

# United Kingdom Overseas Territories Biodiversity Strategy



Foreign &  
Commonwealth  
Office

**DFID** Department for  
International  
Development

**JOINT  
NATURE  
CONSERVATION  
COMMITTEE**

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Department for Environment  
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Biodiversity is crucial in underpinning sustainable development across the Overseas Territories, as it is across the world. Biodiversity is also of fundamental importance to the provision of social and economic benefits across our local communities. Increasing our efforts to combat biodiversity loss is essential, and I am proud of the work the Government is doing in collaboration with the administrations of the Territories as well as with many Non-Government Organisations, which have provided so much assistance in the past, and continue to do so now.

So that is why I am so pleased that my colleagues in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for International Development have worked with my Department to establish this Strategy for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories. This Strategy demonstrates the continuing hard work across these Departments as well as the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, the Government's scientific advisers on international biodiversity issues. It has built on the assessment of priorities for biodiversity conservation in our Overseas Territories, as well as ongoing work between Government departments and other Government agencies, both in metropolitan UK and in the Territories.

The Strategy will be an essential vehicle for continuing and enhancing the constructive cooperation among the various interested administrations, agencies and individuals. For our part we in Defra, in leading on the co-ordination of the work of the Strategy, guarantee to continue to deliver our very best efforts towards engaging all parties more effectively in reducing biodiversity loss for our generation, and for generations to come, in the UK's Overseas Territories which contain so much of our most valuable wildlife.

**Huw Irranca-Davies**  
**Minister for Marine and Natural Environment**

# Background

This paper sets out a new UK Government strategy for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories. It has been prepared by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC), with input from officials from Defra, the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development (DFID), at the request of the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Biodiversity (IDMGB). The IDMGB has endorsed the strategy.

# The need for a UK Government strategy

The UK has international obligations to protect biodiversity. Under the Convention on Biological Diversity the UK has made a commitment to reduce significantly the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010 (and likely successor targets), and this target is a component of the Millennium Development Goal of ensuring environmental sustainability. There are additional commitments to protect biodiversity under other Multilateral Environmental Agreements (e.g. the Convention on Migratory Species, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species and the Ramsar Convention), all of which contribute to the wider 2010 target. For some of these agreements, the UK's interests are predominantly or exclusively related to the Overseas Territories (e.g. the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels). A list of Overseas Territories and the agreements to which they are signatories is provided at Annex 1.

Biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories is globally significant. The Territories support unique ecosystems and a large number of rare and threatened species, many of which are found nowhere else in the world. Further details are provided in Annex 2.

Biodiversity in the Overseas Territories underpins many of the ecosystem goods and services which provide economic and social benefits to local populations. For example, the economies in Tristan da Cunha and the Falkland Islands are largely dependent on fisheries; in Montserrat, the Centre Hills supply the majority of the island's fresh water; and in several Territories, tourism is dependent on the natural environment. Biodiversity therefore plays a critical role in helping to achieve sustainable development.

The main threats to biodiversity in the Overseas Territories are invasive non-native species, climate change and habitat loss (e.g. through development for tourism).

## The need for a UK Government strategy

As set out in the 1999 White Paper *Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories*, primary responsibility for biodiversity conservation and wider environmental management in the Overseas Territories has been devolved to the Territory governments, who, with the support of the UK Government, are responsible for developing appropriate, applicable and affordable environmental policies, legislation and standards.

However, the ability of many of the Territories to fully meet international obligations for biodiversity conservation is restricted by various factors, which may include some or all of the following:

- i. small and sometimes fragile economies;
- ii. small human populations and consequently limited capacity to undertake environmental projects;
- iii. limited access to technical expertise;
- iv. remoteness, which adds to the costs of environmental projects.

The UK Government therefore supports Territory governments in meeting international obligations. Most of the Overseas Territories have Environment Charters, signed by both UK and Territory governments in 2001, which contain guiding principles and commitments. The UK Government's commitments are set out in Annex 3.

Additional support from the UK Government is needed to help reduce the rate of biodiversity loss in the Overseas Territories, which will contribute to meeting obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity and other Multilateral Environmental Agreements. Reducing the rate of biodiversity loss will also, directly and indirectly, provide support for livelihoods and economic and social development in the Territories.

