent Territory and the assistance to be developed by the Forum.

April 1994 to April 1996

- Development and implementation of an Action Plan as determined by the Pilot Study to carry out priorities and project objectives.

- The updating and expansion of the Forum's Projects Database, in order to produce a definitive report upon the status of knowledge and expertise in the UK regarding Biodiversity in the Dependencies.
- The analysis of conservation recommendations for each Dependent Territory and the preparation of a strategy for producing priority project proposals for implementation.
- Expansion of the network of Forum Supporting Members and subscribers to Forum News, in order to increase the level of UK based activity and interest for biodiversity conservation in the British Dependencies.

For any further information about this project, please contact the Forum Coordinator.

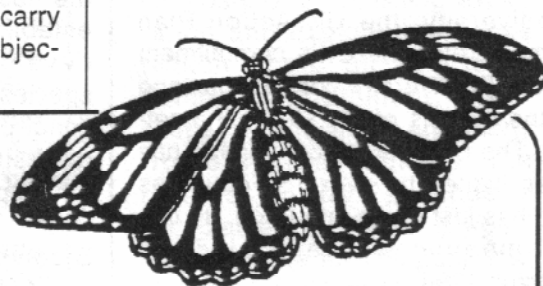
FORUM MEMBERSHIP

This Spring, we hope to encourage all NGOs in the Dependencies to become full members of the Forum. Details will be sent to each known conservation organisation shortly. Any other organisations who would like to join, but do not have details, please contact the Coordinator.

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THE DEPENDENT TERRITORIES CONFERENCE

The Forum had a strong representation in November at the Dependent Territories Conference, held in London. The conference, sponsored by the Governments of Gibraltar and the Falklands had as its theme **Progress through Partnership**, and was attended by representatives from most of the European Dependencies. The Flora & Fauna Preservation Society generously sponsored a stand for the Forum, which displayed information and pictures about conservation projects in the UK Dependencies, and attracted substantial interest from delegates. The keynote address was delivered by the UK Foreign Secretary, the Rt Hon Douglas Hurd, and speeches were also made by the Chief Minister of Gibraltar; Hon Joe Bossano and the Hon. Norma Edwards of the Falkland Islands Legislative Council. Although the theme of the Conference was general, rather than specifically geared towards conservation, the meeting was declared to be a great success, in that it highlighted the significance of the Dependent Territories, and brought together many people from all corners of the world with a shared interest.



The Hon. C. Washington Misick, Chief Minister of Turks & Caicos Islands discusses marine issues with Sara Oldfield, WWF's Representative for the Forum.

This gives a summary of the biodiversity situation in all the UK Dependencies, with the exception of the British Indian Ocean Territory. The Forum played a key role in collating and summarising information for this chapter and also provided an agenda for conservation action to be undertaken in the Dependencies. The comprehensive action agenda, drawn up in full consultation with conservation agencies in the Dependencies, has been distilled in the Government document to one brief objective:

"Encourage individual Dependent Territories to develop strategies for biodiversity conservation, including updating existing legislation and developing new legislation to protect species and habitats as appropriate."

In addition, as part of a general strategy the Dependent Territories are also encouraged to: consider ways to develop their institutional capacity to implement the biodiversity convention; identify priority areas for biodiversity conservation and exchange information for the development of wider biodiversity databases.

In all, the Biodiversity Action Plan sets out 59 objectives for the UK Government. Over the next two years, these objectives will be refined, prioritised and spelt out in more detail. A Biodiversity Action Plan Steering Group is being established to help take the objectives forward and the Forum expects to be fully involved with this group. It is significant that the Dependent Territories are given some prominence in the Action Plan, but what is now needed is positive and immediate commitment to help conservation on the ground. The development of local biodiversity action plans will, for example, depend on surveys of plants, animals, habitats and the current threats these face. Without this information it is hard to see how appropriate legislation and other conservation measures can be drawn up.