## The need for a UK Government strategy

Several reports from parliamentary select committees, the National Audit Office and non-governmental organisations have stressed the importance of the UK Government's role in conserving biodiversity in the Overseas Territories. These reports have recommended that if the UK Government is to discharge its responsibilities effectively a more joined-up approach across Whitehall is needed, in which all relevant departments play distinct but complementary roles. The reports also stress the requirement for enhanced financial support for biodiversity conservation in the Territories.

The UK Government has begun to address the points raised in these reports (e.g. through increased Defra funding to support biodiversity conservation in the Overseas Territories).

**The overarching objective of the UK Government's strategy for conserving biodiversity in the Overseas Territories is:**

***'to enable the UK and Overseas Territory Governments to meet their international obligations for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories'.***

## Government roles and responsibilities

Effective conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories will only be achieved through a partnership approach involving government, NGOs, scientific institutes, the private sector and others. It will require collaboration between bodies based in the Territories themselves and those based in the UK and elsewhere.

Within the UK Government, Defra, FCO and DFID each have responsibilities in relation to the Overseas Territories, as set out in Annex 4. Officials from each of these departments meet as a group to support the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Biodiversity, but the remit of this group is too wide to achieve an effective focus on Overseas Territories.

**In line with the responsibilities set out in Annex 4, Defra, FCO and DFID, with support from JNCC, will work in partnership to enable the UK and Overseas Territory Governments to meet their international obligations for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories.**

**Collectively, the three departments will:**

- i. ensure that UK Government strategies and policies for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories are sufficient to meet the UK's international commitments, taking account of Territories' individual legislative systems, capacity and other factors;**
- ii. provide effective, co-ordinated UK Government support for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Territories;**
- iii. help Territory governments to understand and meet international commitments and support their engagement in relevant international processes;**



- iv. champion, within Whitehall and more widely, the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Territories;**

**Defra will take the lead in co-ordinating the work of this partnership. All three departments will contribute funding.**

**JNCC will provide specialist support and expertise on the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity to the UK Government and the Territories.**

**Defra will chair a cross-departmental official-level group with responsibility for overseeing delivery of the UK Government's objectives for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories:**

- i. core membership of this group will comprise Defra, FCO, DFID and JNCC. Other departments and statutory bodies with an interest in biodiversity conservation in the Overseas Territories, e.g. DCMS (World Heritage sites), MoD (management of the Defence Estate) and Royal Botanic Gardens Kew (advice on plant conservation), will be invited to participate as appropriate;**
- ii. JNCC will provide the secretariat for the group;**
- iii. to secure the engagement of Overseas Territory governments, a representative of the UK Overseas Territories Association<sup>1</sup> will sit on the group;**
- iv. where necessary, issues requiring ministerial involvement will be directed to the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Biodiversity.**

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<sup>1</sup> UKOTA comprises UK-based representatives of Overseas Territory governments

# Strategic priorities for UK Government action

UK Government support for biodiversity conservation in the Overseas Territories should be focused on addressing those factors that are preventing achievement of commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity and other relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements.

**Strategic priorities for the UK Government's support for biodiversity conservation in the Overseas Territories will comprise the following<sup>2</sup>:**

- i. obtaining data on the location and status of biodiversity interests and the human activities affecting biodiversity to inform the preparation of policies and management plans (including baseline survey and subsequent monitoring);**
- ii. preventing the establishment of invasive alien species, and eradicating or controlling species that have already become established;**
- iii. developing cross-sectoral approaches to climate change adaptation that are consistent with the principles of sustainable development;**
- iv. developing tools to value ecosystem services to inform sustainable development policies and practices;**
- v. developing ecosystem-based initiatives for the conservation and sustainable use of the marine environment.**

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<sup>2</sup> These priorities have been identified following consultation with Overseas Territory governments, UK Government and selected NGOs.

## Strategic priorities for UK Government action

To address these priorities, action by the UK Government will be focused on:

- i. providing financial support (within the resource limits of each department) to address the priorities listed above, facilitating access to other sources of funding, and helping to build capacity within the Territories;
- ii. improving the flow of information and advice with and between the Overseas Territories, and supporting engagement with regional and international initiatives.

# Financial support for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories

The UK Government's approach is to encourage the Overseas Territories to focus on their responsibilities for biodiversity and to provide financial assistance to those Territories that need it. Territories vary in their financial and technical resources and thus the level of support required from the UK will vary.

Current UK Government funding for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories is summarised in Annex 4. The amount of funding provided by the UK Government has increased in recent years, primarily because of additional support from Defra, and exceeded £1.5 million in 2008/09.

At present, Overseas Territories are ineligible for many international funds, including the Global Environment Facility (GEF) – the key funding mechanism for the Convention on Biological Diversity. Many of the European Funds available to metropolitan UK (e.g. rural development funds) are not available to the Overseas Territories.

While current funding arrangements have led to some notable successes, they are insufficient to fully meet the UK's international commitments for biodiversity conservation, and are not necessarily focused on the strategic priorities identified above. In 2007, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds conducted an exercise to cost biodiversity priorities in the Overseas Territories, and estimated that funding of £16 million pa was required. Following consultation with Overseas Territory governments in 2008, JNCC advised that the total cost of meeting high priority biodiversity conservation projects was in excess of £48 million over a 5-year period.

## Financial support for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories

While the UK Government has a responsibility for ensuring that international obligations in relation to biodiversity conservation are met, and should make a contribution towards meeting the funding shortfall described above, it cannot be expected to meet the full costs, and so other funding sources will need to be accessed.

Increasing the budgets available for biodiversity conservation in the Overseas Territories will not immediately solve all the problems. Many Territory governments do not currently have the institutional capacity to spend increased funding effectively or to prepare high-quality bids for funding.

There is no 'one size fits all' solution. Funding requirements range from small projects with a cost of a few thousand pounds to major programmes of work with a cost of several million pounds because of the scale of the work required and the remoteness of some of the locations (e.g. eradication of non-native species from islands). Some work is best targeted on a small geographical area; other work is best undertaken at a regional scale.

Supported by funding from DFID, JNCC is currently undertaking an exercise to collate information on potential funding sources for biodiversity conservation in the Overseas Territories and make this available through a web-based search tool. This work will be completed at the end of 2009. To date, several hundred potential funding sources have been identified, including Government streams, international funds, multilateral institutions, EU regional frameworks, non-governmental organisations, private trusts and foundations.

## Financial support for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories

**Future UK Government funding arrangements for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories will:**

- i. be sufficiently flexible to reflect the different social, economic and environmental characteristics of each Territory;**
- ii. be focused on the strategic priorities listed above;**
- iii. encourage regional or cross-Territory initiatives, e.g. where these offer an effective means of addressing the impacts of climate change and invasive species;**
- iv. support long-term capacity-building (e.g. through funding of training, secondments and cross-Territory skill exchange), as well as on-the-ground conservation work;**
- v. not be a substitute for reasonable recurrent expenditure from Territory governments.**

**The UK Government will:**

- i. provide project funds for biodiversity conservation and wider environmental management, within the resource limits of each department, aiming to increase the amount of money available to at least £2 million pa. This will be achieved by:**
  - a) maintaining OTEP (which funds some biodiversity projects and some wider environmental projects) with a budget of at least £1 million pa;**
  - b) ear-marking up to £1.5 million for biodiversity projects in the Overseas Territories in the current Round of the Darwin Initiative, including the creation of a new Overseas Territories Challenge Fund within the Darwin Initiative to prepare for main projects.**

## Financial support for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Overseas Territories

- ii. **in the longer term, consider establishing a new UK Government funding stream that would support a wide range of environmental activities (including biodiversity projects) within the Overseas Territories, and would subsume OTEP and the Overseas Territory elements of the Darwin Initiative;**
- iii. **in addition, explore possibilities for helping the Overseas Territories access the large international funds on biodiversity, climate change and natural heritage. This would require significant political expenditure, but could potentially secure significant additional funds for work in the Overseas Territories;**
- iv. **continue to help Overseas Territories to participate in the full range of available funding sources, especially those that have the potential to support major biodiversity projects (such as EU funds and certain charitable trusts) by maintaining an up-to-date database of funding mechanisms, providing guidance/training, and supporting the preparation of funding applications by bodies in the Overseas Territories.**

## Improving communication and engagement

There are substantial benefits to be gained from improving the flow of information between Territories, and enabling Territories to access information and expertise within the UK and elsewhere.