The Biodiversity Convention calls on

BIODIVERSITY UPDATE

The Prime Minister, John Major, launched Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan on 25 January. The Action Plan is one of four major reports which set out how the Government will follow up on commitments made at the UNCED Earth Summit in June 1992. Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan demonstrates the UK's commitment to the Biodiversity convention, one of the outputs of the UNCED meeting. The Biodiversity convention has been signed by over 150 countries and has just come into force. Its first full meeting will take place in Autumn 1994.

The objectives of the Convention are the conservation of biological

diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilisation of genetic resources. Parties to the Biodiversity convention are required to identify priorities for conservation and sustainable use; develop national strategies, plans or programmes for the sustainable use of biodiversity; establish protected area systems; develop or maintain threatened species legislation; carry out educational programmes; and further biodiversity conservation by various other specified means.

Biodiversity: the UK Action Plan mainly looks at what is already happening in the UK to protect plants, animals and their habitats. The report includes a chapter on UK support to biodiversity overseas.

parties to take into consideration the special conditions resulting from the dependence on, distribution and location of, biological diversity within developing country parties, in particular, small island states (Article 20.6). As recognised in the Biodiversity Action Plan, the provision of financial and technical aid for biodiversity conservation in the Dependent Territories provides one of the main mechanisms by which the UK Government implements this requirement.

Within the Caribbean Dependencies implementation of the SPAW Protocol would be a good way to ensure that many of the requirements of the Biodiversity Convention are met. This important regional protocol has not yet been ratified but steps are being taken to work out how the provisions of the Protocol can be translated into conservation action. A workshop was, for example, held in Jamaica in December to assist with the formation of national legislation to implement the Protocol. Representatives from BVI, the Caymans, Montserrat and the Turks & Caicos attended the meeting. A UNEP document, Legislative Guide to Implement the SPAW Protocol was adopted by the meeting and also a checklist for developing legislation. As a next step, UNEP will facilitate a programme of technical assistance for countries to develop national legislation which can be used as models throughout the region.



LIFE IN THE FREEZER

Television viewers in Britain have

just had the most comprehensive coverage of any Dependent Territory; the 6 part series 'Life In the Freezer' based on the wildlife of Antarctica was screened in November and December 1993 and was billed by the BBC as the most '...ambitious wildlife series ever'. The presenter was Sir David Attenborough and much of the filming was on South Georgia as well as the Antarctic Peninsula itself. The scenic beauty of the region was stunning; however, it was the penguins which naturally took centre stage. South Georgia was the location for King Penguins (St. Andrews Bay) and Macaroni Penguins (Bird Island). On the Peninsula Chinstraps were filmed at Deception Island and Adelies at Anvers Island. The whole series followed the seasons and the changes which drive the annual cycle of the natural history at incredible speed: in Winter pack ice increases at 2 miles a day, effectively doubling the size of the continent!!

OIL IN THE FALKLANDS

The Falkland Islands and their hinterland are an internationally important breeding site for seabirds and sea mammals. Millions of seabirds, including the world's largest populations of Rockhopper and Gentoo Penguins and Black-browed Albatrosses nest in the Islands and depend upon the surrounding waters of the south-west Atlantic for their food. At present, commercial fisheries are the only major threat to these birds.

Now, however, there is the prospect of a new and potentially greater threat. The first steps are being taken towards the development of an offshore hydrocarbon industry which could be on a scale to rival that of the North Sea. The British Geological Survey says that because many oilfield areas of the globe are now so well known, the potential of virgin territory such as this is probable unsurpassed and the scientific as well as commercial rewards could be high.

Following extensive seismic surveys in 1992/93, the drilling of initial

exploration wells is expected to take place in 1997-98. While oil will bring much needed financial benefits to the Falklands, there are serious associated environmental risks, both direct, eg. oil spillages and indirect eg. substantial increase in human population and associated infrastructure.