The participation of Overseas Territories in regional initiatives will often provide access to a wider pool of expertise, achieve greater nature conservation benefits, and enhance cost-effectiveness. Several initiatives of this nature are currently underway, e.g. in relation to climate change in the Caribbean, and invasive alien species in the south Atlantic. Active engagement of the Territories in global mechanisms, such as the Global Island Partnership (GLISPA), is also beneficial.

Some European initiatives are intended to support biodiversity conservation in the EU's Overseas Territories and Outermost Regions. Notably, the European Commission has recently proposed the BEST scheme to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity and ecosystem services in European overseas entities.

### **The UK Government will build on its current efforts by:**

- i. promoting the sharing of information and experience between the Overseas Territories and with other relevant bodies, and facilitating access to expertise that is not available in the Territories themselves, e.g. through building links with academic institutions and nature conservation agencies in the UK and elsewhere;**
- ii. encouraging Overseas Territory governments to develop and participate in cross-territory and regional initiatives;**
- iii. enabling Overseas Territory governments to input effectively to Multilateral Environmental Agreements and other global initiatives by establishing a network of contact points, providing early warning of key issues, and giving timely feedback. In particular, Overseas Territories will be consulted on the development of UK/EU positions and efforts will be made to minimise reporting requirements;**



## Improving communication and engagement

- iv. **helping the Overseas Territories to take full advantage of EU initiatives and funding opportunities, such as BEST, through liaison with the European Commission and other EU institutions.**

## Overseas Territory signatories to Multilateral Environmental Agreements relating to the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity

	Convention on Biological Diversity	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species	Ramsar Convention on Wetlands	Convention on Migratory Species (CMS)	CMS Indian Ocean – South-East Asian Marine Turtle MOU	CMS EUROBATs Agreement	CMS Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels
Anguilla			✓				
Bermuda		✓	✓	✓			
British Antarctic Territory							✓
British Indian Ocean Territory		✓	✓	✓	✓		
British Virgin Islands	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Cayman Islands	✓	✓	✓	✓			
Cyprus Sovereign Base Areas				✓			
Falkland Islands		✓	✓	✓			✓
Gibraltar	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Montserrat		✓	✓	✓			
Pitcairn		✓	✓	✓			
Saint Helena (including dependencies)	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓
South Georgia and South Sandwich Islands			✓	✓			✓
Turks and Caicos			✓	✓			

## Biodiversity in the UK Overseas Territories

Because many of the UK Overseas Territories are small, isolated islands, they hold relatively large numbers of endemic species that are found nowhere else in the world. To date, over 340 endemic species have been recorded from the Overseas Territories, compared to about 60 in metropolitan UK.

The 2004 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species lists globally threatened species. Figures for the UK Overseas Territories include:

- 80 critically endangered species (compared to 10 in metropolitan UK);
- 73 endangered species (12 in metropolitan UK); and
- 158 vulnerable species (37 in the metropolitan UK).

It is likely that these figures are under-estimates, as new studies invariably report the occurrence of additional species or populations especially amongst the less well-known taxa, such as invertebrates.

As an indication of the threats to island biodiversity, there are 39 recorded extinctions in the UK Overseas Territories and two species are extinct in the wild, compared with only a single extinction from the metropolitan UK. The most recent extinction in the Overseas Territories was the St Helena olive *Nesiota elliptica*, which occurred in 2003 when the last tree in cultivation died (the last wild individual had died in 1994).

In addition to numbers of globally threatened species, the Overseas Territories also hold regionally or globally important concentrations or assemblages of species. For example:

- Ascension Island supports the second largest green turtle rookery in the Atlantic;
- Gough Island (Tristan da Cunha) has been described as, arguably, the most important seabird island in the world; and

## Annex 2

- the reefs of the Chagos Archipelago (British Indian Ocean Territory) are described as some of the most pristine and best protected in the Indian Ocean (and account for some 1.3% of the world resource).

The importance to nature conservation of parts of the Territories is recognised through the designation as World Heritage Sites of Gough Island and Inaccessible Islands (Tristan) and Henderson Island (Pitcairn) for their insular natural heritage interests.

## UK Government's commitments under the Environment Charters

- Help build capacity to support and implement integrated environmental management which is consistent with the Overseas Territories' plans for sustainable development
- Assist in reviewing and updating environmental legislation
- Facilitate the extension of the UK's ratification of Multilateral Environmental Agreements of benefit to the Overseas Territories and which the Territories have the capacity to implement
- Keep Overseas Territories informed regarding new developments in relevant Multilateral Environmental Agreements and invite them, where appropriate, to participate in the UK's delegation to international environmental negotiations and conferences
- Help to ensure that the Overseas Territories have the legislation, institutional capacity and mechanisms needed to meet international obligations
- Use UK, regional and local expertise, to give advice and improve knowledge of technical and scientific issues
- Promote better co-operation and the sharing of experience and expertise between Overseas Territories and with small island states and communities which face similar environmental problems
- Use the Overseas Territories Environment Programme and promote access to other sources of public funding for projects of lasting benefit to the Overseas Territories' environment
- Help Overseas Territories to identify further funding partners for environmental projects, such as donors, the private sector or non-governmental organisations
- Recognise the diversity of the challenges facing Overseas Territories in very different socio-economic and geographical situations

## Summary of UK Government roles and resourcing in relation to environment/biodiversity in the Overseas Territories

	FCO	DFID	Defra
<b>Responsibility</b>	Co-ordination of overall UK Government policy on Overseas Territories issues.	DFID provides budgetary aid to Montserrat, St Helena and Pitcairn to help meet their essential needs. It also provides development aid and humanitarian assistance as required, and technical and financial support on cross-cutting issues like human rights, environment and HIV, to all Overseas Territories.	Responsible for nature conservation and biodiversity across UK Government, including multilateral environmental agreements to which the UK is signatory.
<b>Staff</b>	0.5 staff deal with environmental/biodiversity protection.	1.5 full-time equivalents.	No dedicated staff for Overseas Territory issues. Several staff deal on an ad hoc basis with Darwin, ACAP etc.
<b>Programme funding</b>	The Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) has an annual budget of £1 million and is jointly funded by DFID and FCO. It is a project-based fund that supports the implementation of Environment Charters and environmental management more generally in the UK Overseas Territories (i.e. its aims are wider than just biodiversity conservation).	The Overseas Territories Environment Programme (OTEP) has an annual budget of £1 million and is jointly funded by DFID and FCO. It is a project-based fund that supports the implementation of Environment Charters and environmental management more generally in the UK Overseas Territories (i.e. its aims are wider than just biodiversity conservation).  DFID also provides funding for biodiversity and environmental management through its budgetary aid programmes to Montserrat, St Helena and Pitcairn, and other development programmes. The proportion dedicated to environmental management varies between Territories and between programmes depending on nature and need.	The Darwin Initiative is funded by Defra, and assists countries that are rich in biodiversity but poor in financial resources to implement their obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Convention on Trade in Endangered Species and the Convention on Migratory Species, through the funding of collaborative projects which draw on UK biodiversity expertise. Applications for Overseas Territory projects are particularly welcomed, and in the latest round of funding over £400k was assigned to projects in the Overseas Territories.  The 17th round earmarked £1.5 million for the projects in the Overseas Territories, and established a Challenge Fund dedicated to work in the Territories.  Defra also provides financial support for biodiversity conservation in the Overseas Territories in various other ways, notably through core funding for JNCC and Kew, the Flagship Species Fund and support for Multilateral Environmental Agreements. In 2008/09 the total value of this funding was over £500k.



Little Cayman Green Anole, Little Cayman (Copyright Fred Burton)

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