In November 1993, the Falkland Islands Government produced a report "The Falkland Islands and Oil" for the information of the Falkland Islands public. This explains the background to the development of oil and gas resources offshore, outlines events to date, sets out the timetables and discusses the implications which the search for oil will have on the way of life in the Islands and their future income. It raises some of the issues on which hard decisions will have to be made. Amongst other points, Islanders are asked to consider :

- Whether the economic benefits from oil production will outweigh the social and environmental changes that will inevitably follow;
- The level of involvement of conservation organisations in protecting the environment;
- Whether the social and ecological costs of establishing exploration and exploitation bases (which could include large dumps of equipment, workshops, port facilities and many workers from outside the Islands) on the Falklands is acceptable; or whether it would be preferable for companies to place their facilities elsewhere;
- Once oil is found and once the process is rolling it is irreversible.

If the risks are to be minimised it is essential that relevant environmental information is available to assist industry planners in the early stages and also to enable subsequent impacts of hydrocarbon extraction in the south-west Atlantic to be monitored.

The geographical isolation of the Falkland Islands, their small human population and general lack of financial resources mean that even basic background information on the Islands' ecosystems has been largely unavailable to date. There is no governmental conservation agency. The only specialist conservation organisation in the region is Falklands Conservation who are now preparing detailed research plans for a major Environmental Impact Assessment Programme. This implementation of this vital work is dependent on raising sufficient funds. This spring, Falklands Conservation is launching the Penguin Appeal, aiming to raise sufficient money so that it can provide the essential detailed and expert advice on safeguarding the coastal and offshore marine environment in the Falklands now so threatened. For information on Falklands Conservation and its Appeal, please contact their UK Secretary, Ann Brown, at 1, Princes Avenue, Finchley, London N3 2DA Telephone: 081 343 0831.

FRIENDS OF THE CHAGOS UPDATE

The first Annual General Meeting of the Friends of the Chagos was held on 13th October and formal approval given for submission to the Charity commissioners for registration. The Commissioner of the British Indian Ocean Territory very kindly invited some ninety people to a Reception in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the 13th October on the occasion of the Launch of the Friends of the Chagos. The Chagos database has been started and hardware and software have been obtained. Inputs to the database are welcome and as

soon as possible. The database will form part of the Chagos Conservation Plan. An expedition planned for 1996 which will validate the Chagos Conservation Plan. An outline of the scientific objectives has been started and participation is very welcome. Proposals should be forwarded as soon as possible and before the end of May 1994 to be included in the plan. In June 1994, an outline plan for the expedition will be forwarded to the Commissioner, British Indian Ocean Territory for approval.

The point of contact to join the Friends of the Chagos, to contribute to the Chagos database and proposals for the 1996 Chagos expedition is: John Topp, 20, Lupus Street, London SW1 V 3DZ.

NOTICES New Coordinator

Nineteen ninety four sees a change over in roles within the Forum. The Coordinator for six years, Sara Oldfield has become the Forum Chairman, and Sara Cross has moved into the Co-ordinator's post. Please note the change of address for correspondence below.

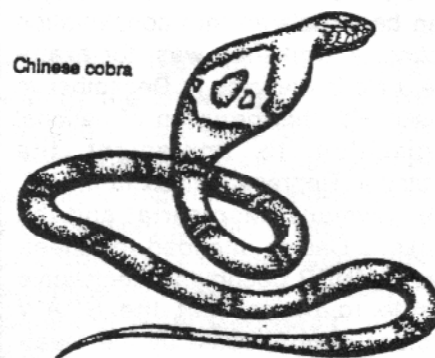
Pitcairn Discussion Meeting

An International Discussion Meeting on the Biogeography, Ecology and Prehistory of the Pitcairn Islands will be held at the Linnaean Society of London on 5th & 6th May 1994.

For further details, please contact Dr. M. de L. Brooke, Department of Zoology, University of Cambridge, Downing Street, Cambridge CB2 3EJ UK. (0223) 336610.

COMMENTS

We welcome comments or articles which may be of interest from Forum News readers. Please send your letters to the Coordinator at the address below.



Chinese cobra

Production of this news-sheet was supported by Fauna and Flora Preservation Society (FFPS), Plantlife, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), World Wide Fund for Nature United Kingdom (WWF-UK) and the Zoological Society of London (ZSL)



PLANTLIFE



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